INTIMIDATION WAS THE PROGRAM: THE ALLEGED ATTEMPT TO LYNCH H. SEB. DOYLE, "THE RHETORIC OF CORRUPTION," AND DISFRANCHISEMENT

by

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(Under the Direction of Scott Reynolds Nelson)

ABSTRACT

In 1892, Seb. Doyle, an African American preacher allegedly under the threat of death by a Democratic lynch mob for supporting Populist Congressman Tom Watson, became the center of a campaign discussion of race, politics, and corruption. The newspaper accounts that sought to make since of this and other events reveal the role the rhetoric of corruption played in the Populist Party's campaigns in the 1890s. Oddly enough, the Populists used a similar rhetoric as Democrats did against Republicans during Reconstruction. Included in this rhetoric was the linkage of political and economic malfeasance with the racial "corruptions" of miscegenation and "Negro Domination." The similar rhetoric of corruption proved much less effective against the Democrats. Although the Populists attempted to make this link, their insistence on the political equality of African Americans along with suggestions of armed self-defense weakened the previously effective tactics of the Democrats who had long been the party of white supremacy. Despite the Populists' failure, the ultimate result was the same as the Populists abandoned biracial politics, and called for greater disfranchisement, all in the name of reform.

INDEX WORDS: Populism, Georgia Populism, Black Populism, Georgia, Race, Tom Watson, New South, Politics, Disfranchisement

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DEDICATION

To those who made me who I am. Unfortunately there are too many of you to list, but I will be forever in your debt.

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In the early morning hours of an autumn Monday in 1892, the citizens of Thomson, Georgia, awoke to a mass of nearly 100 armed men standing around the home of Congressman Thomas E. Watson. The ground outside Watson's home was trampled and muddy from the rain and boot heels of the gathered men.[1] Their rifles and shotguns were stacked on the veranda and their "buggies and horses foaming and tired with travel" lined the street.[2] As the guns signified, this was not a social call; it was an army bracing for an attack. The day before, H. Seb Doyle, an African American preacher campaigning for Watson's reelection as a Populist, arrived in Thomson. Shortly after Doyle stepped off the train, another black man rushed to warn him that his life was in danger. The man said that two "virulent" Democrats were unhappy that Doyle was back in Thomson. "The air was full of threats to lynch me," Doyle later recalled. By way of back streets, Doyle arrived at Watson's home where Watson promised him protection. Watson and the McDuffie County sheriff called on their Populist friends from neighboring counties in preparation for an assault on Watson's property. "By sundown there were some fifty men," Doyle remembered, and "by Tuesday morning there were fully two thousand men."[3] Watson

[1] Remsen Crawford, "Tom's Silly Fake," *The Atlanta Constitution,* October 25, 1892, 1.
[2] "Watson's Latest Fraud," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 25, 1892, 1; Crawford, "Tom's Silly Fake," 1.
[3] U.S. Congress, House, *Contested Election Case of Thomas E. Watson vs. J.C.C. Black from the Tenth Congressional District of Georgia* (Washington, D.C., 1896), 669, 781-782.

later said that these men, along with their weapons, "convinced the Democratic leaders that the dangers of collision with us were too serious to be risked."[4] Order prevailed.

Yet while Watson and Doyle, along with other Populists, saw this incident as a victory of civility over mob violence, Thomson Democrats recalled the event differently. The citizens of "the pretty little town of Thomson [were] pulled out of bed this morning into a cold, drizzling rain" by the "greatest sensation her people have known in the city's whole history," wrote the *Atlanta Constitution*. After becoming "tired of acting the absurd roll [sic] of defenders, without provocation, [many of the Populists] strolled down town, carrying their shot guns and muskets with them," the article claimed. Thomson Democrats asserted that the threat to Doyle's and Watson's lives was a pure fiction, merely a "silly fake" of a conspiring and desperate politician. Dr. T.P. Reville, the alleged leader of the conspiracy to harm the Reverend Doyle, agreed. He claimed that he was away when Doyle arrived and was unaware of his presence until later that evening. Doyle's accusation was nothing more than "an infamous lie," he declared. The men at Watson's home, according to the Democrats, represented "a lawless mob of armed men." To the "law-abiding and peace-loving" Democrats of Thomson and McDuffie County, the Populists were not the protectors of civility, but its destroyers.[5]

These two very different stories reveal a tremendous amount not only about how Populists and Democrats saw themselves in relation to each other, but also about politics and society in the post-Reconstruction South. In discussing the Doyle incident, as well as events surrounding it, the Populists and Democrats defended themselves and condemned the lawless

[4] Thomas E. Watson, *Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (Thomson: Press of The Jeffersonian Publishing Company, 1911), 14; Doyle remembered the success similarly, saying that the Democratic leaders "were thwarted in their efforts to do me violence." See *Watson vs. Black,* 782.
[5] R.C. Johnson and Ira E. Farmer, "Watson Rebuked," *The Atlanta Constitution,* October 31, 1892, 4; Remsen Crawford, "Tom's Silly Fake," *The Atlanta Constitution,* October 25, 1892, 1.

actions of their opponents.[6] As the national elections neared, each side's goal was to attract new supporters by exposing the cowardly and dangerous nature of its opponents while simultaneously posing as the true protectors of law, order, and good government. But the argument over who was right and who was wrong at Thomson was more than a local dispute. And while the language the two sides used did, indeed, pass blame, it also brought to light the true fears and hopes of the Democrats and Populists.

Historians of Populism have put forward several hypotheses of the origins of the Populist Revolt. Most of the focus has been on the economic complaints of the Populists such as deflated farm commodity prices, increasing debt peonage, and unfair railroad shipping rates. In addition to economic complaints, some historians point to he changes in social norms as an agrarian and (by their lights) cooperative economy succumbed to intense postbellum market forces, increasing both competition and consequently human suffering. Yet while economic and social issues were important to the Populists, there was also a growing dissatisfaction with the political order. As the Doyle incident will show, what brought the discontented together under the third party banner was a pre-Progressive desire to clean up politics. The source of the economic and social complaints, the Populists asserted, was ultimately the corrupt political leaders who sold their

[6] Interestingly, while numerous scholars have mentioned the Doyle incident, very few have discussed the differing accounts of the Populists and Democrats. C. Vann Woodward, in his biography of Tom Watson, pointed to the incident as proof of the Populists' commitment to a biracial political alliance and only mentioned Democratic objections in a parenthetical, see C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938; Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.), 239-240. Additionally, Charles Crowe, in a scathing article that severely doubted the Woodwardian assumption that the Populists were racial progressives only mentioned the disagreements in a footnote, see Charles Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 55 No. 2 (April 1970): 115. See also, Eugene R. Fingerhut, "Tom Watson, Blacks, and Southern Reform," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 60 No. 4 (Winter, 1976): 326. Finally, Barton Shaw, in his phenomenal account of the Georgia Populist movement, took a more pessimistic, but accurate, view of the Doyle incident, saying that many of the Populists who rushed to Thomson did so to defend Watson, not Doyle. He added that no Populists rode to Doyle's defense just weeks earlier when he was nearly killed. Barton C. Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 88-89; see also, Lewie Reece, "Creating a New South: the Political Culture of Deep South Populism," in *Populism in the South Revisited: New Interpretations and New Departures*, ed. James M. Beeby (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 161; and Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 78-81.

constituents to the highest bidders and used bribery, whiskey, and intimidation to maintain their own power and position. More than issues of economics – which often divided white and black Populists – and more than biracialism – which divided white Populists – what made the Populists more successful than their predecessors was their desire to rid politics of its corruption and an effort to put power back into the hands of "the People."[7]

Yet in their attempts to expose the inherent corruption of the old parties – especially the Democrats – Tom Watson, Seb Doyle, and others often borrowed from the playbooks those same Democrats had used against the Republicans in the late 1860s and early 1870s. They attributed their economic and social struggles to the malfeasance of people in power, particularly to "rings" of powerful merchants, bankers, and railway men. And finally, like the "Redeemers" before them, the Populists explicitly and implicitly linked this perversion of politics with the issues of miscegenation and "Negro rule." While the attacks on courthouse rings and the language of miscegenation worked for the "Redeemers," it failed for the Populists. The result was a similar, and much more effective, restriction of the franchise which further narrowed the already limited opportunities of African Americans.

