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ANDREW DEXTER: FOUNDER OF MONTGOMERY

Edited By

William Warren Rogers

The land that became the site of Montgomery was purchased at the Federal land sales held at Milledgeville, Georgia, in August 1817. Among the buyers were Georgians General John B. Scott and Dr. Charles Williamson. They were members of the "Alabama Company." Also purchasing land adjacent to the Alabama River was an enigmatic Rhode Islander named Andrew Dexter. Losing no time, the Georgians quickly advertised lots for sale in the "Town of Alabama." Dexter arrived shortly to inspect his purchase, and with the financial aid of two other easterners, John Falconer and James G. Klinck, laid off lots a mile east of the "Town of Alabama." Dexter's village was named "New Philadelphia." The two settlements became rivals, although Dexter's town was located on higher ground and attracted more immigrants.¹

Peter A. Remsen, a native of New York, came South in the winter of 1817-1818 to make his fortune. He finally settled at Mobile, where he became a prominent cotton factor until his death in 1852. But his first visit was as a young man in a new country. On January 12, 1818, he recorded, "I visited New Philadelphia 1 mile back from the river. A high pleasant place and bids fair to flourish. . . . Lots sell in this place for \$50 to 150 per lot. It has 800 laid out and Mr. Dexter is about to have grist and saw mills in operation shortly 5 miles distant."² The rivalry between the villages continued for another year, but a movement for unification was successful, and both towns were incorporated under the name "Montgomery" on December 3, 1819.³ Despite conflicting arguments, there is

¹Wayne Flynt, *Montgomery An Illustrated History* (Woodland Hills, California, 1980), 3-5; Clanton W. Williams, "Early Ante-Bellum Montgomery: A Black-Belt Constituency," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 495-525; "Extracts From The Records Of The City Of Montgomery, Alabama, 1820-1821," *Alabama Review*, I (April, 1948), 79-90; and "Conservatism in Old Montgomery, 1817-1861," *Alabama Review*, X (April, 1957), 96-110.

²William B. Hesseltine and Larry Gara (Editors), "Across Georgia And Into Alabama, 1817-1818," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XXXVII (December, 1963), 336.

³See James P. Jones and William Warren Rogers (Editors), "Montgomery As The Confederate Capital: View Of A New Nation," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (Spring, 1964), 2.

general agreement that the town was named for Brigadier General Richard Montgomery of Revolutionary War fame, while the county was named for Major Lemeul Purnell Montgomery, who was killed at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814.⁴

Little was known of Andrew Dexter, although his contemporaries viewed him as an admirable but impractical dreamer. Poor management resulted in scant real estate profits for Dexter. He remained in Montgomery with his family, went briefly to Texas in 1833, and returned to try once more to make his fortune. A brilliant graduate of Dartmouth College, Dexter was far too much the romantic to prosper on the Alabama frontier. He decided to try Texas again and left in 1837. He got no further than Mobile before coming involved in legal difficulties that resulted in his arrest. He died in the port city that year and was buried there.

There is no scholarly work on the founder of Montgomery, but on March 19, 1871, the *Montgomery Advertiser* printed a brief biography. The author of the sketch on Dexter did not sign his name, but it is highly probable that the profile was the work of Wallace W. Screws. A gifted journalist, Screws was a native of Barbour County, read law in Montgomery, and served in the Civil War. He saw much action, was wounded, captured, and gained a reputation as a war correspondent for the *Montgomery Advertiser*. After the war ended Screws began working for the *Advertiser* and became editor on November 5, 1865. From then until his death on August 7, 1913, he guided the editorial policies of the state's leading Democratic paper.⁵

Screws had, from time to time, a number of partners, and there were always reporters, but he did most of the writing. His piece on Dexter is particularly valuable. Obviously, a good bit of research went into it, and Screws grasped the significance of Dexter to the city. Dexter viewed himself as a failure, but

⁴Conflicting arguments about the name are in *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 13, 16, 1875.

⁵Rhoda Coleman Ellison, *History and Bibliography of Alabama Newspapers in the Nineteenth Century* (University, Alabama, 1954), 128. Numerous statements attesting the leadership and abilities of Screws include *Moulton Advertiser*, July 2, 1885; *Tuskegee Weekly News*, January 3, 1878; *Tuscumbia North Alabamian*, March 8, 1878; and *Eufaula Weekly Times and News*, December 22, 1881.

he achieved more than he gave himself credit for. He was a banker (not a good one), a hotel owner (it burned), and all his business ventures ended in disaster. Yet he was intelligent and talented. At the end of his article, Editor Screws (who deserves a biography himself) asked the city fathers of Montgomery to erect a monument to the memory of Andrew Dexter. The suggestion has never been acted on. Montgomery's main street bears his name, but as the following article demonstrates, some further form of honor and recognition by Montgomery would be in order.

Andrew Dexter Esq., has always been considered the founder of the City of Montgomery. An extended sketch of him which is due to his memory, would doubtless prove very interesting to our present population. We regret, however, that such scanty materials exist for the purpose. With his mental culture and literary acquirements, he could have left ample materials in an excellent form but the cares and vicissitudes of his busy and unsuccessful life were too exacting on his time. Hence our notice of him must needs be rather brief and imperfect. Of our present residents, we can call to mind, Mr. Niel Blue alone, who for many years, was an intimate friend of Mr. Dexter.⁶ He knew him well from 1819 to the period of his death in 1837, about eighteen years.

