



## “Where Money Rules and Morals Rot”: The Vise of Modernity

Soon after he reached the Paris Peace Conference, Woodrow Wilson received a communication from his secretary in Washington. “If America fails now,” Joseph Tumulty warned, “socialism rules the world.”<sup>1</sup> That sense of a world poised on the brink of a precipice reached well beyond the halls of Versailles. Back home, the events of 1919 defied assumptions that millions of small-holding white men had constructed their lives on. As black Americans stood their ground and fought back, undaunted, against their white assailants in the nationwide race riots of that year, white supremacy appeared vulnerable. As the woman suffrage movement won its seventy-year-long battle for the right to vote, male prerogative no longer seemed assured. As one in every five American workers walked off their jobs to go on strike, the rights of property seemed less clear. And, finally, as Wilson set out to build a global League of Nations, the levers of power moved farther from the hands of non-elite white men than ever before. A middle-class man inclined to fear, in fact, could see in the events of 1919 the nightmare of the republic’s founders come true: growing economic inequality had bred concentrated power above and below a great mass with little stake in society.

Some of the men in between, like Athens barber *A. J. Boyd*, would soon enlist in the Klan in order to reimpose their notions of order on this topsy-turvy world. *Boyd* was no novice in encounters with change. Born soon after the end of Reconstruction, he had lived through a profound transformation in local, regional, and national life. But that is precisely what made the immediate postwar years so ominous: the concatenation of challenges made new sense of alterations long under way in the economy and society. The message was both clear and shrill. The nineteenth-century world, a world in which a white man could still reasonably hope to become his own boss if he harnessed himself to the task, was fast passing. Without the self-sovereignty that small-holding promised, maintaining his authority over African Americans and immigrants—let alone over his own wife and children—would be more difficult than ever before. So, too, would be making himself heard by the most powerful men in society. For as their enterprises and interests grew to national and international proportions, the input of men like *Boyd* came to seem irksome to them.<sup>2</sup>

Athens had a different look and feel to it now than when *Boyd* grew up back in the 1880s. Founded astride the Oconee River in 1801 to host the state university, the town in time spilled out over the red clay hills undulating away from the river’s east and the west banks. By the early twentieth century, several rail lines and major highways linked Athens to markets elsewhere in the country and helped it become an important hub of cotton trade and manufacture. By 1920, its varied enterprises had attracted nearly seventeen thousand residents. Automobiles and streetcars now vied with horses and buggies for its city streets.<sup>3</sup>

As Athens grew after 1880, its internal divisions also became plainer. The wealthiest residents congregated along Milledge and Prince Avenues in the white-columned antebellum mansions that earned Athens the name “Classic City.” To their immediate west was one of many black neighborhoods dispersed

through the city. Almost twenty percent of the city's African Americans lived in its congested, ramshackle, usually unpainted houses, considered by white landlords to be "one of the best investments for small amounts of money," Denied the municipal services that white residents enjoyed, their yards held, alongside their chicken coops, outdoor privies and wells and piles of trash that the city failed to collect.<sup>4</sup>

East of this community was the city center. Anchored on the south by the university campus, it hummed with customers and the residents who owned and staffed its shops and offices. Here, too, could be found the nascent commercial leisure industry of movie houses, poolrooms and soft-drink parlors that superseded older forms of recreation like the cock-fighting *Boyd* had once practiced. Among the main patrons of these pool halls and picture shows were white youth from the largely working-class neighbor-hoods of East Athens and West Athens. Those who lived in these communities and labored in the area textile mills knew they were looked down upon by the better-off inhabitants of the city as "more or less poor white trash."<sup>5</sup> In short, Athens's placid appearance masked antagonisms no less potent for being largely mute.



Perhaps, if the turbulence of the late 1910s had remained confined to distant places like Harlem, Versailles, and Petrograd, it might not have so upset men like *Boyd*. But the tumult could not be contained. Dramatic national and international events found echoes in communities like Athens. Klansmen were hardly alone in seeing such connections. "The world is seething in social unrest and disquietude," lamented a group of Athens ministers in 1921; "anarchy overwhelms whole sections." The local press, for its part, asserted connections between the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the postwar upsurge of rebellion in the United States, and lenient parenting and crime in Athens. The "world," said editor Hugh Rowe, was "reaping just about what it sowed."<sup>6</sup>

Workers' newfound strength attracted some of the most anxious attention, at least from those in a position to employ. The insatiable demand for labor during the war enabled Southern manufacturing workers to more than double their average yearly wages between 1914 and 1919, in the process narrowing the North-South wage gap. By 1920, wages in Georgia hit an all-time high, inflation notwithstanding. Athens' black workers made particularly spectacular gains; wages in the main occupations open to them generally doubled and in some cases tripled. Employers felt keenly the slip-page of their power in this labor-scarce market. Where only a few years before they had sat firmly in the saddle, now they had to tolerate insubordination for fear of losing the workers they did have if they tried to discipline them as they would have in former days. Unable to control the situation themselves, planters and businessmen looked to the state legislature to pass compulsory work laws and punitive measures against vagrants and labor emigration agents.<sup>7</sup>

Among white workers, the most obvious sign of newfound confidence was a spate of strikes and union-organizing efforts in the southern Piedmont from 1918 to 1921. In Georgia, textile workers built unions in Columbus, Macon, Griffin, and Atlanta. Other, traditionally organized, groups also caught the strike fever: machinists, railway workers, streetcar workers, and building trades workers. In four cities, the strikers proved so determined that the governor had to deploy the state militia to overpower them. Mean-while, the number of union members and locals, in Georgia mounted continuously from 1915 to 1920.<sup>8</sup>

In Athens, skilled workers established or reactivated several locals in the 'teens: painters, barbers, typographers, and carpenters among them. These locals then formed a city central federation in 1914. Although no evidence survives of union organizing among local textile workers, operatives at the Southern Mills conducted an impromptu work stoppage when management tried to introduce piecework. "They would starve first," they said. Giving larger import to these local events, the-Athens press bombarded readers with sensational, front-page accounts of battles between labor and capital elsewhere in the South and the nation.<sup>9</sup>

The insurgence of white labor could scarcely be separated from the disgruntlemerit spreading among African Americans, even before the war. Young people especially resented the curbs on their freedom. Many white planters in the Clarke County area thus complained in 1911 that "the younger generation is rapidly becoming unmanageable," attributing their recalcitrance to "a deep-seated dislike of control and discontent with farming life and conditions." An expert in agricultural economics concurred, pointing to

“the growing aversion on the part of the negro to supervision. He desires his movements to be absolutely unrestricted,” even if it meant less income. That desire was palpable in black families’ growing rejection of wage labor in favor of rental arrangements that allowed more autonomy. In town, black women wrested more freedom for themselves and more time for their own families by choosing laundry work over domestic service where possible.<sup>10</sup> Such efforts, urban and rural, led many white employers to suspect that black workers were secretly organized. One planter thus cautioned Governor Joseph Mackey Brown in 1913 that they “must be crowded back by some means.”<sup>11</sup>

The war brought these antagonisms into the open. Finding Jim Crow in Georgia unions, black workers expressed their aspirations in other ways. Some moved to escape the South’s caste system, undaunted by the knowledge that they would face new ordeals in the North. “Negroes are leaving here by the hundreds,” marvelled an Augusta resident in 1917. “They know where they are going; they know what they are up against.”<sup>12</sup> Those who stayed behind were hardly the docile folk of New South propaganda. Clarke County white employers, both urban and rural, fumed over the boldness of their black employees in 1919. One hotel manager described “such gross indifference ... [as he] had never encountered before.” A fertilizer plant manager maintained that his black workers “were absolutely uncontrollable.” Before long, he and other local white employers believed, such black workers would “begin to organize.” White nerves became so sensitive that they registered changes in blacks’ spending habits as political statements. High wartime wages enabled even some poor people to buy such things as silk shirts or automobiles. This “unusually extravagant buying” irked establishment whites. Some griped that blacks spent twice as much on cars as they did on war bonds.<sup>13</sup>