[7] Several monographs and articles have been written on the Populist Movement and its origins. Amongst others, see, John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1931; Lincoln: reprint University of Nebraska Press, 1961); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), a condensed version is titled *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Robert C. McMath, Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976); Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1977); Bruce Palmer, *"Man Over Money:" The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; reprint 2007); Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

Several scholars have attempted to pinpoint the origins of disfranchisement, segregation, and increasing racial violence and terror in the turn-of-the-century South. C. Vann Woodward argued that the Populists' challenge to the "Solid" Democratic South in the early 1890s generated a call for the disfranchisement of both African Americans and 'ignorant' whites. To further facilitate white unification on the "Negro Question," Southern white conservatives sought to separate the races altogether under the Jim Crow system of segregation.[8] Later scholars, including Howard N. Rabinowitz and Edward L. Ayers, challenged this focus on politics, insisting that more was at play in disfranchisement and segregation. Rabinowitz and Ayers, for instance, argued that disfranchisement, through poll taxes and white primaries, preceded the Populist Revolt and was more likely a result of whites' weariness of election-day fraud and intimidation of non-Democratic black and white voters.[9] Ayers also added that disfranchisement and segregation was a response to gendered fears of social equality between the races and interracial sexuality.[10] In addition to concerns about gender, Leon F. Litwack pointed to the growing assertiveness of the post-Emancipation generation of black men and women that instilled in white supremacists a paranoia of impending "Negro domination." By refusing to

[8] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 322, 330, 347-349; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 78-102; Francis M. Wilhoit, "An Interpretation of Populism's Impact on the Georgia Negro," *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 52 No. 2 (April 1967): 119.

[9] See Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 311, 318-327; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865-1920* Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992), 111-115; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; reprint 2007), 147, 269, 300. I depart from the argument that an alleged antipathy towards violence was the cause of disfranchisement. Instead, I contend this purported disavowal of election-day violence was based on anxiety regarding federal intervention in Southern elections. Ruling whites sought to distance themselves from the acts of their rank and file while claiming that they alone, not federal supervisors, could keep these lower-class whites in line. Oftentimes, though, these same leaders were behind the acts of violence they criticized. See Steven Kantrowitz, "One Man's Mob Is Another Man's Militia: Violence, Manhood, and Authority in Reconstruction South Carolina," in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 67-87.

There are no sources in the current document.

[10] Ayers, *Promise,* 140, 145.

abide by the spoken and unspoken rules of racial etiquette, this new generation of African Americans exposed the chinks in the armor of white supremacy that white southerners stood behind. From this perceived loss of control of the social order, whites sought to reinforce that control by creating ever-harsher rules governing race relations.[11]

Although these arguments have merit, they are incomplete. In order to understand the origins of disfranchisement, segregation, and racial terror, these arguments must be looked at simultaneously. As the Doyle incident reveals, they were intimately tied together. The fears many whites had regarding the social assertiveness of African Americans were magnified by the political unrest of the Populist Moment. Conversely, the perceived possibility of social equality between whites and blacks seemed all the greater due to the Populists' challenge to the "one-party" South as it promised to protect all men's rights, regardless of race. Thus, politics exacerbated white supremacists' anxieties and these same anxieties confirmed the perceived existential threat of political independence outside of the Democratic Party. Furthermore, the worsening of African American political life must be analyzed as part of a continuous discourse in which cries for reform against corruption veered into the dangerous language of miscegenation.

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Henry Sebastian Doyle was born in Macon, Georgia, in 1866 to an Irish father and black mother by the name of Milly. As a child, when he was not working as an agricultural laborer to help support his mother and stepfather, Doyle attended Ballard Normal School in Macon.[12] The

[11] Leon F. Litwack offered an excellent analysis of the anxious reactions of white supremacists to growing black assertiveness in the political and social arenas in *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), xiv, 218-237. See also, Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 26-30; Ayers, *Promise*, 147.
[12] 1870 U.S. Census, Bibb County, Georgia, Population Schedule, Macon, 3, dwelling 17, family 27, Butts, Milly and Smith [sic], Henry; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 8, 2017, http://ancestry.com; 1880 U.S. Census, Dooly County, Georgia, Population Schedule, 66, "42 Dist," dwelling 650, family 685, Butts, Pleasant, Butts, Milly, and Doyle, Henry; digital image, Acestry.com, accessed February 8, 2017, http://ancestry.com; Titus

school, established by the American Missionary Association in 1865, was one of many institutions founded by northern benevolent societies and women's clubs with the intention of educating the youth of the South, both white and black. But the education of black children, although necessary, was no easy task. Whites' resistance, in the words of W.E.B. Du Bois, "showed itself in ashes, insult, and blood; for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro."[13] Despite these dangers, many black families desired a better life for their children than that of the field hand and knew that education was the key. Yet families like Doyle's made calculated decisions in sending their sons and daughters to the school house, weighing the pros – enhanced economic prospects – with the cons – white hate and resentment, the loss of children's labor on the family plot, and the added costs of paying a teacher.[14]

For whatever reasons, Doyle's mother and stepfather took a chance on schooling and Doyle must have done well because he went on to attend Clark University in Atlanta and then Ohio Wesleyan for graduate study. Doyle's son later speculated that his interest in politics and the improvement of his race may have been stimulated by his time in Ohio, where he associated with Joseph B. Foraker, Jr., the son of the Ohio Governor.[15] In 1891, Doyle left Ohio Wesleyan before graduating and joined the preaching circuit of the Colored (later Christian) Methodist

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Brown, *Faithful, Firm, and True: African American Education in the South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 140. Doyle's birthdate is unclear. In the contested election hearings, he said that he was born in 1866. This seems to be correct based on the 1870 census that placed his age at four. However, Doyle's son, in a letter to W.E.B. Du Bois, said his father was born in 1867, which also happens to be the date of birth listed on Doyle's death certificate. See *Watson vs. Black*, 775; Letter from Bertram Wilbur Doyle to W.E.B. Du Bois, August 23, 1947, in *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois: Volume 3 Selections, 1944-1963*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), 266; Kerr County, Texas. Death Certificate no. 175 (1913), Doyle, J. [sic] S.; Texas State Board of Health, Ancestry.com, accessed February 8, 2017, http://ancestry.com.

[13] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 29.

[14] Leon Litwack offers an interesting look at the hopes and fears that often undergirded decisions about education, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 52-61.

[15] Letter from Bertram Doyle to W.E.B. Du Bois in *Correspondence*, 266.

Episcopal Church, leading him to the Trinity CME Church in Sparta, North and East of Macon, in the heart of Georgia's Tenth Congressional District.[16]

That Doyle's first position with the CME Church was in Sparta was quite appropriate for a politically-minded black man interested in finding a solution to the "Negro Problem." Founded in 1793, Hancock County quickly became one of Antebellum America's wealthiest counties after the explosion of cotton created a successful planter elite founded on slave labor. The slaves that harvested the "white gold" quickly became the majority population, numbering 8,137 (68%) in 1860. Although the county lay in the path of General William T. Sherman's march to the sea, it remained, for the most part, physically unharmed, though economically devastated as the once-valuable human property took to the streets as freemen and -women. During Reconstruction, Hancock County sent two black Republicans to the Georgia legislature, but their tenure did not last long as white Democrats violently ripped the county from the black majority's hands. Sparta and Hancock County again rose to prominence by 1880, producing an even greater quantity of cotton than at the start of the war, but the economy was much more in line with the New South rather than the Old. Railroads, merchants, and bankers prospered while poor whites and blacks struggled to get by. Despite these dire prospects, Hancock County had more black landowners as a percentage of the population than neighboring counties. Thus Sparta and Hancock County both prospered and suffered in the post-war South, making it an ideal representative of the New South

[16] *Watson vs. Black*, 717, 775; Letter from Channing Tobias to W.E.B. Du Bois, July 27, 1947, in *Correspondence*, 265. Doyle may have left Ohio Wesleyan to get married. However, apart from a student newspaper notice and an Ohio marriage certificate, there are no other records of his wife. This is interesting because in 1895 Doyle married another woman from Alabama with whom he had his children. See Delaware County, Ohio, Marriage Certificate no 1022 (1891), Doyle-Green; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 8, 2017, http://ancestry.com; *The Practical Student*, January 29, 1891, 4; Elmore County, Alabama, Marriage Certificate (1895), Doyle-Walker; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 8, 2017, http://ancestry.com.