Mr. Dexter was a native of Rhode Island and descended from a family celebrated from the earliest times in that and other New England states. Some of that number were remarkable for intellect and culture, leading in the professions; others for success in the financial and commercial world; and a few were better known for their excentricities [sic]. In his Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution, Mr. Lossing relates to White Plains, in the Autumn of 1777. While the Americans halted upon Chatterten Hill, the British, in close pursuit, rested for a short time, upon another eminence close by. An Irishman, one of Col. Lippincotts headquarters men who was called "Daddy Hall," seemed quite uneasy on account of the presence of the

⁶Blue, born in North Carolina in 1793, had come to Montgomery when Alabama was still a territory. He was a leading citizen, and at the centennial celebration in 1876 read the Declaration of Independence publicly without faltering and without benefit of eyeglasses. See William Warren Rogers, *Alabama News Magazine* (January, 1976), 8-10.

enemy. He had charge of the Colonel's horse and frequently exclaimed, "What are you doing here? Why do we stop here? Why don't we go on? I don't believe the Colonel knows that the red-coated rascals are so near." Paymaster Dexter, seeing the perturbation of the poor fellow said, "Daddy Hall, you are afraid! You are a trembling coward."⁷ The Milesian's⁸ ire was aroused at these words, and looking the paymaster in the face with a scornful curl of his lip, he said, "Be jabbers! no, Masither Dexter, I'm not afeerd more nor yez be; but faith; ye'll find yourself that one good pair of heels is worth two hands afore night; if ye dont call Daddy Hall a spalpeen."⁹ And so he did; for before sunset the Americans were flying before their pursuers, more grateful to their heels than hands for safety. This Mr. Dexter was living in Providence in 1848, ninety two years of age. Samuel Dexter an Uncle of the subject of our sketch, was a member of Congress from 1793 to 1795 from Massachusetts and Senator in 1799-1800. From the Senate, he was transferred to the Cabinet of President John Adams, first to the War Department and afterward, to the Treasury Department.¹⁰

Hon. Samuel Dexter, father of the foregoing, was a gentleman of moral, intellectual and Christian excellence. He originated from Dedham, Massachusetts, where he lived till the Revolutionary war, when he removed with his family to Woodstock, Connecticut, and where by direction of his last will, he was buried. He was a member of the first Provincial Congress in Massachusetts, but lived afterwards chiefly in retirement, greatly respected until his death in 1810. He founded the professorship of Sacred Literature in the University in

⁷Benson: J. Lossing, *Field-Book Of The American Revolution*, I (Cottonport Louisiana, 1972. First printed 1850-1852), 631. Paymaster Dexter's first name is not given.

⁸The word "Milesian" referred to a legendary Spanish ancestor of the Irish, and the term came to mean an Irishman.

⁹"Spalpeen" is an Irish word meaning a scamp or a rascal. George Washington's difficulties in New York, including White Plains, are well documented, but, for example, see Don Higginbotham, *The War Of American Independence, Military Attitudes, Policies, And Practices 1763-1789* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1977), 161.

¹⁰Based on comparative ages, it seems probable that this Samuel Dexter was the brother, not the uncle, of Andrew. Also, since Andrew's father was named Samuel, it seems unlikely that brothers would share the same first name. See *Biographical Directory Of The American Congress 1774-1971* (Washington, 1971), 855-856.

Cambridge.¹¹

The Dexters were originally of Rhode Island stock, branches of them removing to Massachusetts. To this day some of them are to be met with in Providence and adjoining cities and towns. Mr. Winthrop, in his History of New England, makes favorable mention of Thomas Dexter and Rev. Samuel Dexter in the days of and during the Governorship of the original John Winthrop.¹² These probably belonged to the family that emigrated from England. In his History of Rhode Island, Mr. Arnold gives prominence to Mr. Gregory Dexter. This gentleman, in 1653, was elected President of one of the Assemblies of the Providence Plantations, namely, that of the Mainland towns. In 1654, he appears in the position of Town Clerk of Providence. Again, in 1677, he is associated as an attorney with Roger Williams and Arthur Fenner in a suit about titles between the towns of Warwick and Providence, in which he was successful for the latter.¹³

At a suitable age, the founder of our city was entered at Dartmouth College where during his entire Collegiate Course, he was the class-mate of the great Daniel Webster. He frequently stated in Montgomery, that he was awarded at graduation, the *first prize* while Mr. Webster obtained only the *second*. This seemed to be a satisfaction to him in view of the high position attached by his class-mate and his own comparatively obscure position in life. If he could not claim an influence in the councils of the Republic, he could boast with just pride of having carried off the highest honor of Dartmouth College from the leading intellect of America. That success in the Academic contest of his early days led him to assert that if he had chosen the political instead of the financial field, he

¹¹Josiah Quincy, *The History Of Harvard University* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1840), 296-298.

¹²The reference to these early Dexters was not found by the editor in James Kendall Hosmer (Editor), *Winthrop's Journal "History of New England"* (New York, 1980).

¹³The reference is to Samuel Green Arnold, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (New York, 1859-1860). Gregory Dexter was influential in the colony. See Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island A History* (New York, 1975), 372, 383; James Ernst, *Roger Williams New England Firebrand* (New York, 1932), 227, 233; Samuel Hugh Brockunier, *The Irrepressible Democrat Roger Williams* (New York, 1940), 166, 182.

could have made his mark in the Halls of Congress and helped to shape the political destinies of the Country.¹⁴

When he quitted College, the Federal party to which his family belonged was in power under the lead of John Adams as President. His uncle then Secretary of the Treasury placed him in a position under him in this department at the seat of government. Here he continued until the advent of President Jefferson in 1801. Mr. Dexter used to recur to the visit of Mr. Jefferson to the Treasury office when he announced to the Federal Clerks that it was imperatively necessary to displace them with Republicans since "few office holders die and never resign." This visit and Commencement closed his connection with the Treasury department and Federal office.