But the bravest statement of black aspirations came in politics, as some pushed to open a second front in President Wilson’s “war for democracy”: below the Mason-Dixon line. In March of 1918, for example, over a hundred African-American Atlantans signed and put into mass circulation a letter vigorously demanding the rights they declared due them as “sovereign American citizens.” They denounced lynching as “worse than Prussianism” and condemned the “discrimination,” “humiliation,” and “segregation” their people were daily subjected to as “a violation of the fundamental rights of citizens of the United States.” Most dramatically, they attributed these “brutalities and indignities” to the way Southern whites had “filch[ed]” the votes of black men in an “effort to re-enslave us.” Finally, the signers vowed to continue to “exert our righteous efforts until not only every eligible black man but every eligible black woman shall be wielding the ballot proudly in defense of our liberties and our homes.”<sup>14</sup>

In their focus on the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance, in fact, historians of African-American life in these years have slighted the surge of resistance to white supremacy by Southern blacks.<sup>15</sup> Contemporaries did not. “Did you ever know a race to awake as our race has awakened in the last year or so?” ex-claimed a member of the Augusta NAACP. “Augusta is almost a different town. The old spirit of humble satisfaction, of let-well-enough-alone is fast dying out.” In the three years after 1916, the number of NAACP branches in the South jumped from six to 155. Together, they amassed a dues-paying membership of over 42,000. For the first time, Southerners now dominated the organization’s rank and file. Georgia blacks organized scores of these chapters, not only in cities like Atlanta and Augusta, but also in tiny towns and hamlets around the state.<sup>16</sup>

In 1917, the same year the NAACP came to Georgia, thirtyone Athens residents chartered a branch in their community. The following year, they brought NAACP leader Walter White to town to speak. G. C. Callaway, a member of the local executive committee, gave voice to his co-workers’ aspirations. He informed the national office that Athens had a reputation as “the best town” in the state for blacks. But that relative comfort was no longer enough. Callaway looked to the NAACP “to force in to the nation liberty fre[e]dom [and] equality.” Everyone, he hoped, would “organize and join the fight.”<sup>17</sup>

Branches in cities took up the cudgels for their rural brethren. The Atlanta NAACP, whose membership reached 1,700 in 1919, prosecuted cases of debt peonage and defended two blacks who had killed whites in self-defense. Harking back to the abolition crusade, Atlanta members constructed “a system of underground railroads for ... persons fleeing from the cruelty and oppression of the rural communities and small towns.” The chapter also undertook a massive, successful voter-registration drive in 1919. In one month, they bought over a thousand new black voters to the polls in Atlanta—more than double the number who had taken part in some past elections. This campaign caused panic among leading whites, who hauled out their white employees to offset black votes. The “solidity” of the African-American vote in

the election, as much as the NAACP's forthright insistence that it expressed "definite and long standing grievances," was perhaps behind the legislation proposed in the state assembly the following year to prohibit blacks' voting or holding office at all.<sup>18</sup> The proportion of blacks involved in such outspoken protest was tiny; the challenge their undertakings posed to the status quo was great.

Even more fearsome to racist whites than the NAACP were black veterans of the Great War. The mere vision of an African-American man in a uniform, a symbol commanding respect, could arouse white fire-eaters to violence. But the threat posed by black soldiers was not merely symbolic. Once having experienced an alternative to Southern life, most would never be the same—nor would the communities they returned to. Seventy percent of the Clarke County planters with black employees in the Army reported in one study that the veterans left the farm soon after returning from the service. A majority said that the remaining workers then became dissatisfied as well.<sup>19</sup>

Even federal officials became disturbed about black veterans moving north. "They are inclined to put what they understand to be their rights as American citizens above every other consideration," observed one official in the War Department. Others were not so circumspect. A 1918 military intelligence report described as "a potential danger," not white vigilantes, but the black soldier "strutting around in his uniform" particularly if he was "inclined to impudence or arrogance." If these men tried to act on "the new ideas and social aspirations" they had acquired in France, the author declared (in allusion to rumors of romantic liaisons with white women), "an era of bloodshed will follow as compared with which the history of reconstruction will be a mild reading, indeed." So alarmed was the Division of Military Intelligence over "Negro subversion"—defined as black veterans' fighting "any white effort, especially in the South, to reestablish white ascendancy"—that it undertook a secret investigation to find out whether they had a collective organization to promote their goals.<sup>20</sup>

Here, it seemed, was brewing the black rebellion whose specter haunted the white establishment. Not only were black soldiers trained in combat, but it appeared their civilian peers might no longer turn the other cheek, either. This, at any rate, was the message of the race riots of 1919. In them, African Americans fought back en masse, for the first time, against white assailants. Certainly local racists noticed that, according to Athens merchants, black purchases of firearms skyrocketed in these years, restrained only by limited supply. The newly formed Federal Bureau of Investigation became so worried that in 1920 it initiated investigations throughout the South into the extent of gun purchasing by blacks. The reports that came back often indicated either a noticeable increase or that they were *already* almost universally armed with good weapons—hardly a comforting prospect to panic-ridden white supremacists.<sup>21</sup>

The unrest among blacks was serious enough to prompt a small group of liberal whites to action. Several met in January of 1919 in Atlanta to form what would come to be known as the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC). World War I had "changed the whole status of race relationships," an internal account of the CIC's origins later explained; blacks became determined to obtain "things hitherto not hoped for." The CIC identified three different groups among Southern blacks: the "openly rebellious, defiant and contemptuous" leaders to whom "one talks ... in vain as to the need for patience"; "below ... the great mass of uneducated Negroes" who gravitated more and more toward the radicals' positions; and finally, those "thoughtful, educated Negro leaders" who counseled a need for "patience" yet had a "tendency to despair" at its failure to produce results. White CIC founders sought to isolate radical leaders and raise the credibility of more conservative ones with the mass of skeptical poor blacks by alleviating some of the most onerous aspects of white supremacy. Limited as the goals of the CIC were, its very existence marked a sea change in sortie quarters of Southern white society. In a culture in which, as CIC director Will Alexander rued, many whites still found "killing a Negro less reprehensible than eating with him," CIC committees in hundreds of local communities involved leading blacks and whites in ongoing discussions on how to stop mob violence and improve race relations.<sup>22</sup>

Indicative of the indivisibility of the challenges to prevailing relations of power in these years, adult women and college students proved among the most avid of the CIC's white supporters. Thus, some intrepid young men and women from the YMCA at the University of Georgia met with students from the Knox Institute, a local black private school, in an interracial discussion group—until their leader was driven from the university.<sup>23</sup> From the first meeting of leaders of women's organizations to discuss the war's impact on race relations in 1920, according to Alexander, "the most effective force in changing southern racial patterns has been the white women." Their efficacy came from the way their very

participation in interracial work challenged the myth of the “Southern lady” so central to policing the lines between black and white in the South.<sup>24</sup>