order Doyle would soon challenge. Furthermore, it was home to one of the founding members of the CME Church, Lucius H. Holsey.[17]

By the time Doyle arrived in Sparta, he was "a handsome man." In the first volume of his fictional Black Flame Trilogy W.E.B. Du Bois described him as "one of those dark blonds of Negro and white blood which sometimes makes the most beautiful beings on earth." "He was physically perfect, with erect carriage and resonant, well-modulated musical voice," making him not only perfect for the pulpit, but also for the stump.[18] Earlier in 1892, after reading about Congressman Watson, Doyle attended a meeting in the town of Warrenton, about twenty miles North and East of Sparta, where Watson was to speak. Doyle approached the stand following Watson's speech and asked if he might talk with the black men and women gathered there. Watson gave his assent and learned that Doyle was "a very fine stump speaker." Major C.E. McGregor, a former Confederate officer and a close friend of Watson, agreed, echoing that Doyle was "an exceedingly intelligent man and excellent stump speaker." Recalling the meeting at Warrenton, McGregor cited these qualities as the basis for Watson's acceptance of Doyle into the campaign.[19]

But there was certainly more to Doyle's appeal to Watson than his skills as an orator. Watson would not have placed Doyle in the position he did unless they viewed politics in the same light. Both men had lost faith in the two major parties and believed they were rotten with corruption. They believed that both the Democrats and Republicans were parties owned and

[17] John Rozier, *Black Boss: Political Revolution in a Georgia County* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1982), 9, 11, 12, 17-18. Mark R. Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 2-3.
[18] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Ordeal of Mansart* (New York: Mainstream Publishers, 1957), 162. Although this is a fictionalized account, Du Bois researched Doyle extensively. I take from this account only descriptions or facts based on correspondence from Du Bois' research.
[19] *Watson vs. Black,* 669, 717; McGregor, according to Barton Shaw, was not just a friend of Watson, but was the second most important Populist in Georgia. He went on to serve in the state's General Assembly as a Populist, Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys,* 130.

controlled bya wealthy elite at the expense of the masses. Doyle believed that only the good men from the "old rotten parties" could make up a "good party" and with it, good government.[20] What stood in the way was the corruption of the political process through bribery and whiskey. According to Doyle, most black men aligned with the Populists, but some "would go where a few dollars and a large amount of whisky could be found."[21] So adamant was Doyle about the corrupting nature of whisky in politics that he served as a delegate to the national Prohibitionist convention the same year he campaigned for Watson.[22] Yet while Doyle understood political corruption through the eyes of an oppressed people, Watson's understanding came from his childhood. After the Civil War, Watson's family, once wealthy planters, lived in near poverty as his father squandered what little wealth remained on failed investments, gambling, and alcohol. Watson came of age as Democratic Redeemers chastised Republican rulers for their incompetence and corruption. His own life seemed to validate the Redeemer rhetoric that the physical, economic, and political devastation surrounding him was the fault of corrupt Republicans kept in office through bribery and intimidation. Nevertheless, Watson saw little change once the Democratic "saviors" came to power.[23] The Bourbons still ruled and the bourbon continued to flow.

Doyle got to work quickly. A friend later claimed that "Doyle's name was almost as much of a household word as Watson's among the poor whites as well as the Negroes in Georgia."[24] Doyle's support of the Populist cause was strong and his speeches, Watson stated, were "peculiarly irritating to the Democrats."[25] It did not take long before the threats to Doyle's

[20] *Watson vs. Black*, 281, 755, 790
[21] *Watson vs. Black*, 776, 778-779, 782-783, 784.
[22] *Watson vs. Black*, 790
[23] Woodward, *Tom Watson,* 13-14, 16-17, 32, 43 53-66.
[24] Letter from Channing H. Tobias to W.E.B. Du Bois, in *Correspondence*, 265.
[25] *Watson vs. Black*, 669.

life and person became as constant as they were to Watson's, and the alleged threat in Thomson was not the first. A former ordinary of Hancock County swore that if Doyle remained in Sparta, he would do so in his coffin. At another time, people threatened violence if he did not "keep quiet." Shortly before the state elections, Doyle looked on with fear as he saw the mayor of Sparta lead a group of armed men who rifled through his parsonage looking for him "with the intention of doing me violence."[26]

Even more frightening was the time when a "crowd of roughs" interrupted a speech Doyle delivered in Jefferson County just weeks before the incident at Thomson. These men, Doyle noted, had "come prepared for trouble, which was evidenced by the number of Winchester rifles and revolvers" the men carried. Among the men in the crowd was a marshal from a neighboring town who stormed from the hall after Doyle responded to his heckling with "some repartee." Doyle worried not, though, and talked amongst the gatherers outside after the meeting concluded. At the same time, a white man by the name of Jon Hall, wearing an overcoat much like Doyle's, started driving his buggy out of town. When the buggy had traveled about fifty yards from the meeting hall, the crack of a Winchester split the air and Jon Hall fell dead. The offended marshal who had earlier stormed from the hall, Doyle asserted, then jumped from the bushes that lined the street and rushed out of town. He later sent word "that he had got the _____." Doyle assumed he was the marshal's real target since "in the moonlight it would be very hard to tell the difference between myself and a white man."[27]

One of the most overt signs of Democratic aggression occurred on the day of the 1892 state elections. On that day, Doyle went to the courthouse to cast his ballot, but his eligibility to vote was challenged. He took the required oath, placed his ballot in the designated box, and then

[26] *Watson vs. Black,* 779-780; also "Echoes From the Election," *People's Party Paper,* October 14, 1892, 5; "An Address to the People of the Tenth District," *People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 4.
[27] *Watson vs. Black*, 779-781.

walked onto the front steps of the courthouse. But once on the steps he was met by a group of county and city officials, including the county Judge and the Mayor of Sparta. According to Doyle, Judge F.L. Little quickly approached him with a knife drawn and exclaimed, "'I have come to cut your infernal throat.'" As Little raised the knife, a man rushed from the courthouse and pushed Doyle aside, urging him to run for his life. Several blows, likely intended for Doyle, landed on the Samaritan's head. Shots rang out as Doyle fled and when he looked back, he saw two men with pistols drawn and leveled in his direction. The black men who had gathered during the scuffle, Doyle claimed, were beaten. Some, being Populists, were jailed before casting their votes. Furthermore, Doyle asserted that "to show that intimidation was the programme [sic], Governor [William J.] Northen mounted the court-house steps after the riot, and cheered the persons who had assaulted me and beaten and jailed the negroes who were around the polling place."[28]

Certainly, Doyle faced harm while campaigning for Watson. He also created a significant amount of anger among Democrats with the speeches that he gave. But why was he such a target for Democratic hostility and violence? If Doyle had not questioned Democratic authority, demanded his rights as a citizen, or challenged white supremacy, he might have had a good chance of living a relatively peaceful life. But Doyle was not one to sit back and blindly obey the racial mores of the South. A friend of Doyle later recalled admiring his courage, saying that Doyle "had the courage to challenge" racial discrimination even when he knew his statements and actions might be used against him "by the so-called 'Uncle Tom' Negro type of leadership."

[28] *Watson vs. Black*, 779; "Echoes From the Election," *The People's Party Paper,* October 14, 1892, 5; "Democratic Infamy," *The Wool-Hat*, October 22, 1892, 8. Governor Northen was in Sparta that day as he was a native of that town. Whether he actually praised this violence and intimidation is questionable. The only source saying this was from Doyle, who was fleeing for his life. However, as we will see, Northen may have had another reason to applaud the assault on Doyle, see notes 32 & 106 below.