He retired to Boston and possessing ample means entered the financial world. Failing to obtain a charter for a Bank in Massachusetts he secured one in Rhode Island where his Bank had for a time, a great degree of success. The bills circulated widely coming even down into the Southern States. The power of the Bank was keenly felt by other Banking institutions of the country. Mr. Dexter caught the spirit of speculation and plunged in without due consideration. Among other ventures in real estate, he erected "Exchange Coffee-house" at an immense cost, a building containing over two hundred rooms and at that time, the largest hotel establishment in the United States. The destruction of this costly structure by fire, uninsured, superadded to other unsuccessful investments and financial reverses left him insolvent.¹⁵ To escape imprisonment for debt which was then allowable in Massachusetts, he moved with his family to Windsor, Nova

¹⁴At Dartmouth, Webster was a good but not a brilliant student. Not unexpectedly, he was a brilliant debater. See Sydney George Fisher, *The True Daniel Webster* (Philadelphia and London, 1911), 52; Irving H. Bartlett, *Daniel Webster* (New York, 1978), 23. If Dexter and Webster graduated at the same time, the date was August 26, 1801.

¹⁵The fashionable Exchange Coffee House was built in 1804. It was easily the leading hotel in Boston, and when it burned in 1818, the flames could be seen 50 miles away. See Carl Seaburg, *Boston Observer* (Boston, 1871), 130; Samuel Adams Drake, *Old Boston Taverns And Tavern Clubs* (Boston, 1917), 108. In 1791 one Andrew Dexter, in all likelihood a relative of the founder of Montgomery, was mentioned as a director and one of the founders of Providence Bank. See Mack Thompson, *Moses Brown Reluctant Reformer* (Chapel Hill, 1962), 250.

Scotia, where he remained several years. Just after the close of the last war with Great Britain, he returned to the United States and resolved to try his fortune in the South West, at this time presenting such an inviting field for speculation. The Alabama land sales at Milledgeville, Georgia, attracted his attention. He attended those sales in July 1817 and without a personal inspection and with no other information than was afforded by the maps at the Land Office he purchased at first, the west half of the south west quarter of section seven in township sixteen of Range eighteen.

In August, 1817, he also, purchased the balance of that quarter section. Upon those portions of land, the eastern part of our present city between Jefferson Street on the North and South Alabama Street on the South is located.

Under the law at that sale, purchasers were required to pay five per cent of the purchase money down and were allowed forty days to pay the balance. Mr. Dexter started at once to view his purchase, coming through the Creek Indian Nation and through a comparative wilderness, over the most wretched apologies for roads and ferries. Mr. John G. Klinck, one of the first merchants of Montgomery and who died at Memphis, Tennessee, last year aged seventy-five years, says in one of his letters, that while he was halting at a Mr. Evans' house at the fork of the road leading to Fort Jackson (about where R. H. Brewer now resides) Mr. Andrew Dexter and a Mr. Spears arrived both being attacked with bilious fever (Dexter slightly.)¹⁶ Mr. Spears during his illness, was prescribed for by Dr. Dabney an eminent physician from Virginia, but died about two weeks after his arrival. Every attention was bestowed by Mr. Dexter and the family of Mr. Evans. After the death of Mr. Spears, Mr. Dexter proceeded to examine his purchase and soon returned, says, Mr. Klinck, being much flattered with the prospect of its advantages for a town site, and its central position for the Court House when the county

¹⁶Fort Jackson was between the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers at the ancient site of Fort Toulouse built by the French. It was constructed by Andrew Jackson and his men after the battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814. Like Fort Toulouse, Fort Jackson fell into decay and was later abandoned. See W. Stuart Harris, *Dead Towns Of Alabama* (University, Alabama, 1977), 42. The actual sale of lands began August 4, 1817.

became sub-divided. He communicated all of his plans to Mr. Klinch — that they were jointly to use their influence in drawing all the traders to the place intended for the town, which would necessarily draw the trade to that point, except from those on the road near Line Creek. Mr. Klinck advised him to visit Jonathan C. *Farley*, carpenter, and Harris and Andrew A. Laprade, traders, and Dr. Morrow, a practicing physician, offer each a lot gratuitous, and proceed immediately to lay off the town. He acted upon that sage advice and attracted these gentlemen to his purchase.

Mistaking the land which he had purchased, he employed a Mr. Hall to survey and lay off the North West Quarter into lots. Before the survey was completed, he concluded to locate the town on more elevated ground which was really his purchase, embraced in the Eastern part of our present city. Mr. John Blackwell (uncle of the late Peter B. Mastin) made this survey and the arrangements of squares and lots in that section of the city as they now exist. Mr. Klinch says that Mr. Dexter gave him the choice of lots and the privilege of naming the town, and he adopted that of "New Philadelphia." He claims too to have erected the second house here. Jonathan C. Farly having put up the first framed store house

Mr. Dexter really was not able to comply with the terms of his purchase. He fortunately formed the acquaintance of Mr. John Falconer who advanced the money and became interested in the sale of lots. The patent is recorded in the office of the Judge of Probate of this county in the name of John Falconer, assignee. Hence it is that the first titles run from that gentleman. The sales of lots were made by Mr. Dexter who would prepare the deeds for Mr. Falconer's signature. He also assumed a share in the erection of buildings.