Involvement in interracial work after the war betokened a metamorphosis among Southern white women. Among its other markers was a growth in feminist agitation by middle- and upper-class women in the 1910s. The Athens Women’s Club joined with society women’s groups across the state to demand the admission of women to the University of Georgia in Athens. The Clarke County Equal Suffrage Association, established in 1912, held public rallies and debates to promote woman’s rights.<sup>25</sup> Some men, such as local newspaper editor Hugh Rowe, feared that the suffrage movement was breeding “sex antagonism and prejudice.” Antisuffragists went further: votes for women would overturn the social order. Still, the “world-wide pull of the feminist movement” seemed irresistible, “neither race, nationality, nor the hostility of man,” it seemed to Rowe, “[could] stop it.”<sup>26</sup>

Feminism’s spread both reflected and fueled changes in the everyday lives of young, middle-class white women. Despite the opposition of a majority of the male faculty and the “skepticism” of male civic organizations, the University of Georgia finally admitted women as full-time, regular students in September of 1918. Many male students resisted the change. “Boys did everything to embarrass the co-eds,” one contemporary recalled, from boycotting them socially, to swearing in front of them, to denouncing “the evils of women” in public meetings. Yet their tantrums failed. Female students stood their ground. One even publicly defended the recent gains of her sex. She insisted that college training was women’s “just right rather than a high privilege bestowed upon them.” She pointed out that “most twentieth century girls do choose to enter a profession or industry.” They did so in part because they were “unwilling to become economic burdens or social parasites” now that so much work had moved outside the home. “The modern girl,” she warned, “will not submit” to the desires of men “who insist on girls being dolls to be flattered and entertained.... She demands recognition and opportunities for her capabilities.”<sup>27</sup> That the writer chose to remain anonymous indicates the opposition such ideas still confronted; that she wrote it at all indicates the willingness of some women to challenge a gender ideology inherited from an older social order.

In this context of redefinition, simple gestures came to denote larger agendas for both sides. Perhaps because new standards of Female dress were the most visible marker of change, they served as a potent symbol in the renegotiation of female roles. Casting off the long skirts and high-necked blouses of their mothers’ generation, “business girls” adopted styles at once more relaxed and more flamboyant. Impatient with polite conventions about female modesty, girls from the posh Lucy Cobb Institute in Athens followed their lead. They endured the ritual inspection of their dress length each Saturday morning before they could go to town—only to hike their skirts above their knees once they were out of the matron’s sight.<sup>28</sup> The significance of young women’s determination to shed Victorian attire, denoting as it did also aspirations toward sexual self-determination, was not lost on defenders of female domesticity. Reports circulated in 1921 of a bill pending in the state legislature to fine or imprison women whose skirts ended more than three inches above their ankles. Even the press joined in the outcry. The failure of all such efforts to dissuade young women from baring their knees and bobbing their hair merely confirmed their unruliness in the eyes of those who believed that the “new woman” jeopardized the social order.<sup>29</sup>

Like rising skirts, the rise of smoking among young white women became a controversial issue. Whereas the new dress styles indicated a decline in female sexual modesty, female smoking threatened to dissolve gender distinctions altogether. “French Women,” a banner headline in the local press thus proclaimed, “Get Mustaches from Smoking.” Although only about thirty Female students at the University of Georgia smoked in these years, they were also the first generation of co-eds. As such, they appeared to many to be the wave of the future. Their insistence on their right to smoke and their defiance of university rules forbidding it no doubt made that future appear ominous to those interested in preserving clearly demarcated gender roles and unquestioned submission to authority.<sup>30</sup>

The very newness of such behavior, adopted as it was in an already turbulent social context, made it seem seditious. Many contemporaries could not believe that a woman who smoked could be a reliable mother, or that a girl who wore short skirts would ever heed a husband’s wishes. Only experience could calm their fears. And, in fact, it would be a decade before the fearful realized that these changes did not have the apocalyptic potential they had imagined. In the ’twenties, “girls was shipped off for just any offense,” recalled a maid at the State Teachers’ College in Athens in the 1930s. “Now they does pretty

much as they please. [The school] even provides smokin' rooms for 'em."<sup>31</sup> Until then, smoking, like so much other new female behavior, seemed to pose a grave threat to the social order.

Continuities notwithstanding, young women did expect more from men than their mothers had. When disappointed, they proved more willing to buck the Victorian middle-class convention of marriage as a permanent union devoted to child-rearing. Nation-wide, the divorce rate increased by two thousand percent between the Civil War and the Great Depression, when one in six marriages ended in divorce. While the total number of divorces per capita in Georgia was about half the number nationally in 1916, *the rate* of increase after the turn of the century was more rapid than in the United States as a whole—notwithstanding the fact that state's courts granted alimony to fewer than one in ten women. In Clarke County, the number of divorces leapt from fifteen in 1916 to forty in 1922.<sup>32</sup> Faced with this surge, the local press recoiled from its earlier liberalism. Having defended “the divorce blessing” in 1914 as many women's only means of “escape” from “oppression,” after the war the Athens *Banner-Herald* deplored the “divorce evil,” called Athens “a little Reno,” and referred to its court as “the Divorce mill.”<sup>33</sup>

Its turnaround issued from an astute intuition. Such things as the rise of divorce, feminism, black radicalism, white racial liberalism, and the postwar strike wave were not isolated, random occurrences. These instances of insubordination to old masters were the birth pangs of a new kind of social order, one whose relations of power and culture differed from those of the nineteenth-century world men like *Boyd* and *Rowe* had been born into. In their eyes, it appeared to eviscerate discipline, stability, and predictability—in short, to undercut the kind of hierarchy from which men like themselves had derived security.<sup>34</sup>



As disturbing as the many challenges to authority was the awareness that they had not emerged from thin air. Rather, they realized potentials created by long-term changes that together weakened the foundations of the nineteenth-century world. By altering the ground families constructed their lives upon, for example, economic development after 1880 began to open up to question previous relations between men and women. On one side, employment apart from the family, more control over their fertility, and easier access to divorce offered women the prospect of greater autonomy. On the other side, economic insecurity, geographical mobility, and the market's takeover of much domestic labor made men more willing to desert wives and children. Taken together, such developments made families less permanent, more contested, and in many ways, different institutions.

Of course, the changes should not be overstated. In hindsight, some of the continuities seem as impressive. Cotton continued to dominate the economy, for example. Although agriculture now occupied a minority of the local labor force, it was still the leading occupation of Clarke County men, as of most Southern men, just as cotton manufacture was the area's leading industry. Most rural people, moreover, still strained to make ends meet. The average annual income for a farm family in a typical Georgia Piedmont county in 1924 was \$591, from which expenses for farm operations had to be paid. As late as 1930, fewer than one in ten Clarke County farm households enjoyed electricity, telephones, or running water. Like their grandparents, most rural people still lived in unpainted houses on dirt roads, drew their water by hand, and travelled by wagon or buggy when need arose.<sup>35</sup>

Whether they lived in the countryside or in town, nearly every group in Georgia still relied on kinship networks for economic survival. Among the wealthy, endogamous marriage practices concentrated economic resources so that they could be mobilized to greatest effect. Among the less well-off, children still counted as net assets rather than debits. Small-farm owners and tenants alike counted on the labor of all family members. The more the hands to tend it, the better the crop—or the bigger the plot, for a tenant household.<sup>36</sup> Like rural landlords, mill managers favored large families and penalized small in their employment and housing policies. “The size of your house,” as an Athens mill villager recalled, “depended on the size of your family.” From the children who earned wages, to the grandparents who looked after toddlers whose parents worked in the mills, household maintenance required collective effort.<sup>37</sup> Kin also furnished aid no one else would in times of unemployment, illness, or incapacity. Indeed, the support of one's children made it possible to avert what a Savannah unionist described in 1922 as “the terror of Old Age”: “POVERTY, and the POOR HOUSE.”<sup>38</sup>