Not only that, his friend asserted, Doyle challenged the party system of the South, maintaining political independence until the day he died.[29]

Doyle's real crime against the Democracy was that he was not a party member. When asked if he was a Democrat before joining the Populists, Doyle responded with an emphatic "no." Furthermore, in his speeches, he compared the Democratic Party with that of the hated Republicans, stating that both parties were beholden to the wealthy at the expense of the poor. They had become dominated, he asserted, by monopolistic interests and were equally responsible for the failures in American society.[30] Yet in addition to the blasphemy of comparing the Democracy to the party of Reconstruction, Doyle also offended the Democrats by resisting their attempts to bring him into the Democratic fold. Once during the campaign, Sterling Roberts, the business editor of a Democratic newspaper printed out of Sparta, offered him money to shift sides and advocate for the election of Major J.C.C. Black, Watson's Democratic opponent. After making this offer, Roberts allegedly "intimated that it might not be well for [Doyle]" to support Watson. Later, a man purportedly in Major Black's employ offered Doyle $100 to return to counties in which he had spoken in favor of Watson and announce that he had shifted allegiance to Black. Doyle declined these offers. He stressed that "the reason why violence was attempted on me [in Thomson] and all over the district was because I dared to oppose the Democratic party, and refused all overtures made me by that party."[31]

In recalling these incidents nearly four years later, Doyle fashioned himself as a peaceful citizen asserting his constitutionally-guaranteed rights. His only crime, he asserted, was that he

[29] Letter from Channing Tobias to W.E.B. Du Bois, in *Correspondence,* 265-266.
[30] *Watson vs. Black,*790.
[31] *Watson vs. Black*, 780; see also Watson's statement in "Democratic Madness," *People's Party Paper,*October 28, 1892, 4; Charles Crowe doubted Doyle's sincerity in aligning with Watson and the Populists, saying that due to his receiving compensation, Doyle was more of an employee rather than an ally. While Watson may have seen it this way, the fact that Doyle declined the offers of Democrats implies that money was not a deciding factor in Doyle's support of the People's Party, see, Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered," 107.

attempted to vote against the Democrats and urged other men, white and black, to do the same. In contrast, he portrayed so-called "respectable" Democrats as lawless and violent. Democrats were not only violent, he declared, but corrupt. By publically describing their multiple alleged attempts at bribery and coercion, Doyle portrayed the Democrats as enemies of true democracy and therefore the good men of Georgia. According to Doyle, Judge Little and the mayor of Sparta were just examples of the greater corruption of the Democratic Party which was willing to commit fraud, intimidation, and even murder to ensure its own partisan success.

However, the Hancock County Judge along with the men who stood accused of conspiring to lynch Doyle in Thomson contended they had other reasons to dislike Doyle besides his transgressions against the party of the white South. Democrats such as Dr. Reville accused Doyle of speaking ill of prominent Democrats in various speeches. And Doyle, although pleading innocent, certainly knew he had crossed the lines of racial etiquette. For instance, the morning of the state election during which Judge Little attacked Doyle, a "scurrilous circular" had come into Doyle's hands. The pamphlet was printed by Dr. W.R. Gilmore, a Populist, who sought to answer Democratic assertions that Populists were in favor of social equality between the races. The pamphlet named several prominent white men of Hancock County, "who were foremost in the Democratic party" as having "given practical illustrations of social equality, and mention[ed] them as having lived with negro women," Doyle explained. Having received about six copies of this circular, Doyle had handed them to people who asked to see a copy. Among those named in the pamphlet was Judge Little. Little had learned that Doyle had distributed some of these pamphlets and cited this as his justification for attacking Doyle.[32]

[32] *Watson vs. Black,* 780,789; "A Scurrilous Circular," *The Ishmaelite,* October 7, 1892, 2. Governor Northen, according to *The Ishmaelite* appears to have also been named in this circular. If Northen did cheer after the attack on Doyle, this may have been his reasoning.

Whether true or not, the allegation that respectable white Democrats (or any white man or woman) were guilty of miscegenation carried tremendous weight in the post-Reconstruction South. And while it certainly still happened, it remained taboo and often illegal after Redeemer governments sought to bolster racial boundaries due to fears of "black sexuality." In Georgia, sex across the color line was a felony punishable by up to six months in prison. Many of these anti-miscegenation laws were based on pseudoscience that asserted that interracial sex would lead to the corruption of white blood and therefore society.[33] Little was certainly enraged by being accused or exposed (as the case may be), and he was determined to defend his reputation.

According to Major Black four years later, the judge's actions, or at least his anger, were justified. In his cross-examination of Doyle during the 1896 contested election hearings, Black asked if the charges in the circular "were naturally very offensive to a good many people." Black sought to clarify whether the circular impugned the reputations of both the living and the dead. Doyle responded affirmatively that the accusations were offensive and included the names of living and dead Democratic leaders.[34] By distributing a circular that made such accusations, Doyle challenged the "respectable" reputations of the accused men. When Doyle first mentioned the attack at Sparta, he made no mention of these pamphlets. In his telling of the story, Judge Little and the other Democratic officials were corrupting the electoral process by trying to intimidate Doyle and, through him, the crowd of African American men waiting to cast their own ballots. But in asking about the accusations in the pamphlet and getting Doyle to confirm the offensive nature of those accusations, the Democrats attempted to make it clear that Judge

[33] Peter W. Bardaglio, "'Shameful Matches': Regulation of Interracial Sex and Marriage in the South before 1900," in *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History,* ed. Martha Hodes (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 122-126. Forty-five years after this incident, Doyle's son, a Fisk sociologist, wrote about these same concerns, see Bertram Wilber Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1937), 117-118.
[34] *Watson vs. Black,* 789.

Little was merely defending his reputation, not attempting to intimidate black or Populist voters. Psychologists Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen contend that when a man violated another man's personal honor as Doyle had, there was "a tacit belief that violence [was] an appropriate response."[35] Instead, the Democrats implied, Doyle and the Populists were perverting the political process by making incendiary appeals to the passions and prejudices of voters in dishonorable ways, not even sparing the reputations of the deceased.

What is telling, though, is that Little chose to take out his anger on Doyle rather than the man who had printed and mailed the pamphlets. Judge Little may not have known of the pamphlet's authority and, after hearing that Doyle distributed some, may have acted on that alone. It is also likely that Doyle was simply the closest target.

However, Doyle's race may have been a more significant reason. According to historian Scott Reynolds Nelson, the Democratic Party had come to power in 1868 by intermingling the image of the black rapist with stories of the financial malfeasance of the Republican Party. The term that combined these two seemingly unrelated issues was the word "corruption," which joined the misuse of state funds with images of interracial sex.[36] Yet twenty years later this Populist pamphlet turned this "rhetoric of corruption" back against the Democratic Party. Instead, it was prominent white men who stood accused of defiling black women while these same prominent white men misused state funds and bribed opponents. The accusations in the pamphlet, if leveled against black men, would have served as a justification for lynching. But as the Populist accusations were directed at the "reputable Democrats of Hancock county," Democrats called it an "infamous lie" and there was "nothing meaner in conception, baser in

[35] Richard E. Nisbett and Dov Cohen, *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 2.
[36] See Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 95-114.

purpose, [and] more shameless in expression."[37] The very notion that whites would have consensual sex with African Americans defied white logics of "superior" and "inferior" races.

That Doyle, a product of the relations between a white man and a black woman, handed out this pamphlet suggested that the accusations not only attacked the honor of white Democrats, but did so in the person of one whose own body represented the crossing of racial lines. A mixed-race man flipped the traditional narrative of miscegenation on its head. At nearly the same time, Ida B. Wells published her *Southern Horrors* pamphlet in which she inverted the reasons for lynching. Miscegenation laws, Wells wrote, "leave the white man free to seduce all the colored girls he can" without the responsibility of marriage or support, all the while preaching of chastity.[38] Although Doyle did not author the pamphlet he circulated, by handing it out he became tacitly responsible for its meaning. And, like Wells, he was not afraid to call the self-proclaimed defenders of women's purity out on their hypocrisy. Despite his claims of innocence in the matter, Doyle most certainly knew when he rose above his "place" as a black man in the South. In calling attention to the illicit affairs between prominent white men and black women, Doyle equated African Americans' complaints and fears with those of whites, disassembling the racial hierarchy. Only six years later in Willmington, North Carolina, similar charges made by a black newspaper editor sparked a violent race "riot" in which white mobs roamed through the streets terrorizing and murdering innocent black people.[39]

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[37] "A Scurrilous Circular," *The Sparta Ishmaelite*, October 7, 1892, 2.
[38] Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases,* accessed February 18, 2017, Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm.
[39] The preceding paragraphs follow the arguments of Leon Litwack, Gail Bederman and Glinda Gilmore. See Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 57-60; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind,* 212-214, 276, 280-283, 290, 312-315; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 105-108. Like Gilmore, I contend that the increased political tensions only reinforced whites' outrage regarding this pamphlet. In the minds of white conservatives, it was because the Populists were openly fighting for biracial political equality that a black man like

But what might have been the motives of Dr. Reville, the man accused of conspiring to lynch Doyle, for wishing Doyle harm? And if Reville did not wish Doyle harm when he arrived in Thomson as he claimed, why did Doyle sincerely believe that to be the case? Before arriving in Thomson on the twenty-third, Doyle, in one of his speeches at a campground in McDuffie County, supposedly referred to Dr. Reville as a "bulldozer," saying that he and other Democrats used economic and physical coercion to get people to vote for Democrats. The doctor, upon hearing this accusation, was offended and decided to confront Doyle. At the railroad station in Thomson, Reville grabbed Doyle's attention just before he boarded the train to leave. Ira Farmer, a leading Democrat, recalled seeing Reville approach Doyle with his hands locked behind his back. Farmer stated his surprise at how calm Reville was while talking to Doyle, for it was well-known that the doctor had a "high-strung nature."[40] According to Doyle, Reville told him to leave town and that he "'would like to put a bullet through you anyhow, and if you ever say anything about me again, I'll do it.'" "Fearing violence" because of the doctor's concealed hands, Doyle decided it best to leave.[41] Having been shot at and nearly stabbed, Doyle was not going to question the willingness of Democrats, whom he had accused of bulldozing, to do exactly that.