Notwithstanding his rapid sales of lots at fair prices, Mr. Dexter seemed to be continually involved in debts, and law-suits. He was endowed with energy and perseverance combined with unusual intelligence but he was visionary; too sanguine without a due amount of business prudence and foresight. His calculations on paper were splendid and convincing to him but he could not manage to realize them in practice. Hence the major part of his grand purchases of land

in our present city passed from his possession with scarcely any lasting profit to him.

Disappointed here and smitten by the Texas fever, in 1833, he visited the Eastern part of Texas from which he wrote back most glowing accounts. Upon his return, he resolved to dispose of the remainder of his real estate in this city and try his fortune in that new country. Many of his lots, he swapped off to merchants here for dry goods. He was overreached in that trade by having old goods palmed upon him which had lain on the shelves for years. This last transaction about closed him out financially. He was arrested in Mobile for a small debt, and while under arrest for the same, as was then allowed, sometime during 1837, he died.

Mr. Dexter, when he retired from the Treasury Department to Boston, married Miss Charlotte Authorpe Morton, sister of Governor Morton.¹⁷ Coming himself from an influential Federalist family, and by marriage connecting himself with one of the leading Republican or Jeffersonian families, he often wondered why he had not made better use of his double advantage politically. He was frequently heard to lament, when worried for debts, the inferior position he occupied, notwithstanding the advantages of high family connection, compared with that attained by Daniel Webster, without wealth or family influence, whom he had outstripped at College. His amiable and accomplished consort died in Montgomery, August 17th, 1819, and was among the first females interred in our beautiful cemetery, the west end or old part of which her husband had presented to the town for a burying ground.

Mr. Dexter's sons were well and favorably known to many of our present citizens, Andrew Alfred and Samuel. The latter was engaged in business at Mobile when he died. The former was the first Chief Engineer of the Montgomery and West Point Railroad. He had been formerly engaged in the construction of the Charleston and Hamburg Railroad. Few men were his equal in the engineering profession in the South, and his mental abilities and culture were of a high order. His widow and children, the latter, grandchildren of the founder

¹⁷For a sketch of Morton see Dumas Malone (Editor), *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIII (New York, 1934), 259-260.

of Montgomery, still reside here. We cannot close this hurried and imperfect sketch, without expressing the opinion that our city will fail in its duty and a proper respect for the memory of its founder, if it does not erect a suitable monument in our Cemetery to perpetuate his name and fame. True, it is impossible to identify his grave in Mobile and re-inter his remains, but a lofty column can be erected in a conspicuous part of the Cemetery. The present City authorities by giving this matter immediate attention and thus making amends for the past oversight or neglect on the part of their predecessors, will receive the plaudits of the citizens.