Nearly all social relations, in fact, still bore the stamp of an older patriarchal model that subordinated

individual needs and rights to the welfare of hierarchical collectivities. That model sanctioned private violence in the service of public order. Most important, in the South, was the force used to bolster white supremacy. Lynching illustrated the legitimacy of such force among whites. Between 1882 and 1934, lynch mobs murdered more than five thousand people, the vast majority of them Southern black men. In Georgia, at least 549 people, 510 of them black, were lynched over roughly the same period. Yet, between 1885 and 1922, the state prosecuted only *one* person for lynching.<sup>39</sup>

Violence against African Americans short of killing was still a routine feature of Southern life. The whipping of workers common in slavery persisted into the twentieth century, particularly in rural areas, where physical compulsion remained an accepted tool of labor control. The NAACP received numerous complaints in the 1920s about the killing of black farm hands by white employers or overseers. One Albany, Georgia, minister, in reporting the murder of a black man whose only offense was to have “cursed” his cheating boss, concluded forlornly, “often things like this hapen in this county.”<sup>40</sup>

Labor relations in the countryside influenced state penal practice. A few complaints notwithstanding, Georgia prison camps still used whips to discipline their charges in the 'twenties. Some contemporaries—including the editor of the Athens *Banner-Herald* and the American Bar Association's Committee on Law Enforcement—even called for the re-establishment of the public whipping post. A speaker at an annual convention of Georgia sheriffs and peace officers advocated it for “petty criminals,” in particular for “men who neglect their families.”<sup>41</sup>

The paternalistic power wielded by planters was also copied by industrialists. Since many mill villages were unincorporated, they had no democratically constituted public authority. Mill officials owned them and ran them, and hired, paid, and controlled their police forces. Workers who violated the employers' codes of moral conduct, even during their off-hours, stood to lose their jobs and homes. “You didn't have no private life at all,” one mill worker later complained. “You could come home and take your pants off and leave one leg on, and they'd tell you about it at the mill.”<sup>42</sup> Of even more concern to mill owners and their political supporters than illicit sex, drinking, or gambling were strikes and union activity. Especially in the turn-of-the-century South, employer-sponsored vigilantism against labor organizers was extensive and unabashed. It included warnings out of town, beatings, floggings, tar-and-featherings, and occasionally, outright murder.<sup>43</sup>

Public social control, in turn, derived legitimacy from the power relations of family life. Most whites accepted male dominance as necessary to maintain family order. Wife-beating, although publicly frowned upon in the 'twenties, nonetheless appeared common. Courts treated it lightly when it came before them. Similarly, parents took for granted their right to whip their children. Most also continued to back corporal punishment in Georgia schools, especially in rural areas and small towns.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, for all the continuities, as productive property became more concentrated and the number of people engaged in wage labor grew, Southern society changed in fundamental ways. Where once the class structure of Southern white men had bulged in the middle, now it looked more like the pyramid that its Northern counterpart had become. At the pinnacle of the emerging order stood the economic moguls of the nation, distant figures such as Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller. Their imitators in Piedmont cities and towns like Athens were industrialists (generally textile manufacturers), bankers, and large-scale merchants. Often travelling in the same circles as this regional elite, if not with the same resources, were college-educated white professionals. At a lower, albeit still respected, rung stood small business owners, managers, salaried clerks, and skilled tradesmen. Finally, near the bottom of the pyramid were unskilled white operatives. Their paltry wages nearly matched those of the black laborers and service workers who filled the very bottom tier. Although far over-represented at the bottom of the heap, African Americans existed in smaller numbers in the middling ranks as well.<sup>45</sup>

The countryside featured a comparable hierarchy. Here, too, prospective white smallholders found old avenues to independence impeded by economic concentration, even in the once yeoman-dominated Piedmont. A landlord-merchant class stood atop the rural class structure, presiding over a mass of propertyless blacks and whites. Yet the forms in which the landless sold their labor varied in ways that corresponded to class fractions in town. Racism ensured that the lowliest positions—sharecroppers and wage laborers—would be occupied almost exclusively by African Americans. Lacking farm animals and equipment, sharecroppers constituted, in both fact and law, a rural proletariat akin to the unskilled wage laborers in the region's mills. Renting tenants, in contrast, shared some of the attributes of skilled

craftsmen, such as ownership of their own tools, greater freedom from supervision, and better, if diminishing, prospects for acquiring land of their own. More likely to be white, renters were also more likely to identify their interests with those of small farmers.<sup>46</sup>

Southern society had not always divided on such lines. Farm ownership had remained widespread among whites throughout the nineteenth century. Yet a series of circumstances led the rate of independent ownership to plummet between the Civil War and the World War. Credit being scarce in the South, farmers in need of cash turned—or were pushed by furnishing merchants to turn—more and more to commercial crop production. Reflecting that growing orientation to the market, an orientation made possible by railroads that began to connect non-plantation areas to Northern markets, Clarke County farmers in 1920 planted three times as many acres in cotton as they had in 1880, at the expense of food and other crops. In Georgia as a whole, cotton came to account for two-thirds of the value of all crops by 1920.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, acquiring a farm of one's own became a more monumental task for young white men. As descendants multiplied while the land supply held constant, a trend to smaller and less viable farms developed. Young men, in particular, now had to hire themselves out in growing numbers as tenants in hopes of acquiring the wherewithal to purchase farms of their own. Many never would. The proportion of Georgia farm operators who were tenants thus grew from forty-five percent in 1880 to sixty-seven percent in 1920. In Clarke County, the ratio was starker: almost three of every four farm operators in 1920 worked someone else's land.<sup>48</sup>

Developments in town and country were closely connected, since, as one study put it, “the impoverishment of farmers was industrialization's driving force.” Manufacturing acted as a magnet for refugees from hardscrabble farms. Athens' population practically doubled between 1890 and 1920, making it one of Georgia's leading mid-sized cities. By then, two-thirds of the county's residents lived in the city proper or in smaller satellite towns. The number of wage-earners and of manufacturing establishments in the county had also more than doubled since 1880. Among the, largest firms were the Climax Hosiery Mill, the Athens Manufacturing Company, and the Union City Thread Mill in East Athens, and in the outlying areas of Princeton and Whitehall, the Southern Manufacturing Company and the Mallison Braid and Cord Mill. As the manufacturing labor force grew to more than one and a half thousand people, the aggregate value of the products they produced grew over fifteen times, to reach over ten million dollars in 1919.<sup>49</sup>

While country life had its drawbacks, mill villages left more to be desired in the view of many whites, especially older men. In place of the self-paced and seasonal if hard work of farming, manufacturing workers endured monotonous workdays and grave risks. Every three to four working days in Georgia in 1921 a worker died in an industrial accident. In Athens, only one in twenty Manufacturing workers worked fewer than fifty-four hours a week in 1919; three in four put in sixty or more hours. “In my young days,” an Athens mill worker later recalled, “the life of a mill worker wasn't very long. The close confinement, long hours, lint and dust that they had to breathe, all worked together to shorten their lives.”<sup>50</sup>

Whether one lived in town or country, in any case, was becoming less important than what one did. A widening chasm separated mill villagers from their “uptown” contemporaries. The latter included not only the self-styled “better people” as one might expect—the mill owners, bankers, large merchants, and professionals who dominated public life—but also small business people, white-collar employees, and supervisory personnel. Even craftsmen took care to distance themselves from unskilled workers. Having them-selves usually hailed from landowning families, large or small, up-town whites joined planters and independent farmers in disdain for mill operatives. Scorned as “lintheads” and “white trash,” their failure to succeed in farm life, according to uptown people, stemmed from laziness, immorality, even genetic inferiority.<sup>51</sup>