Dr. Reville argued, in contrast, that political intimidation was not his intention. He admitted to telling Doyle that he would hurt him if he made such statements again. But he asserted that he had not consulted any other citizens about the matter and that he "never thought of lynching the negro."[42] In stating that his intentions behind his threat were minor and that his

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Doyle would challenge the racial status quo so blatantly. For more on the Wilmington massacre, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind,* 312-315; Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow,* 105-117.

[40] *Watson vs. Black,* 636, 637.

[41] *Watson vs. Black,* 781, 792-793.

[42] "Outraged and Indignant," *The Augusta Chronicle,* November 3, 1892, 3; see also Ira Farmer's testimony where he said that Reville told him that "he was going to break a stick over his head" in *Watson vs. Black,* 638.

decision to confront Doyle was made alone, Dr. Reville framed the encounter as a matter of honor, not of politics. Reville was no coward and he would not stand being accused of political intimidation and bribery; his threat was a warning. Like Judge Little before him, Dr. Reville merely confronted a man who had allegedly misrepresented him in an attempt to tarnish his reputation. According to Reville, his threat was only rectifying the wrong committed against him.

Yet as with Judge Little, Reville's self- defense was likely misdirection. It is impossible to know what actually went on in Reville's mind, but there was doubtlessly more to the story. Watson may not have explicitly named Reville as a bulldozer, but he certainly did accuse Democratic leaders of coercion and corruption, one of Reville's complaints against Doyle. For instance, after the night at Thomson, Watson repeatedly named Reville and others of conspiring to lynch Doyle for political purposes. Despite these attacks on his honor, Reville never threatened to whip or harm Watson in any way and satisfied himself by simply denying Watson's allegations. Doyle openly challenged white supremacy by questioning the reputation of a prominent white Democrat. And in doing so, Doyle belied Democratic claims of honest politics and government, revealing in its place corruption. When Watson wrote about Reville's role in the Thomson incident, he named the Augusta ring as the true source of this corruption and violence.[43] That this ring of bankers, merchants, and railway men who allegedly sold the state to special interests was at fault recalled memories of earlier allegations against the Republicans during Reconstruction.[44]

Regardless of whether Reville actually coordinated a group to lynch Doyle, it was well known that Reville did wish to harm Doyle. Adding to this the previous incidents that Doyle had

[43] "Democratic Madness," *The People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 4; "Here's the Proof," *The People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 4.
[44] See Nelson, *Iron Confederacies,* 95-114.

experienced, the threat appeared very real in Doyle's mind.[45] And when Major Black asked if Doyle knew anything about the alleged mob being formed, he answered that he was not going to stand around to see if it did. After he received the warning, he sought safety rather than finding out the veracity of the threat. As to the Democrats' later denials that they planned to harm Doyle, he asserted that once their plans were thwarted, denying the plan existed was "the only rational declaration they could make."[46]

The truth of what happened at Thomson may never be known. There is no smoking gun that points to it. But there was more to the story than whether the threat to Doyle's life was real or whether the Populists made it all up to score political points. How the two sides discussed the events in those final days of October are just as important, if not more so, as "the truth" in developing a fuller understanding not only the campaign of 1892, but also the story of turn-of-the-century racial politics.

During and after the Doyle incident, Populist and Democratic newspapers began to tell the story of what happened in Thomson. Both sides accused the other of deceiving the poor, ignorant men and women who read the other side's publications with lies and misrepresentations. In the numerous columns that ran all over the state, each paper told "its side" of the story. And if the "intelligent" reader only listened to both sides, the matter would be easily determined. The *Augusta Chronicle* stated that in any court the testimony of one side always paints one picture for a jury, but when the other side is heard, "the jury often finds a very different verdict." All one had to do was compare the evidence and the truth would reveal itself.[47]

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[45] *Watson vs. Black*, 796; others also asserted that they believed the threat to have some basis, see *Watson vs. Black*, 681, 684.
[46] *Watson vs. Black*, 794.
[47] "Here's the Proof," *The Augusta Chronicle*, November 3, 1892, 4; see also "An Appeal to Reason," *The Wool-Hat,* October 29, 1892, 8; "Who is to Blame," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 4; "Two of Tom Watson's Points," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 4; *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 29, 1892, 4; "Exposed," *The Wool-Hat,* October 29, 1892, 1.

But in addition to telling the different sides of the event at Thomson, Populist and Democratic newspapers described the events in explicit and implicit language that meant more to their readers than what the words alone seemed to state. They used coded language of "law and order," "good citizens," and "good government" that often had deeper meanings tied to social norms like white supremacy and southern honor as well as historically-based notions of federal intervention and "Negro rule" among other things. To the Democrats and Populists, their opponents were "traitors" to their fellow citizens and customs while their supporters were "fair-minded" defenders of peace and accountability to the law. What ultimately differentiated their claims to good citizenship came from their competing visions of what social and political order should look like. The Populists thought that order consisted of independent-minded men, without fear of intimidation or violent reprisal, freely exercising their right to vote.[48] Both Democrats and Republicans, Watson wrote, had kept men from voting in their economic interest by using race to divide class.[49] In response to the long history of Democratic violence and intimidation, the Populists urged armed self-defense.[50] In contrast, Democrats contended that true security depended on the continued power of the Democratic Party and white supremacy. The Populists were pawns of the Republicans and therefore the harbingers of "Negro domination," Democrats claimed.[51] Moreover, the Populist's call for armed self-defense, the Democrats stated, was meant to frighten peaceful men into voting for the Populists.[52]

[48] Populist rhetoric and reality were often contradictory. For more, see Irvin D.S. Winsboro and Moses Musoke, "Lead Us Not into Temptation: Race, Rhetoric, and Reality in Southern Populism," *Historian* Vol. 65 Issue 6 (Winter 2003): 1373-1374.
[49] Thomas E. Watson, "The Negro Question in the South," *The Arena*, October 1892, 540.
[50] "An address to the People of the Tenth District," *The People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 4.
[51] "Mrs. Lease Has Done It" *The Augusta Chronicle*, October 27, 1892, 4; "Tom Watson's Antics," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 28, 1892, 4.
[52] "Is this Bravery?," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 4; "Insurrectionary Methods," *Sparta Ishmaelite,* October 28, 1892, 2.