**DEFENDER OF THE VOTELESS: JOSEPH C. MANNING
VIEWS THE DISFRANCHISEMENT ERA IN ALABAMA**

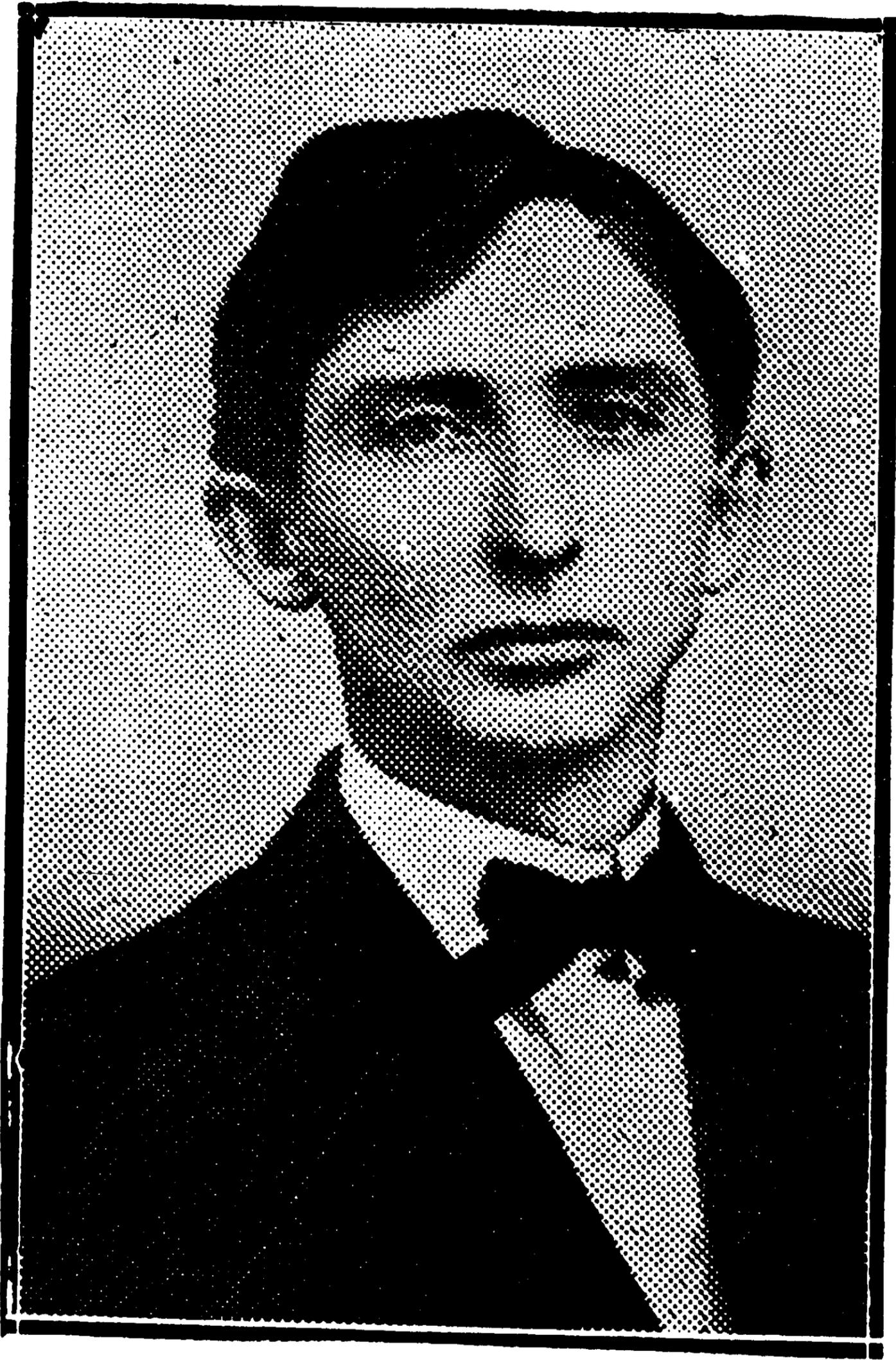
by

Paul M. Pruitt, Jr.

In November 1901 the voters of Alabama adopted a new constitution by an official count of 108,613 to 81,734. The document contained stringent poll tax and literacy requirements, and was patently designed to disfranchise ninety-nine per cent of the state's black citizens. In addition, though future United States Senator Tom Heflin and other pro-constitution spokesmen ostentatiously wrapped themselves in the mantle of white supremacy, it was no secret that the suffrage standards would disfranchise thousands of hill country yeomen. As one North Alabama editor matter-of-factly noted, such extreme measures were deemed necessary by the Black Belt political bosses of Alabama in order "to perpetuate the power of the Democratic Party." The men whose voices were to be silenced, black and white, were almost entirely Republicans or Populists, members of the very groups which had repeatedly united, during the tumultuous 1890's, to challenge Bourbon rule. The Constitutional Convention of 1901, dominated by planters, lien-merchants, and representatives of New South Industrialism, made a conscious decision to follow the lead of other Southern states in discarding the traditional means of overcoming insurgency — namely, ballot box stuffing. But Democratic leaders made sure that the old methods went out in a blaze of glory. The November margin of victory was provided by returns from eleven Black Belt counties where, as Republican Postmaster Joseph C. Manning reported, the great majority of "Negroes were recorded as having voted to disfranchise themselves." With a convincing show of force, the Democratic Party had delivered Alabama into the hands of "the virtuous and the intelligent." The black editor of the *Huntsville Journal* spoke the truth when he cried out: "It is good bye with the poor white folks and niggers now, for the train of disfranchisement is on the rail."¹

¹Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, 1969), 175-229; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1951), 321-349; Joseph Columbus Manning, *The Fadeout of Populism: Pot and Kettle in*

THE COLORED ALABAMIAN.



MR. JOSEPH C. MANNING.

Will address the colored citizens of Montgomery soon

The twentieth-century South is often depicted as a place in which demagogic politicians, often ex-Populists or populist Democrats, divert the white masses with attacks on the good name and civil rights of helpless blacks. The stereotype has a basis in fact, for as Postmaster Manning once wrote, the planter-merchant "Oligarchy" employed the Negro "as a political scape-goat, that he, in his unfortunate condition, . . . [might] condone and cloak the political rascality of those who usurp the control of government from both white and blacks."² Yet as these words suggest, there were white men who resisted the politics of hate, who refused to submit to what Manning called a "shotgun setting" of political tyranny; and often such men, by clear-headed observation of the evils of biracial disfranchisement, became lifelong advocates of ballot freedom and human rights. The following is part of the story of one such individual.

In January, 1901, when Joseph Columbus Manning took over as Postmaster of Alexander City, a thriving central Alabama railroad town, he had behind him almost a decade of political activity. The slight, angular Manning, sandy-haired and just thirty-one, had made his reputation as the founder and "Evangel" of the state People's Party. Counted out time and again by an entrenched Democracy, he and his cohorts campaigned persuasively for "a free ballot and a fair count"; Manning "encouraged to the front hundreds of country orators who sprang up amazingly, many of them with the guts and gizzard . . . to make it mighty disconcerting for the old-time local Democratic Party leaders."³ From 1894 to 1896 the na-

Combat (New York, 1928), 49-50; Rockford *People's Courier*, July 11, 1901, and the Camp Hill *Times*, July 12, 1901; Joseph C. Manning, *Letting the South Alone: Class Government that Defrauds Whites and Blacks* (Birmingham, 1903), 6-7, 9; Dallas County, with a voting-age male population of 2,525 whites and 9,871 blacks, voted for the new constitution by a count of 8,125 to 235.

²Joseph C. Manning, *The Rise and Reign of the Bourbon Oligarchy* (Birmingham, 1904), 18-21. See W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (1941; reprinted, New York, 1969), 252-263, and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (2nd rev. ed.; New York, 1969), 67-109.