Mill villagers tended to reciprocate the dislike of uptown whites and express a strong “them and us” consciousness and values of their own. A man born in a mill section of Athens later recalled what it was like to grow up “on the wrong side of the tracks.” “The people who had money” in the city were “kowitzed to as if they were kings,” while the people in his neighborhood incurred disdain from other townspeople. To reclaim their dignity, he and his friends mocked rich boys, whom parents warned them not to play with, as “sissies.” According to one study, mill workers also spurned as virtual traitors those who moved up the ladder to become foremen. Some mill operatives (almost half in one 1930 study) were

in fact favorable to unions, although convinced by the disastrous results of earlier efforts that their employers would never tolerate them. Others resented company housing and “welfare” programs, which used money they believed theirs by right. Still others consistently voted against the wishes of town elites in politics.<sup>52</sup>

The segregation between mill and uptown people was extreme, in some ways more unremitting than that between blacks and whites. Mill and town rarely associated at all. They almost never intermarried, they belonged to mutually exclusive clubs and organizations, and they avoided social encounters. The friction between the two groups was so great that the few institutions involving people from both, such as churches or schools in mixed communities, often could not hold social events. In Athens, according to one contemporary teacher, the split between mill children and other children was already unbridgeable by the fifth grade.<sup>53</sup>

More than any other group of white wage-earners in the local population, in fact, mill workers most resembled the bogey of Jeffersonian republicans: the Old World proletariat. Their pitiful incomes ranked among the lowest of all manufacturing workers in the United States in the 1920s. Most mill households had to rely on employers for their roofs as well as their wages. Even their churches were usually not their own, but were built and backed by management to mold and subdue them. Moreover, unlike white farm tenants who might acquire land, or craftsmen who might start their own businesses later in life, mill operatives’ station was usually permanent. Although many parents desired better lives for their children, escape from the industry was rare. Paltry education and intensive labor ensured that most would lack the resources for mobility. In the elementary school attended by mill workers’ children in west Athens in the late 1910s, for example, sixty-five to seventy pupils competed for the attention of the first-grade teacher. Were the overcrowding not enough to discourage learning, the lack of a fifth grade in their school barred these mill children from secondary education even if their families could have afforded the loss of their wages. There was thus much truth to the common saying of mill parents that “there is no chance for the children of such as us.”<sup>54</sup>

Yet, as economic development closed off some old options for white men, it opened some new ones for African Americans. A step down from landowning, tenancy marked a step up from share-cropping. As whites moved down and blacks moved up, race and class ceased to converge as neatly as they had in the nineteenth century. “The Negroes in Georgia,” as one Athens contemporary put it, “can no longer be divided from white people by a sharp line of economic cleavage.” While tenants now outnumbered owners among whites, more African Americans owned their farms in Clarke County in 1920 than ever before. For the first time, the number of white and black owners was almost equal: 180 to 163.<sup>55</sup>

Another sign of the old system’s unravelling was the mounting numbers of blacks who left the country for the city, where they felt less pressure to defer to whites. By 1920, a quarter of a million black Georgians lived in urban areas. Like other Georgia cities in the decade, Athens became a magnet for blacks fleeing rural areas. And here also, black property-holding grew after 1875. By 1913, sixty-three black households owned over one thousand dollars of taxable property. Mary Wright Hill was an emblem of their achievements. The principal of an East Athens school, Hill lived in a ten-room house, married in a posh church ceremony, put all her children through college, and treated her daughter to a tour of Europe. Some of Hill’s peers rejected the servility demanded by Southern whites more overtly. At the 1914 Atlanta convention of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Athens black women refused to sit in the segregated area the organization’s white leaders had designated for them.<sup>56</sup>

The growing self-assertion of the black middle class in fact lay behind the emergence of top-down racial reform efforts such as the CIC. On one hand, the pool of educated and relatively privileged black leaders that now existed in most sizable communities in the South shared many of the values held by their white counterparts, a convergence that made cooperation possible. On the other hand, the very economic restructuring that aided some African Americans in their efforts to move up the ladder also decreased the region’s reliance on plantation labor. In this setting, some middle and upper-middle-class whites began to imagine, for the first time, a racial order based less on coercion and more on consent. Coming from universities, churches, newspapers, and some large enterprises in the region’s cities and towns, these men and women recognized that without reform blacks would quit the region, which itself could become a backwater. “The danger,” explained M. Ashby Jones in one CIC missive, came “from the loss of labor on our farms and from the condemnation of the outside world.” Thus, both sides could agree on a strategy that

brought together the self-styled “best elements” of each race to achieve greater harmony through a process of gradual reform.<sup>57</sup>

Economic change altered the foundations, not only of relations between blacks and whites, but also of men and women and parents and children within white society. Although families remained important economic units, their character changed. Where the quintessential nineteenth-century white family labored under the direction of its male head, now sons and daughters, sometimes wives as well, earned wages in their own right. White women and children had in fact pioneered the movement into the mills in the 1880s, with adult men following only as the farm economy constricted. By 1919, adult women accounted for almost one in five manufacturing workers in the state. In addition to manufacturing, which usually involved them as contributors to family coffers, more and more young white women took clerical jobs and moved out of their parents’ homes. By the end of the decade, white women in professional and semiprofessional service in Athens in fact out-numbered those employed in cotton mills. The number of “business girls” living on their own so multiplied by 1909 that the Athens YWCA established a boarding house for them.<sup>58</sup>

More generally, the decline of independent proprietorship undermined fathers’ ability to control their children through the prospect of inheritance. Save the minority of farmers who still owned land and the small-business owners and craftsmen with a shop or trade to pass on, by 1920 most non-elite parents in Georgia lacked resources with which to win their children’s obedience. Even their houses were rarely their own. Freed from agriculture by the shrinking pool of available land and eager to achieve independence, young people proved the likeliest to leave the countryside for the city. As child-labor and compulsory-schooling laws began to take effect after 1914, moreover, urban adolescents enjoyed unprecedented leisure.<sup>59</sup>

Young women and men in these years in fact helped fashion a new cultural constellation aptly depicted by one historian as “filiarchy.” As industry eclipsed agriculture and technological innovation more and more drove the nation’s economy, deference to youth increasingly supplanted the veneration of age that had described classic patriarchy. Willingly or not, parents and churches ceded cultural authority to their children’s peers and a commercial mass culture. The new pattern, described by some as the displacement of Victorianism by modernism, became plain by war’s end.<sup>60</sup>

As it did elsewhere in the country, a heterosocial youth culture began to take form in Athens in these years. Like their peers in New York and Chicago had before them, Clarke County adults witnessed its advent with apprehension. Movie-mania, “dance madness,” “joy-riding,” and even the newly discovered phenomenon of juvenile delinquency all seemed to express disregard for the authority of parents and disdain for their gender roles.<sup>61</sup> Students at the University of Georgia, once quiescent, also became more defiant in the 1920s. Several petitioned the administration to abolish mandatory chapel attendance—on the grounds that it was “boring.” Others started a newspaper, *The Iconoclast*, whose contents lived up to its name. Like adults, students began to polarize over issues of gender, sex, and culture. One student leader thus complained to his friends and his diary about how his male peers were “unable to think above their belts.” Disgusted by their obsessive talk of women and their “obscene jokes,” he was also perplexed by his own fantasies.<sup>62</sup>