Thus, Democrats and Populists cited their opponents as enemies to order. In Democratic papers, Populists were depicted as a wild and rambunctious group who went through towns and villages causing a ruckus and terrorizing the people. For instance, the McDuffie County Democrats wrote that after Watson and his men delivered incendiary speeches at the courthouse on the twenty-fifth, Watson, after "seeing their utter failure to provoke any disturbance," adjourned the meeting after which his men walked through the town "with yells and loud talking."[53] Furthermore, when news that Watson was in trouble reached the town of Lincolnton, the Populists, according to the *Chronicle,* tore through the town "yelling like Comanche Indians and swearing vengeance on the democrats." And even more incriminating, the Populist sheriff was "evidently intent on breaking rather than keeping the peace" as he apparently fueled the flames of passion by joining in the demonstrations.[54] The message was clear, with the Populists came lawlessness and unrest.[55]

The Democrats on the other hand, were inherently peaceful. "Talk of shotguns, defending one's self, resisting intimidation, and the like, are never heard at democratic meetings."[56] While Populists gave incendiary speeches, "Democrats are peaceful, and will not be led into trouble."[57] Democratic papers also couched their peaceful intentions in the rhetoric of democracy: "[The] Democracy expects to win with ballots, not bullets," the *Chronicle* declared.[58] But most frequently, Democrats asserted their peaceful intentions by announcing their utter amazement at

[53] "Outraged and Indignant," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 30, 1892, 1.
[54] "Watson's Wild Work," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 5; see also, "Third Party Lawlessness, *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 27, 1892, 4.
[55] This was ultimately a struggle over public space. As Scott Reynolds Nelson wrote, this space was often defined as a "closed union of white men." Doyle and the Populists contested this definition in almost every instance. For more, see Scott Reynolds Nelson, "Red Strings and Half Brothers: Civil Wars in Alamance County, North Carolina, 1861-1871," in *Enemies of the Country: New Perspectives on Unionists in the Civil War South,* ed. John C. Inscoe and Robert C. Kenzer (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2001), 37-53.
[56] *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 4.
[57] "The Inciter to Riot and Bloodshed," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 1.
[58] *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 4.

the lengths Populists and their insurrectionary leader were willing to go for political gain. "Democrats express the utmost indignation that the quiet and law-abiding town of Thomson should have been filled with such a violent band of men," exclaimed Democrats in a *Chronicle* article.[59] Another article denounced the Populists' efforts at Thomson as "very ridiculous in the sight of all people of ordinary judgement and common sense." Ordinary judgement and common sense were, of course, the first qualities of Democratic citizens.[60] Finally, the *Atlanta Journal* asserted that the Democracy was the best hope for the maintenance of peace. For while the Populists stood guard, "the peaceful democrats of Thomson and the surrounding country were sweetly dreaming of the security guaranteed to the country by the [Democratic] party."[61]

This could not be further from the truth, the Populists claimed. At their rallies, they maintained that while calling for party members to arm themselves, it was only for purposes of self-defense. "Let none of us be the aggressor. Adhere strictly to the lines of self-defence [sic]," the *People's Party Paper* announced after the Doyle incident. It continued, "Remember that one of our men who commits a crime helps the enemy."[62] As to the Democratic assertions that the Populists were amassing arms for the purpose of terrorizing the citizens of Thomson, the Populists claimed that if not for the intimidation and lawlessness of certain Democrats they would not need arms. Had the armed guards not assembled at Thomson that night, the Populists intimated that the peace would have been stained even worse by the blood of innocent men who dared to oppose Democratic supremacy.[63]

Instead, the Democrats were the true dangers to peace, argued the Populists. Watson, in a column of the *People's Party Paper*, asserted that the Democratic leaders and newspapers had

[59] "The Inciter to Riot and Bloodshed," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 1.
[60] "Is This Bravery?" *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 4.
[61] "Case of Political Jim-Jam," quoted in *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 28, 1892, 4.
[62] "An Address to the People of the Tenth District," *People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 4.
[63] Democratic Madness," *People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 4.

"incited lawless men to a pitch of frenzy which threatens anarchy." Not only had the Democrats assaulted Populist speakers, the *People's Party Paper* decried, but at Thomson they had the audacity to plan an attack on the Sabbath. "In their furious partisanship they are willing to violate the sanctity of God's day," the column declared.[64] In addition to breaking the Sabbath, the Democratic mob, according to the Populists, were willing to discard traditional respect for men of the church, saying that not even Doyle's "cloth as a divine" dissuaded the would-be lynchers.[65] The Populists asserted that if the voters elected Major Black, Democratic intimidation, violence, and corruption would continue unabated.

Doyle repeated the charges that the Democratic press was responsible for the ill-feeling between the parties. In an odd article that gives a great deal of credibility to the Populists' claims of misrepresentation, *The Chronicle* exclaimed, "Doyle is Down, His advocacy of the third party is ended." The article expounded on Doyle's apparent decision to "be heard no more in the promulgation of that abominable heresy which is responsible for so much discord and bitterness which disturbs the natural tranquility of the tenth district." It suggested that Doyle's extensive travels through the district convinced him that Major Black would claim victory. And to add to the almost comical reporting, they "gladly publish[ed]" a card from Doyle in which he mentioned the misrepresentations of himself and his politics. *The Chronicle* was chief amongst those organs which had so misrepresented him. In his note, Doyle challenged accusations leveled against him of incendiarism and the abuse of Democrats. He assured *The Chronicle* that he only counseled peace between the races because he knew that if a conflict arose, black men, "being the weaker, must suffer." The dangerous charges against him, he intimated, even warranted

[64] "Democratic Madness," *People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 4; Democratic papers made similar statements in regard to breaking the Sabbath, saying that while the Democrats were on their way to church, Watson was assembling a group of armed men, see "Outraged and Indignant," *The Augusta Chronicle*, October 30, 1892, 1.
[65] "An Address to the People of the Tenth District," *People's Party Paper,* October, 28, 1892, 4.

violent action. If the charges were true, attempts to silence him were not only justifiable, but patriotic, Doyle explained. This note was damning to the Democratic press, accusing it of both lying and of overtly twisting and fabricating the true intentions of Doyle and the Populists. Nowhere in Doyle's note did he denounce the third party or assure Major Black's victory. These bold headlines were based solely on *The Chronicle*'s anticipation and assurance to its readers "that there is every reason to believe that Doyle will furnish a card on the line of the above within a few days."[66] That card never came.

Nevertheless, disturbing the peace was not limited to noisily riding through the streets, threatening the lives of preachers, or distorting facts in the news. An even greater danger lay in the disturbance of the racial order, exactly what the Democratic press claimed that the Populists were doing. Days before the Thomson incident, the *Chronicle* published a letter that accused Watson of "incendiarism" by telling his white followers to "arm the colored people to protect themselves at the polls."[67] In another column, they credited Watson with urging his black followers to "'wipe out the color line.'"[68] Additionally, the Democratic papers said that as Watson and his men marched to the courthouse, "negroes as well as whites" had pistol ends protruding from their pockets. And in Lincolnton, where the Populist sheriff purportedly did nothing to quell the passion of Watson's supporters, the town's Democrats laughed at the news that Watson was in danger, seeing the rumor as "too good an opportunity for putting into practice the Watsonian policy of arming the negroes." They claimed that in addition to the white men who sounded like Comanche Indians, there were just as many black men parading through the streets with pistols in their pockets.[69]

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[66] "Doyle Is Down," *The Augusta Chronicle*, October 27, 1892, 5.
[67] "Mr. Watson at Stellaville," *The Augusta Chronicle*, October 23, 1892, 1.
[68] "Watson's Methods," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 23, 1892, 1.
[69] "Watson's Wild Work," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 26, 1892, 5.

In pointing out that the Populists were in favor of arming African American men, or in the very least ambivalent about black arms bearing, the Democratic press struck a chord that ran deep in the southern psyche. To many white southerners, black violence was a major fear that had its origins in slavery. News of slave revolts in San Domingo and Jamaica had inspired in antebellum whites a fear of similar revolts in the U.S. These fears worsened when American slaves did, in fact, rise up in rebellion. Whites lived in an almost constant state of paranoia.[70]

But black men with weapons took on an entirely new meaning after the Civil War. During Reconstruction, southern black men frequently saw arms as the best way to protect their new political rights and demonstrate martial manliness while white southern men saw black self-defense as nothing more than an act of hostility. It was a challenge to white authority. Ultimately many whites saw "black voting and arms bearing as the twin pillars of Republican misgovernment." In 1868, prominent Georgia Democrats called for whites to take up arms to "defend their families and their state."[71] And while twenty-four years had passed and white Georgians had seriously weakened black Georgian's rights through poll taxes, intimidation, and violence, the threat of black violence remained very real in the minds of whites, especially in the black belt counties of the Tenth District. Only sixteen years earlier, the infamous Hamburg "Riot" occurred just across the Savannah River. This incident proved to white Southerners that black militias encouraged in black men an unhealthy expectation of respect.[72] Additionally, and possibly of greater relevance, the violent overthrow of the biracial Readjuster government in the

[70] See, Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1969). Aptheker describes the paranoia of white Southerners that was based on discovered plots as well as unfounded fears. Although slave owners touted the paternalistic ideal of a family-like bond between master and slave, the names of Nat Turner, and Denmark Vesey often silenced these assertions and brought antebellum fears of black violence to the surface. Slave holders were in a constant state of doubt as to when the next Turner would rise up in a murderous spree.