³Joseph C. Manning, *From Five To Twenty-Five, His Early Life As Recalled by Joseph Columbus Manning* (New York, 1929), 38-39; William Warren Rogers, *The One-Gallused Rebellion: Agrarianism in Alabama, 1865-1896* (Baton Rouge, 1970), 189, 207, 230-243; Paul M. Pruitt, Jr., "A Changing of the Guard: Joseph C. Manning and Populist Strategy in the Fall of 1894," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, XL (Spring and Summer, 1978), 20-36.

tional People's Party sought an alliance with the national Democracy, to the dismay of most Southern Populists — yet even so, Manning's exposures of Black Belt vote frauds were instrumental in electing and seating two Populist and two Republican congressmen from Alabama in the Fifty-fourth Congress. Realizing that the People's Party was faltering, Manning joined the ranks of the Republicans, serving as Alabama correspondent for the New Orleans *Daily Item*, an important Republican organ. Both as a newspaperman and later as a postmaster, he worked with anti-constitution Republicans, Populists, and Democrats against the disfranchisement movement which threatened the state. Of the document adopted in 1901, he commented that it was the work of a "stupendous partisan machine," and concluded that "not in all the history of . . . civilized men can there be found a parallel to the depravity to which this Alabama autocracy . . . has come."⁴ For the remainder of his time in Alexander City, he would be without real power to change the currents of life in Alabama. But as an observer, and as an official forced to deal with the day-to-day inequities of life in a class-oriented, racist society, he grew. In the end he became a bold pamphleteer, an experienced civil rights lobbyist, a clear voice of conscience. And in many respects, the growth which followed defeat began in the Alexander City Post Office lobby.

Manning had always sympathized with the bulldozed black voters of the South. As a Populist he had scoffed at the theory that ballot box-stuffing was necessary to prevent "Negro domination," saying: "The domination we have to fear is that of the man with a black heart, without special reference to 'hide'."⁵ Now, all his instincts of fair play were aroused as he saw "the colored people who came in for mail . . . huddle in a corner until all whites were waited upon." This was a challenge he could meet directly, and so, as he later recalled, he "went into the office lobby for two or three days, telling those who came for mail to get in line as they came — first come, first served, old or young, black or white." Manning had a commanding presence, and he was able to persuade the

⁴Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York, 1976), 436-492; Rogers, *One-Gallused Rebellion*, 287-289; Manning, *Letting the South Alone*, 9.

⁵Joseph C. Manning, *Politics of Alabama* (Birmingham, 1893), 20-21.

startled townsfolk' to accept the new system. They were *not* pleased, though, when he ordered his young lady clerk to begin calling black customers by their proper titles; he had, in fact, speedily decided not to tolerate the standards practice of speaking to black men and women, ministers and school principals, as though they were children. "You can just drop the Molly, Mandy, Dick stuff," he told his employee. "You can treat all patrons alike." These instructions touched upon all the chords of racial and sexual paranoia prevalent among many of the "best people," and for a time there was an angry "yak-yak" around town. Eventually, overt opposition to the new reign of courtesy slacked off, particularly after the clerk's mother, a Southern woman with democratic sensibilities of her own, told Manning that he was in the right. With the support of such level-headed white folks, he had won a small victory for fair treatment of human beings.⁶

With the passage of time, Joseph Manning became even more assertive, more willing to "rub the fur the wrong way" in Alexander City. Whatever the Constitution of Alabama might say, he devoutly believed that "God intended . . . every man [to] have equal opportunity under the law." Because he was prepared to act upon this principle, Manning increasingly served as an advocate and spokesman for the town's black population. In 1902, for example, he learned that local officials had placed only one Alexander City Negro on the voting lists, though hundreds of black men were of voting age. One black leader was "repeatedly told that the registrars were not registering that day," Manning subsequently wrote, observing that many "Negroes of property and good standing were humiliated by the same treatment." Incensed, he gathered together a number of the applicants and, according to a testimonial drawn up at a meeting of black citizens, led them "to the registration officers and made personal plea for fair treatment." Finally about twenty Negroes were entered on the city rolls.⁷ On another occasion Manning encouraged two black men, one a

⁶J.C. Manning to Walter White, December 20, 1928, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, Library of Congress. White was an NAACP official who befriended Manning during his last illness, 1928-1930.

⁷*The Crisis: A Magazine of the Darker Races*, II (August, 1911), 150; Petition by the "Undersigned Colored Citizens of Alexander City," sent to Booker T. Washington, November 17, 1904, in the Booker T. Washington Papers, Library of Congress.

veteran of the Spanish-American War and the other a land-owning farmer, in their aim of founding a general store. It was soon apparent that the white storekeepers of Alexander City were unhappy as the prospect of losing some of their black trade; nevertheless, the two men opened their business in a downtown building secured from a sympathetic property-owner, and Manning was one of their first customers. For his pains, for standing up for equality of opportunity, he "caught the devil in criticism" from those supply merchants, staunch defenders of white solidarity and social segregation, whose monopoly control over black consumers was being threatened. He had personally crossed the color line to strike a blow for the independence of black people, an offense not to be forgotten.⁸

There is no doubt that Manning tried to become part of the social and civic life of his town. He was an active member of the Methodist Church, and a founder of the Industrial and Development Association of Alexander City; indeed, for a time he was responsible for the Association's autumn "Street Fair and Farmer's Jubilee." After a disastrous fire of June, 1902, destroyed more than thirty buildings, Postmaster Manning was the first to get to a working telegraph wire; soon, under his direction, food and supplies were arriving from Birmingham and Montgomery. His devotion to duty naturally earned him praise from the solid citizens of the community. One previously dubious businessman wrote that Manning "has been kind, accommodating, . . . and has given us by far the best service we have ever had."⁹ Yet "Joe" never felt secure in the esteem of his neighbors. Years later he stated that his civic heroics were among the "few things that held to me enough people to enable my living in Alexander City, in the face of my views." Mere attempts to be even-handed with members of both races, he had found, were enough to raise angry protests. Still, he simply could not forbear from criticizing a growing number of blatant legal persecutions — such as a

⁸J.C. Manning to Walter White, December 20, 1928, NAACP Papers; Guion Griffis Johnson, "The Ideology of White Supremacy," in Dewey Grantham, ed., *The South and the Sectional Image* (New York, 1967), 56-78.