White men’s loss of power over their own children and wives was accompanied by a loss of leverage in public life. In early nineteenth-century Georgia, as elsewhere in the country, politics was notable for the breadth of participation of white men. Even after the defeat of Reconstruction and the restoration of white rule, non-élite white men—and black men—continued to turn out to the polls in large numbers. If a Republican sweep was ruled out, the Democratic Party was nonetheless far from united. Under its auspices a planter-dominated old guard struggled against challenges from both small farmers and city-based proponents of an industrialized New South. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, these rivalries erupted in the so-called Independent revolt against Bourbon Democratic “machine rule.” Later in the decade, the region’s rulers faced a challenge from a different quarter, as the Knights of Labor, with its vision of an end to “wage slavery” and a “cooperative common-wealth,” made a pitch for the loyalties of America’s direct producers. In Georgia, the Knights signed up some nine thousand members in thirty-one assemblies, three of them in Athens.<sup>63</sup>

By far the most momentous struggle, however, was that waged in the 1890s by the People’s Party. Prompted by a catastrophic decline in cotton prices and the devastation wrought by the Long Depression,

Southern farmers began to question the direction of American society and politics. When their attempts to organize producers' cooperatives through the Farmers' Alliance ran aground, large numbers turned to politics. Convinced by talented organizers like Tom Watson and by their own experience in state politics that the Democratic Party was beyond repair, they joined the national third-party movement on a wide-ranging anti-monopoly platform. Worship of the almighty dollar, said the Populists, had corrupted politics and dehumanized society. But their most radical position was an insistence that black and white small farmers shared a common interest in reform.<sup>64</sup>

Within a few years, the People's Party mounted the most significant electoral challenge ever faced by the region's rulers. At least one in three Georgia voters resisted bribes, intimidation, and violence to vote Populist in 1892, an act that cost fifteen men their lives. Two years later, the third party took more than forty-four percent of the state's votes and one-third of its counties. Nearly half of all Clarke County voters went Populist in 1894; some of the faithful even established a Farmers' Alliance Warehouse and Commission Company and a Workingmen's Cooperative Store. But enthusiasm was not enough; by 1896, the People's Party was on the wane. Bribery, fraud, threats, violence, and cooptative reforms by Democratic elites had combined with internal divisions among "the people" themselves to seal the third party's fate.<sup>65</sup>

The defeat of Populism shaped the future of politics in decisive ways. As pragmatic as its white leaders' proposal for alliance with black farmers had been, their willingness to extend it marked a watershed in Southern politics. Bourbon Democrats' understanding of the profundity of this challenge to the building blocks of their political economy was evident in the lengths they went to to defeat the Populists and to prevent such a challenge from occurring again. Across the South, the resurgent Bourbons pushed through legislation to so separate whites and blacks that they might never again recognize common experiences and needs. Over the next two decades, Southern states and localities issued a veritable avalanche of Jim Crow laws and ordinances. Some went as far as to segregate the dead in cemeteries. Even more devastating to black communities and to the prospects for interracial social movements was the related campaign to disfranchise black men—to guarantee the political quiescence that other forms of intimidation had failed to.<sup>66</sup>

Yet, in Georgia at least, planters and Democratic party bosses bent on suppressing challenges from below were not the only proponents of disfranchisement; former Populist standard-bearer Tom Watson also clamored to exclude black men from the electorate. Watson's reasoning presaged the kind of convoluted thinking about class and race that would later characterize the Klan. On the grounds that the Democratic elite used black votes to deter challenges from a disaffected white majority, Watson promised in 1904 to deliver his following to any Democrat who would support a constitutional amendment to disfranchise blacks. Hoke Smith did; with Watson's backing he trounced his competitor by a four-to-one margin in 1906. Two years later, an amendment that took suffrage away from most of the remaining black voters became law. While Watson's campaign to deprive black men of voting rights marked an about-face from his interracial appeal for economic justice in the 1890s the different stages of his career were unified by a common core: his devotion to the interests of middling whites as he understood them. Whereas in the 1890s, the primary threat to them appeared to come from above—from robber barons and conservative planters—as time went on, the challenge from below—from propertyless labor in town and country, especially blacks and immigrants—grew, and Watson turned more and more attention to it.<sup>67</sup>

Yet things did not work out the way he had planned. With black voters pushed to the margins, white politics became less, not more, democratic. Even drastic restrictions on who could vote failed to satisfy the South's governing class. On the contrary, throughout the region a commercial civic elite, led by organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and made up of substantial proprietors and their allies in the press and professions, sought to limit the range of issues to be decided by the remaining voters. In Athens, beginning in 1913, an elite reform coalition involving upper-class residents and members of the university faculty repeatedly sought to shift the city government away from the mayor-council form inherited from the 1870s to a city commission or city-manager system. Proclaiming the latter "more efficient," they also looked to it to dilute the voting power of working-class and lower-middle-class wards and to ease out politicians without college educations.<sup>68</sup>

By the 1910s, Southern white men outside the seats of power in the economy and government were understandably skeptical about their ability to influence the occupants through the old channels. Regular

elections notwithstanding, politics could hardly be called democratic. Rather, planters, industrialists, and their urban commercial and professional allies together rode herd on the excluded majority, black and white, and the less powerful voters who remained.<sup>69</sup> One resident of Athens, a shoe salesman, thus explained later that he never bothered to vote because “the little man’s vote don’t count for nothing nohow.” In the county as a whole, the proportion of the population who went to the polls dropped from nineteen percent in 1868 to eight percent in 1920—the passage of woman suffrage notwithstanding.<sup>70</sup>

Growing constraints on popular control of public affairs were not unique to the South, of course. On the contrary, the accession of Woodrow Wilson to the presidency in 1912 culminated a process of sectional reconciliation under way since the Compromise of 1877. Like their Southern brethren, Northern elites were also working to insulate governance from the unpredictability associated with popular participation. Indeed, they invented the new forms of city government that soon spread across the country, and they acquiesced when Wilson imported Jim Crow into federal government offices. Throughout the country, in fact, the central attribute of American politics in the first two decades of the twentieth century was a mounting elitism: the two main parties atrophied, voter participation dropped precipitously, and a rising national administrative bureaucracy filled the vacuum in political decision-making. The “chief function” of the party system inaugurated by the election of 1896, in the words of political scientist Walter Dean Burnham, was “the substantially complete insulation of elites from attacks by the victims of the industrializing process.”<sup>71</sup> As the victims lacked means of redress, their frustrations festered.



Yet, by and large, these frustrations rarely erupted in Georgia in the years between the demise of the People’s Party and the Great War. If the economic upturn after the turn of the century did not eliminate anxieties, it did assuage tempers. Such flare-ups as occurred could be put out before they ignited the combustible mixtures at hand. But then wartime economic boom gave way to serious recession in the summer of 1920. Cotton farmers encountered the steepest price dive in cotton history: from 40 cents a pound in July to 13.5 cents in December. Other problems exacerbated the strain. The boll weevil, in the words of Athenian Harry Hodgson, “played havoc with all of Georgia.” Over the years from 1920 to 1925, cotton production in Clarke County and its northern neighbors dropped by half to three-quarters; the counties to its south sometimes lost their entire crop. Not for a decade would production recover its former level. In the meantime, the human toll was steep. The county suffered a net loss of over three hundred farms during the 1920s; every fourth farm went under.<sup>72</sup>

Cotton being the centerpiece of the state economy, the crisis soon infested other areas. “The truth is” one Georgian concluded a treatise on the spin-off effects of the farm disaster, “we are all as good as busted.” “The last three years have been tough ones,” his Athens counterpart confided in 1922. “Our businessmen are in a bad plight[,] with the farmers discouraged and in many cases labor leaving the farms.” “The South is in great distress,” wrote another man; “where the farmer cannot function the merchants, banks, hotels, etc. all go down.”<sup>73</sup>