[71] Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 146, 157. Doyle's son mentioned black arms bearing in his book discussing social governance of racial etiquette, see Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South,* 117.

[72] See Stephen Budiansky, *The Bloody Shirt: Terror After Appomattox* (New York: Viking, 2008), 225-247.

Danville, Virginia, Massacre was, per the conservative Democrats, a response to a mob of armed black men firing at whites in the streets.[73] Fortunately, the supposed masses of armed black men roaming the streets of the Tenth District did not lead to bloodshed. But the implications were the same: the southern (white) way of life needed to be defended against the armed mobs of black men that Watson and the Populists were creating.[74]

The Democrats also accused the Populists of desiring not only political equality but social equality. Despite the efforts of Watson and Doyle to clarify that political equality for black men was as far as the Populists intended to go in challenging the southern racial order, Democrats vociferously argued that that was not the case. In the days leading up to, during, and after the Thomson incident, the Democratic press made this assertion in more subtle ways. The most common implication that Watson and the Populists were in favor of social equality came in the way Democratic papers referred to the Reverend Doyle as "Watson's negro chum."[75] Benign on the surface, the implication that Watson and Doyle were close friends was meant towarn of the types of interracial relationships that Populism would bring if it succeeded. In the 1896 contested election hearings, J.T. West, an attorney for Watson, asked Ira Farmer about a *Chronicle* article in which Doyle was referred to as Watson's "negro chum." Mr. West asked if this statement was meant as a reflection on Watson. Farmer, a Democrat, asserted that he had not drawn that part of the report for the article and that, when he signed the report, he disclaimed any intention of "meaning that Mr. Watson associated with the negro or kept him in his house."[76] Although Farmer denied any negative implication in referring to Doyle in this way, the

[73] See Jane Dailey, "Deference and Violence in the Postbellum Urban South: Manners and Massacres in Danville, Virginia," *The Journal of Southern* History, Volume 63 Number 3 (August, 1997): 581-582.
[74] See also Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 259, 422-428.
[75] "Doyle in Trouble," *Augusta Chronicle,* October 23, 1892, 2; "For Mr. Watson Et Al," *Augusta Chronicle,* October 29, 1892, 4.
[76] *Watson vs. Black*,637-639; This includes a selection of that article, which can also be found in "Outraged and Indignant," *Augusta Chronicle*, October 30, 1892, 1.

Democratic press, in the Tenth and elsewhere, made other statements about the closeness of Watson and Doyle. In the October 28 issue of the *Sparta Ishmaelite,* Democrats stated that Doyle was Watson's guest in Thomson.[77] African Americans, mostly women, frequently entered the homes of white Georgians, but this was purely in a subservient manner as domestic workers, never as guests. In the same vein as referring to Doyle as Watson's "chum," the statements that Doyle was Watson's guest carried serious meaning. A respectable white citizen would never entertain a black man. For a sitting Congressman to do so, it was scandalous. A similar outrage occurred nearly nine years later when President Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to the White House. In response, "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman of South Carolina stated that it would "necessitate our [whites] killing a thousand niggers in the South before they will learn their place again."[78] If the Populists allowed black men to think they had the liberty of dining with a sitting Congressman, the Democrats intimated, would the Populists deny black men the liberty of fraternizing with white women?[79] This accusation would follow Watson throughout his political career.[80]

As the foremost black speaker in either the Populist or Democratic Party, Doyle frequently found himself in the center of these stories of woe and caution. In his note to the *Chronicle*, not only did he contend that blacks would lose in an armed clash with whites, he denounced accusations that he advocated social equality. "I have everywhere respected the laws

[77] "Insurrectionary Methods," *Sparta Ishmaelite,* October 28, 1892, 2.
[78] Quoted in Robert J. Norrell, *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2009), 243-253; also Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex,* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 54-58.
[79] This constant conflation of public and private played a great role in conservative whites' conception of the Populist challengers. In these whites' minds, political equality was only a stepping stone to social equality and black male and white female sex. For an interesting approach analyzing white supremacists' fascination with the possibility of interracial sex, see Scott Reynolds Nelson, "Livestock, Boundaries, and Public Space in Spartanburg: African American Men, Elite White Women, and the Spectacle of Conjugal Relations," in *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History,* ed. Martha Hodes (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 313-327.
[80] See, Charles Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered," *The Journal of Negro History,* Vol. 55, No. 2 (April, 1970): 107. Crowe mentions that in 1906, Watson's political foes discussed the Doyle incident to challenge Watson's commitment to white supremacy.

of the land, and have said that the further apart the races are, socially, the better for both."[81] Although Doyle was certainly talking of segregation laws, he was not entirely respectful of all the "laws of the land," and the Democratic press sought to make this clear. The day before the incident in Thomson, Doyle had been arrested in Augusta for carrying a concealed weapon, a crime in Augusta. While Doyle gave a speech in a nearby town, "several gentlemen" saw in his pocket a Smith & Wesson revolver and telegraphed the police requesting that Doyle be arrested and searched. As the train Doyle took from his engagement entered the depot at Augusta, a policeman boarded the train and arrested Doyle. The revolver was not concealed when Doyle gave his speech, but while on the train, *The Chronicle* elaborated, "he had taken the weapon from his hip-pocket…and had concealed it in one of the pockets of his overcoat, which he carried slung over his left arm." The article did not attempt to infer why Doyle may have done this, but the implication that his intent was ill.

Perhaps the greater was the "big roll of Uncle Sam's greenbacks" Doyle supposedly carried in his pockets. "He had $135."[82] This additional detail was quite important. White supremacy meant black dependency. By mentioning that Doyle was carrying not only a concealed weapon, but $135 in cash – enough to buy a bedroom suite, a "plush parlor suit[e]," and a flat top cooking stove and still have $85 to spare – Democrats positioned him not only as a threat to peace and law, but to white supremacy.[83] When a black man, the alleged inferior of

[81] "Doyle is Down," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 27, 1892, 5.
[82] "Doyle in Trouble," *The Augusta Chronicle*, October 23, 1892, 2.
[83] "$40,000 Stock of Furniture," *The Sparta Ishmaelite,* October 21, 1892, 3. In the same paper there ran an ad for a "Splendid Building Lot of 7 acres" for $300. It is unclear why Doyle had this money, but he owned land in both Macon and Sparta, and this could have possibly been the proceeds from crops grown on his land. See *Watson vs. Black*, 717. Mark Schultz in his study of black lives in Hancock County – where Sparta is located – wrote that in some areas of Hancock County, blacks owned upwards of 26% of the land. However, he stated that in districts near the county center, near Sparta, black farmers owned only 3%. Thus Doyle's ownership of land near Sparta was quite exceptional. Nevertheless, black-owned acreage was on a rather drastic rise during the early 1890s, see Mark R. Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 46, 49 Figure 7.

whites, held $135, more than most southerners, white and black, could dream of in the cash-strapped South, he was not only demonstrating his economic independence, but flaunting it by carrying it all on his person. The message, while subtle, was clear: economic independence begot audacity, audacity that had to be extinguished lest it spread like a wildfire, toppling the towers of white supremacy and the continued power over and domination of southern blacks.[84] If this was what voters desired, the Democrats urged voters to vote for Populists. They suggested these voters reconsider.