⁹Alexander City *Outlook*, January 11, February 8, April 5, May 3, 1901; Dadeville *Free Press*, October 24, 1901; J.C. Manning to W.E. Chandler, November 14, 1901, William E. Chandler Papers, Library of Congress; Jennie Lee Kelley, *A History of Alexander City* (Alexander City, 1974), Part III.

twenty-year prison term given in 1905 to one Josh Grimes of Alexander City, a "black brute" who had allegedly wrenched the arm of a little white girl. From his dealings with a variety of black folk, Manning knew that they were not "a menace to American civilization," as Democratic politicians and apologists claimed; rather, most blacks were striving "amid difficulties known only to God and them, to raise the standard of their people." Worse culprits by far were the respectable citizens of Alexander City and other towns — middle class whites who, in the belief that "niggers" and "white trash" must be taught stern lessons, had allowed their judicial officers to become "perverters of human rights and constitutional liberties." Gradually, through bitter experience, Manning perfected his understanding of the disfranchisement-era South. In the long run, none of his knowledge went to waste.¹⁰

From 1901 to 1905, Manning centered his hopes for the political reformation of the South on President Theodore Roosevelt and his chief Alabama lieutenant, Tuskegee educator and boss Booker T. Washington. Manning had met Roosevelt as early as 1895, while on a lecture tour of the North. Roosevelt was then famous as a reform police commissioner in New York City, and Manning was confident that, as President, he would continue to be a dynamic opponent of machine politics. Joe was therefore somewhat shocked when the President, on Washington's advice, appointed conservative Democrat Thomas Goode Jones as Judge of Alabama's Middle District. On the other hand, Manning respected Washington as a manipulator of Republicans *and* Democrats, rejoiced in his influence with Roosevelt, and between 1902 and 1904 waged with him a successful fight against the "Lily-White" (pro-disfranchisement) faction of the Alabama GOP. After the infamous Washington-Roosevelt "dinner at the White House," when Southern journalists denounced the President for committing the "damnable outrage" of inviting a "nigger" to lunch, Manning praised Roosevelt for his "recognition . . . of the greatest leader of the colored race." It seemed to the impatient postmaster that he could, with the help of those powerful friends, enlighten the nation concerning the "disfranchisement system" and "the

¹⁰J.C. Manning to Walter White, December 20, 1928, NAACP Papers; Alexander City *Outlook*, March 31, 1905; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 350-355; Manning, *Rise and Reign*, 21.

results arising from its application."¹¹

His prayers seemed on the point of being answered in the spring of 1903, when Federal District Attorney Warren S. Reese, Jr., an ex-Populist, brought peonage charges against more than a dozen central Alabama planters and sawmill operators. Using information uncovered by secret agents, probably including Manning, Reese broke up a ring of "convict lease" slave drivers and corrupt county officials. The New York *Evening Post* and other national journals, encouraged by Washington and Manning, covered the trials in sensational detail. The Northern public, though, was not profoundly moved by the revelation that guarded stockades and shackles were the lot of scores — doubtless hundreds — of black Alabamians. Even the news that some peons were white failed to spark a drive for a more thorough federal investigation. Roosevelt, already courting the votes of Bourbon Democrats for the next presidential election, was silent; his officials in South Alabama, where evidence of debt slavery was particularly strong, were unwilling or unable to secure indictments. Within a few months, Alabama politicians led by Tom Heflin were openly denouncing Reese and the peonage prosecutions.¹² Understandably depressed, Manning was fearful that the Bourbons' assault on civil liberties had gained national credibility. Now he was compelled, he felt, to strike out on his own with an appeal to the country. The odds were against him, but if he could gain the attention of a sufficiently large audience, he might — with financial aid from such "conscience" Republicans as Oswald Garrison Villard of the *Evening Post* — pressure Roosevelt to take a stronger civil rights stance. In Sep-

¹¹J.C. Manning to W.E. Chandler, October 5, 1901, Chandler Papers; J.C. Manning to Booker T. Washington, January 10, 22, 1905, Washington Papers; J.C. Manning to Walter White, December 15, 17, 1928, NAACP Papers; Manning, *Rise and Reign*, 28. For information on the Alabama GOP in the early twentieth century, see David E. Alsobrook, "Mobile's Forgotten Progressive — A.N. Johnson, Editor and Entrepreneur," *Alabama Review*, XXXII (July, 1979), 188-202; for information on Roosevelt's 1901 luncheon with Washington, see Richard Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America: From McKinley to Hoover, 1896-1933* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1973), 27-29.

¹²Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Urbana, Illinois, 1972), 43-46; A.P. Fuquay to Booker T. Washington, November 18, 1904, Washington Papers; J.C. Manning to W.E. Chandler, November 28, 1916, Chandler Papers.

tember, 1904, on the eve of TR's reelection, Manning published the fruits of his work and thought in pamphlet form, under the appropriate title, *The Rise and Reign of the Bourbon Oligarchy*.