Without cotton, the mills could not run full time. In any case, they had their own problems in the ’twenties, as the introduction of synthetic fabrics compounded the industry’s surfeit of national and international competition. Managers responded by cutting production, laying off workers, and demanding more from those who remained. Never again would Athens mill operatives enjoy the wages they had during the war. On the contrary, throughout the Piedmont, anxiety became chronic about what “these hard times” would do to families.<sup>74</sup>

Governor Thomas Hardwick in 1922 described the preceding few years as “one of the periods of most profound depression” in all of Georgia’s history. It cut a wide swath, as a hardware merchant from Winder observed. “The world is [affected by this panic,]” he said. “The rich and strong are losing fortunes daily and the poor is hungry and homeless.” Never before in his three decades of work with farmers, Georgia’s Commissioner of Agriculture maintained, had they appeared “so depressed and in such an alarming financial condition” as they were by the summer of 1921. “It is pitiful,” bemoaned a South Carolinian; even returning white veterans were “glad to work for 10 cents per hour.” In Athens, men who had once had jobs, particularly in the building trades, were by 1922 spending their days roaming the streets “begging and pleading for work.”<sup>75</sup>

Some kind of retrenchment was perhaps to be expected in the circumstances, but there was no

consensus about who should bear the brunt. For a time it seemed that, South as well as North, labor might win a larger say than ever before. Or so the tens of thousands who walked the picket lines had hoped. But that possibility was foreclosed in short order by the combination of government persecution of the Left and a robust open-shop drive. Southern employers, particularly in the textile industry, had a reputation for violent suppression of labor unrest, one borne out by their response to the strikes and organizing drives of these years. From 1920 to 1922, they fought hard to roll back the gains organized workers had made, as did their counterparts in the nationwide effort to impose the "American Plan."<sup>76</sup> The number of union members in Georgia plummeted, and most of the smaller city central labor bodies collapsed. Nationwide, union membership dropped from its 1920 high of over five million to just over three and a half million in 1923; by 1930, the proportion of nonagricultural workers in unions would be about half what it had been in 1920. With labor defeated, radicals driven underground, and liberals demoralized, the government was free to pursue policies supportive of big business, often at the expense of small.<sup>77</sup>

Even the *New York Times* acknowledged in 1920 that the restrictive monetary policies of the Wilson administration and the Federal Reserve Banks had "created a bitter feeling" across the South. "The hand that is feeding the world," one Georgia farmer complained, "is being spit upon." "The people of the whole country are distressed beyond measure with the present situation," complained an Augusta insurance agent. "In a land of plenty ... yet the people are almost starving for a lack of money and credit to keep business and trade moving ... [while] J. P. Morgan and the International Bankers are governing the country in the interests of big business." A state envoy of the Farmers' Union reported by 1923 "unrest among the farmers ... as wide as Georgia's bound-aries"; it was so profound as to pose "a menace to Georgia's security."<sup>78</sup>

By late 1920, the confidence of non-elite Southern whites in the government was at a low ebb. An Athens lawyer hoped for some measure that would "restore the confidence of the people in Congress, and give them more courage for the future." "Since the propaganda of the war," an elderly minister from Virginia observed, "the folks have lost faith in the 'Powers [that] Be' until their is a state of unrest that is close to the danger line." Even some of those who might be expected to be most loyal to the government grew mutinous. "Tell them to try another war and see where they will land," warned the Commander of the Huntsville, Alabama, post of the American Legion after the defeat of the Soldiers' Bonus Bill. "The flagwaving patriots ... can go where it is hotter than it is in Alabama before we will lift a hand again for J. P. Morgan, Standard Oil, and other big interests."<sup>79</sup>

The trouble went deeper than the recession or big business's political influence. The government itself seemed out of control. In so enlarging the power of the executive, Woodrow Wilson had excited time-honored republican fears of concentrated power. One Georgia farmer complained that the people had endured sufficient "autocratic encroachments o[n] our liberties ... to nauseate to extremes during the late war." Thomas Hardwick, one of Georgia's United States senators, likewise condemned the "Beauracracy which has grasped this government by the throat under Mr. Wilson." "I am deeply alarmed," he told an ally, "at the tendency to centralize this government, to enthrone an autocrat, to abandon, one by one, the great fundamentals that underlie and protect our liberties." "It is high time," warned a Single Tax advocate whose ideas would later be appreciated by Atlanta Klansmen, "to stop this temporizing with Wilson or we will be in far worse [shape] than if we had a hereditary 'ruler.'"<sup>80</sup> Even after Wilson's death, Washington, D.C., presented to Tom Watson a "loathsome" specter of Old World corruption. Evoking "Paris at its worst" in the days of Louis XV, Watson voiced disgust at "the waste, greed, graft, thievery [and] harlotage" in the nation's capital. A Georgia editor of the *National Farmers Magazine* spelled out the logic: "no people may remain free where money rules and morals rot."<sup>81</sup>

Feeling afraid and excluded, tens of thousands of white Georgians turned for leadership to the old Populist standard-bearer, Tom Watson. Himself a rich planter and lawyer, Watson still had a knack for addressing the concerns of middling men. Persecuted by the Wilson administration for his opposition to the government during the war, Watson now appeared a martyred hero to many non-elite whites. In his race for a United States Senate seat in 1920, he thrashed his establishment rivals at the polls. Once in Washington, Watson acted as a faithful outsider. He thundered against the executive office's usurpation of power, against the imperial designs of American foreign-policy makers, against the tight-fisted Federal

Reserve Bank, against the machinations of monopolies—even against the imprisonment of socialists for antiwar activity and against American intervention against the Soviet government in Russia. At the same time, he fulminated against the Catholic menace and fought the appointment of blacks to federal jobs.<sup>82</sup>

Watson was hardly alone in his understanding of the problems facing the country. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the Klan's rise without recognizing that vast numbers of people, all over the United States, embraced views like his. White farmers, small merchants, and others wrote to Watson to express gratitude for his efforts and to denounce those they held accountable for their plight. Their primary grievances with the economy, like Watson's, centered on monopolies and high finance. "The farmers are being imposed upon by every class of speculative interest" complained a representative of the Brooks County Farmers' Union; "this must be curbed if we expect this republic to live." Grocers from Valdosta sought Watson's help against the "meat trust," which they blamed for farmers' problems and their own. Others voiced more directly the old Populist theory of economic crisis; their target was the government and the banks. J. S. Dean of Buchanan, Georgia, thus agreed with Watson's attacks on the Federal Reserve. Dean, too, believed that "the money question ... was the most vital question." Like the old People's Party, he found the root of the problem not in the economy itself but in "law making since ... the laws [are] being made by those who are to be benefited by said laws." Dean complained that "this set of robbers" was using the Federal Reserve to make farmers "poorer year by year and ... more & more dependent on those whom the laws protect."<sup>83</sup>

Even some outside Watson's ranks shared these convictions. J. S. Hale of Barnesville, Georgia, made the same complaints to Watson rival Hoke Smith. Capitalism per se was not the problem; like Watson, Hale believed that "money is a blessing when properly used." But "the hoarding" practiced by the "big interests]" was something else. It was "causing wreck and ruin throughout this whole country" and making a mockery of democratic government. The rule of "the money power" had become "more cruel" than that of "the German K[a]liser." Hale hoped for "a Moses to lead the people from under the yoke of bondage." "By the help of God," he concluded, "the people will not crouch and cower to the will of the money kings."<sup>84</sup>

This kind of malaise would find an outlet in the second Klan, whose leaders seized on the old Populist analysis and remolded it to their own ends. In Georgia, the connections were not merely ideological; they were personified in Watson.<sup>85</sup> Whether he actually joined the Klan cannot be determined from the evidence available, he did endorse it as "a worthy organization."<sup>86</sup> But that the Klan embraced Watson's vision and he theirs, albeit a more pro-labor and civil liberties version (he had, after all, denounced "the '100 percent' idiots"), there can be no doubt. Watson did not merely promote reactionary causes—couched in populist language—that the Klan would later take up, including the disfranchisement of African Americans, attacks on the Roman Catholic Church, tirades against socialism, and campaigns against finance capital tinged with anti-Semitism. He also maintained close and amicable relations with the Klan. He defended the order from congressional investigators in 1921, he helped Klan candidates for public office, he shared his subscription lists with the organization, and he supplied the Klan's official national lecturer with material on how Jews and Catholics endangered the country.<sup>87</sup>

The Klan, in turn, worshipped Watson as a hero of "the common man." One national Klan representative and past ally of Watson described him as "the political genius of our age." Rank-and-file Mississippi Klansmen praised Watson "as the most active proponent of true Americanism" for his defense of "liberty and freedom" and his fight against the "papists." After Watson's death, Klan leader E. Y. Clarke offered the organization's sympathies to Watson's widow for the loss of this "champion of right and courageous defender of the downtrodden[,] suffering and oppressed." At least one Klavern of the Georgia Klan was named in his honor, while the state's Grand Dragon described Watson as "beloved" by the members. Perhaps most indicative of the connection, however, were popular perceptions among Klan sympathizers that Watson was a representative of it.<sup>88</sup>

Also indicative of the way the nascent Klan movement would perpetuate and deepen earlier cleavages was the way previous enemies of Watson went on to oppose the Klan. The CIC thus counted among its leaders several men who had fought against Tom Watson in the Leo Frank affair of 1915, such as the ministers M. Ashby Jones, C. B. Wilmer, and Plato Durham. Some representatives of the Democratic political establishment also worked against first Watson, then the Klan. In Athens, Mayor Andrew Erwin urged party loyalists in 1920 to "fight against Watsonism" in the surrounding counties, in the 1924

Democratic Party national convention, he was the only Georgia delegate to support an anti-Klan platform. Less courageously, a few other prominent local figures followed the same trajectory.<sup>89</sup>

Such opponents of Watson and the Klan tended to have more cosmopolitan economic interests than their peers, particularly in attracting outside investors to Georgia. University of Georgia president David Crenshaw Barrow, for example, the first to sign a 1921 Athens anti-Klan petition, was also a supporter of Woodrow Wilson, the Federal Reserve, and the League of Nations. "A liberal attitude is required to attract new residents," explained Atlantan Walter Taylor, one of the components of which was "a willingness to stop trying to regulate others' lives."<sup>90</sup> These frictions were not only longstanding, but political in the most basic sense of the term: conflict over who should wield power and how. When some of those who felt they had a right to power found themselves ignored, they resorted to more Machiavellian tactics of getting their way, violence among them.

That in the circumstances of the late 1910s and 1920s some men would turn to force should not surprise us. European historians and sociologists have long recognized the use of collective violence as a tool to readjust relations of power. "Violence flows from politics," writes Charles Tilly; "more precisely from political change." One can expect outbreaks, he suggests, at "those historical moments when the structure of power is changing decisively."<sup>91</sup> Clearly, the postwar years constituted such a moment.

In adopting collective violence to achieve their ends, Klansmen could draw support from indigenous American vigilante traditions that began even before the Revolution. Foremost among these models were the White Cap bands who periodically came forward to police social relations in the nineteenth-century Southern up-country, in the Midwest, and in frontier communities. Named for the hoods they wore on their night-riding raids, these bands of up-standing white community residents terrorized deviants from their collective sense of right and wrong. Whether the victim of their masked floggings was an adulterous wife, a hard-drinking father, a rapacious businessman, or an ambitious black sharecropper, the object of the White Caps' visit was the same: to enforce the private and public conduct the world of white proprietors like themselves depended on. Rarely were they prosecuted.<sup>92</sup>

The night-riding members of the second Klan would operate with a similarly holistic world view, against a similarly broad range of perceived threats, and with similar indemnity. Yet their movement differed from its predecessors in a fundamental way. It was the first national, sustained, and self-consciously ideological vigilante movement in American history. No other White Caps operated on such a scale, for so long, or with such a propaganda apparatus. Such novel coordination and promotion appeared necessary to participants because the paternalistic social relations earlier vigilantism was associated with had so weakened. As individual wage-earning supplanted the petty production of households organized by their male heads, and as class differences grew among both whites and blacks, it became more difficult to present the ascribed hierarchies of race, gender, and age as natural and inevitable. Indeed, many African-American women and men, white women, and youth of both races took advantage of this uncertainty and the resources now available to them to claim new rights. The Klan's scope and frenzy were thus the measure, less of members' power, than of the distance separating them from the provincial, patriarchal world of their dreams.



## Men in the Middle: The Class Composition of the Klan

“It has worried me to think,” Klansman *S. B. Yarborough* would muse in the 1930s, “that I’ve worked hard all my life and just can’t seem to make no headway.” Surveying his years of effort, *Yarborough* concluded forlornly, “It’s right down disheartening to try so hard and never git nowhere.” Like his older brother, *Roy*, Kligrapp of the Athens Klan, *Scott Yarborough* had ample reason for frustration with his life. The *Yarborough* brothers had grown up in a mill community outside Athens in a family with ten children. Only six survived infancy. Their father, *B. F. Yarborough*, had lost an arm in the Civil War. Relegated to teaching in a rural public school, he developed a reputation for bitterness and cruelty toward his students and his own children. The pay from school-teaching being too paltry even to buy shoes for all of his family, *Ben Yarborough* sent his sons and daughters to work early “doing everything that come to hand,” from hired labor in the fields to mill work.<sup>1</sup>

*Roy* and *Scott* dreamed of escaping from the mills—and no doubt from their father as well. In time, both managed to. Beginning on a few dollars of borrowed money, *Roy* acquired his own farm and established a small grocery business. Over the years, he accumulated some \$10,000 worth of personal assets and was able to provide jobs for some of his seven children. Yet industriousness proved a feeble shield against the vagaries of the economy and unexpected family illness. By 1910, *Roy* had to mortgage his farm; by 1927, he had lost almost three-quarters of his 1910 assets. For his part, immobilized by personal tragedy, *Scott* remained in the Princeton mill long after his brother had struck out on his own. When his first wife died in childbirth a year after their marriage, it “most nigh killed” the seventeen-year-old husband she left behind. The loss so depressed him that he quit work for a time and did not remarry for six years. Once back in the mills, however, he moonlighted in the evenings and on weekends as a barber in his home. Ultimately, he put away enough from haircuts to open his own “Red, White and Blue Barber Shop.” “We eat three meals a day, all my taxes are paid, and I don’t own a cent to nobody,” *Scott* said. “I don’t have to call on nobody for nothing. That’s what the barber business has meant to me.”<sup>2</sup>

The *Yarborough* brothers’ dream of independence—and the modesty of its fruition—bound them to fellow Klan members. Like their occupations and living conditions, the social standing of local Klansmen varied considerably. Yet, in general, these were middling men: neither elite employers and brokers nor, as today’s popular conceptions of the Klan would have it, “poor white trash.” While few had the resources to hire others, most exercised more control over their labor than their working-class contemporaries: the operatives who tended the cotton looms and the sharecroppers who tilled the fields of luckier men. “If not the ‘best people,’” as one observer put it at the time, Klan members were “at least the next best ... the good, solid, middle-class citizens.” Some sixty-three percent of Athens Klansmen, for example, lived in