Rise and Reign was not Manning's first published work, nor would it be his last. When he died in 1930, he had at least six books or pamphlets to his credit, as well as dozens of newspaper articles.¹³ In all these writings, however, Manning emphasized one basic theme — that the leaders of the Southern Democratic Party, the leaders of Southern society and economic life, had systematically denied basic freedoms to members of the biracial lower class. Moreover, he accused the spokesmen of the ruling Oligarchy of fomenting a double-edged race hatred among yeoman class whites, corrupting and distracting them, and using them as instruments in "keeping down" the blacks. Thus "the hardships, sufferings and wrongs heaped upon the blacks . . . [under] the institution of chattel slavery" had operated "to bring about a condition by which the whites of the South have come to endure a yoke of political serfdom." More than any of Manning's other works, *Rise and Reign* makes a detailed and statistical proof of these charges. Manning was clearly acquainted with the census records for Alabama and other Southern states, as well as congressional election returns from all over the nation. Furthermore, by 1904 he had begun to exchange ideas and information with several black journalists and intellectuals, including T. Thomas Fortune of the *New York Age*, and the Reverend R.C. Judkins, subsequently editor of the *Montgomery Colored Alabamian*. These factors, combined with Manning's emotional intensity, made *Rise and Reign* a message of incisive, accurate, and start-

¹³Manning had been building up his Northern contacts even before the urgency of the peonage scandals. In April, 1903, he delivered a speech before the Middlesex Club of Boston. This shrewd and fiery talk, which he subsequently printed as a pamphlet entitled *Letting the South Alone*, was limited in historical and statistical scope to the state of Alabama. By the time he wrote *Rise and Reign*, his thought embraced the whole region, and his sociological observations were more sophisticated. In addition to the works already cited, Manning published (New York, 1916), a pamphlet in support of Republican presidential candidate Charles Evans Hughes, entitled *Sectionalism: Rise and Reign of the Southern Political Oligarchy*. For Manning's later newspaper articles, see the *Montgomery Colored Alabamian*, March 14, 1914, September 18, 1915, February 15, 1916, and the *Washington, D.C., Bee*, May-August, 1919.

lingly radical scope.¹⁴

Manning began by praising the white farmers of North Alabama as basically "brave and patriotic men, who dared to aspire to a true democracy." Called upon to defend slavery, these freedom-loving people had frequently opposed "the revolutionary and fiery movement of secession." During the agrarian revolt of the 1890's, correspondingly, white and black reformers united to insist "that real democracy means the people shall rule, and that a real democrat is one who" would place "a fair and honest ballot . . . inviolate" in the hands of the people. Allegedly, Manning continued, the Bourbons and businessmen who wrote the constitution of 1901 did so in order to eliminate black voting power — again, supposedly, for the benefit of white citizens. But this rationale, which the Populists had vigorously opposed, did not mean that the freedmen had ceased to play a part in the conservative scheme. Neither the constitution nor the racist propaganda accompanying it had altered the nature or location of power in Alabama, as Manning showed by citing a notorious fact:

The method by which the . . . oligarchy fastens its hold upon the Democratic machine . . . is [by] basing the representations in the conventions of the party and in the Alabama legislature upon an apportionment embracing the disfranchised blacks in the Black Belt, . . . thereby prohibiting control . . . by the white counties.¹⁵

And still the bosses of Bourbon regimes in Alabama and across the South insisted that "the soul [*sic*] issue of paramount importance is the race issue." Assertive and grandiloquent, the planter-politicians presumed to speak for the whole South, and did so with such assurance that few Northerners doubted

¹⁴Manning, *Rise and Reign*, 8; J.C. Manning to Governor Emmett O'Neal, April 11, 1911, Box 203, Governors' Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

¹⁵Manning, *Rise and Reign*, 5-8, 9, 10-13, 17. Manning glosses over the Reconstruction era, a time when, he feels, the black and white masses were alienated from each other by the presence of the Carpetbaggers. Even so, he has little respect for the Democratic "Redeemers." "Violence and fraud," he says, were "seemingly a pastime employed" by Democrats, whether the object was "to count out and intimidate 'Carpetbaggers' and 'niggers'" or to over-rule the wishes of the white yeoman majority.

the fact of white unity and majority rule within the region. Based on his personal knowledge and recent studies, however, Manning had a different tale to tell.¹⁶

Using election returns from several 1902 contests, he revealed the limited extent of white "backing behind the oligarchy." South Carolina's seven-man congressional slate, he pointed out, had been elected after polling an aggregate of 29,343 out of 32,185 votes cast; yet there were 130,374 white men of voting age in the state. Turning to Mississippi, Manning noted that favorite son John Sharp Williams had been elected to Congress without opposition, and that Mississippi's entire delegation (all Democrats) had received a total of 18,058 votes, though 150,922 white men were old enough to vote. In Alabama, where the Republican Party was relatively vigorous and where the Democrats had made white supremacy a campaign issue, Democratic incumbent William D. Jelks had won the gubernatorial race by a count of 67,649 to 24,190; even so, taking 3,000 black voters into consideration, fewer than 100,000 of Alabama's 230,000 adult white men had voted. Plainly, the Democratic voters of these states were a minority of the potential white voting population, and it was logical to conclude that the majority of white men were either disfranchised outright by state poll taxes and literacy tests, or rendered apathetic by the certainty of Democratic victory. Manning, characteristically, summed up the situation in strong words. "The great mass of [white] voters in the South have been dashed back into sullen silence and into hopeless acquiescence, and, under present conditions, they are as helpless as are the blacks upon whose necks the Bourbon heel was long since pressed."¹⁷

Manning did not claim that white farmers were free from the taint of racism. For years, instead of discussing "issues really effecting [*sic*] the welfare of the Southern people," the disfranchisers and their political ancestors had bombarded the white South with "an amazing tirade of abuse of the Negro." Considering the persistence of the Tom Heflins, it was no wonder that a growing number of white people were "misused

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 12, 14-16; Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism*, 206-208; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 326-337.