The chips were and would continue to be stacked against any independent political movement that desired reform at the hands of black voters. The fact that the Populists openly challenged the system of whites' political supremacy by calling for black political equality made criticisms about Populists' racial policy all the more ominous. Thus Populists had to walk a fine line that eased white fears without alienating African Americans. Watson added to Doyle's denunciation of social equality by denying claims that Doyle was his guest. When Doyle arrived at Watson's house, he told Doyle "to take up quarters in a negro house on the lot."[85] When asked about this fourteen years later, Watson stated that Doyle protested being ordered to stay in a servant's house by saying, "Mr. Watson, I am an educated man, I went to college," to which Watson responded, "I can't help that, Doyle – I'll protect you but get in that nigger house."[86] To Democratic reporters, Watson maintained his belief in the superiority of both himself and the white race by referring to Doyle, a man only ten years his junior, as "the boy."[87] He insisted that neither he nor his followers posed any threat to the social and political barriers erected between

[84] Leon Litwack argued that black success "all too often provoked white resentment rather than respect." This resentment often led to violence. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 28, 150-163.
[85] "Democratic Madness," *People's Party Paper*, October 28, 1892,4.
[86] Quoted in Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered," 107; by this time, Watson and the Populists had abandoned Georgia's African Americans and Watson's racial rhetoric was much more blunt and in tune with the Watson of the Leo Frank Case.
[87] "Watson's Latest Fraud," *The Augusta Chronicle*, October 25, 1892, 1.

the two races. In fact, as they had with the miscegenation pamphlet, the Populists even turned the fears of "Negro domination" back onto the Democrats. In an article reprinted in *The People's Party Paper,* the Populists of North Carolina mentioned that "Democrats claim and admit that a majority of the negroes voted the Democratic ticket." "Only a few Georgia negroes voted the People's party ticket [in the state elections]." The article stated that black voters would divide between the three parties, but "the Democrats will get a big share with money and whisky." They asked rhetorically, "Now which is the negro party?"[88]

For over thirty years Democrats did not have to worry about accusations of courting black voters. Indeed since the days of Andrew Jackson the party had identified itself as the party of which supremacy. Yet the party stood on a knife's edge in the 1890s. It could not afford to push black voters away as they were still important to Democratic dominance. Democratic columns rarely made overt appeals to white supremacists. Instead they took a more subtle approach, assuming that black readers would not pick up on the subtleties. For instance, the *Atlanta Journal* wrote, "Every clear-headed white man will laugh to scorn this absurd, reckless and desperate bid for sympathy and suffrage." The sympathy and suffrage Watson was bidding for came not from whites, but black men.[89] After the Doyle incident, the Democratic press proudly announced the return of "true" men to the Democratic fold. One such story they printed was of William Burgamy, a self-proclaimed "Third party man and warm supporter of Thos. E. Watson." But after hearing the content of Watson's speeches, Mr. Burgamy determined that he was "on the wrong track," concluding that "[Watson] is not the leader for me or any *true* white

[88] "White People Must Stand Together," *The People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 6. Stephen Kantrowitz's article about the rhetorical failures of Populism in South Carolina offers an excellent analysis of how Populists often used white supremacist language to bring white men into a biracial alliance. This language was based on "expectations of political, economic, and social primacy." See Stephen Kantrowitz, "Ben Tillman and Hendrix McLane, Agrarian Rebels: White Manhood, 'The Farmers,' and the Limits of Southern Populism," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 66 No. 3 (August, 2000), 497-524.
[89] "Case of the Political Jim Jam," quoted in *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 28, 1892, 4.

man" (emphasis added).[90] Major Black and other Democrats throughout the state were gaining strength, the *Constitution* assured, due to "conviction among intelligent people that democratic success means the political, social, and industrial salvation of the south."[91] As their warnings about the "Watsonian policy of arming the negroes" were more subtle than those of the "redeemers" before them, the Democratic press subtly reminded their white readers that the Democratic party was *the* white party. The old guard concluded that while social salvation came with a Democratic victory, a Populist victory would be synonymous with social damnation: the demise of white political and social supremacy.

Knowing that the votes of African American men were still crucial, the Democrats also appealed for black suffrage. In doing so, they attempted to place a buffer between themselves and their overtures to blacks so as not to offend whites. In one such attempt, the *Chronicle* ran a headline declaring, "THREATS OF DEATH." The article alerted African Americans to the danger posed by the Populists: "The third partyites are threatening the lives of the negroes who voted with the democracy." Nevertheless, the Democrats promised "the very fullest protection" for their black supporters. To further allay any fears that the Democracy was getting too cozy with blacks, though, the article assured white readers that the black men being offered protection were "worthy, industrious citizen[s]."[92]Other efforts to demonstrate their willingness to protect blacks involved publishing letters from "sensible" black men. G.W. Williams, a former Populist, urged his fellow black men to work with the Democracy, for "When I was in trouble no one helped me but a Democrat. So, as one who loves you as a friend, my advice is do as I shall do and not go against them any longer."[93] In short, Democratic periodicals voiced their concern for

[90] "Another True Man," *Sparta Ishmaelite*, October 28, 1892, 3.
[91] "The Situation in the Tenth," quoted in *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 28, 1892, 4.
[92] "Threats of Death," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 29, 1892, 5.
[93] "A Sensible Colored Man," *The Sparta Ishmaelite,* October 28, 1892, 3.

the safety of black Democrats, yet did so in a way that suited whites: those being protected were "sensible" and "worthy." Moreover, their offers of protection were not overt bids for black votes, but rather suggestions that their opponents were dangerous. In fact, as the "THREATS OF DEATH" article suggested, it would be best if blacks stayed out of the polling place all together.

The heresies both sides accused each other of committing went beyond getting too close with African Americans, though. The Democrats frequently denounced the Populists, specifically Watson, as turncoats, who betrayed the love and trust their fellow citizens had placed in them. After many Democrats read the columns of the October 28 issue of *The People's Party Paper*, they were convinced that Watson held no love for his fellow citizens. Two days later, Democrats of Thomson and McDuffie County wrote an article in the *Chronicle* to vindicate themselves and referred to Watson's editorial, saying he only offered "abuses and criminations…all going to show Watson's hatred of our people, and his eagerness to express it, simply because we are not following him in his wild career."[94] Watson was also guilty, the Democrats urged, of betraying the people who elected him to Congress. He left for Congress "full of honors, friendship, respect and pride," but in Washington, he "turned trust" and "sought the negro and the republican party to keep him in office." The article not only compared Watson to the most infamous of traitors, Judas Iscariot, but also to the fallen leader of Virginia's Readjusters, General William Mahone. Yet Watson was even worse because Mahone had still "respected his former home" rather than, like Watson, inviting "its ruin by inciting the ignorant to riot and outrage."[95]

The Populists, of course, cried foul. If treachery of one's own kith and kin was the topic of discussion, the Populists contended, the Democrats were worse. The *People's Party Paper*

[94] "Outraged and Indignant," *The Augusta Chronicle*, October 30, 1892, 1.
[95] "Watson's Methods," *The Augusta Chronicle,* October 23, 1892, 1.

asserted that bribery and fraud were the Democratic standard. Yet when bribes and whisky failed to convert the independent voter, "threats were ready." Throughout the district, the October 28 article ran, "Tenants are the [sic] threatened with loss of homes. Laborers are threatened with loss of work." All this for voting in their interest, for the People's Party. "Many a man in this district who wishes to vote for Mr. Watson has been put on notice that he must give up his manhood or give up his job."[96] But not only did Democrats intimidate and threaten the voters, they were guilty of corrupting the hearts of the men in the Tenth. The "Augusta ring" of bankers and merchants, "with its whisky, its money and its lies, infuriated men who wear white skins over hearts which were not always murderous." They inspired such hatred of Watson and Doyle that, in order to get to the latter, the Democrats would have shot Watson "like a dog in his own door."[97] A small Populist paper printed in a suburb of Augusta berated the editors of the *Chronicle* for stooping "so low as to mislead and corrupt the morals of the young and unsuspecting." The article continued, "Parties of roughs roaming over the country by day and by night, ttying [sic] to intimidate P.p. voters, stopping in front of their houses cheering for Black, firing pistols and guns and scaring women and children; then the next day you may look for a sensational editorial in the Chronicle, charging third-partyites with having arsenals and arms."[98] In sum, the Populists charged the Democrats and their media organs with betraying the citizens of the Tenth through their incessant lies and bribes, riling ignorant men into a fervor of hatred, contempt, and lawlessness.

Two weeks after the Doyle incident, Georgia voters went to the polls to vote in the national elections. When the ballots were counted, no Populist candidates from Georgia were elected to Congress. In The Tenth District, Major Black defeated Tom Watson. C. Vann

[96] "An Address to the People of the Tenth District," *People's Party Paper*, October 28, 1892, 4.
[97] "Democratic Madness," *People's Party Paper,* October 28, 1892, 4.
[98] "An Appeal to Reason," *The Wool-Hat,* October 29, 1892, 8.

Woodward later said about the election, "Democrats found little difficulty in identifying the 'cause' of 1892 with the 'cause' of 1872."[99] In response to Populist appeals for federal supervisors in certain counties, one Democratic editorial proudly announced that Democrats had faced armed marshals before and were not afraid to face them again.[100]Populist votes were thrown out often, and voter fraud was rampant. In Richmond County the fraud was ubiquitous. Augusta Democrats carted in African Americans from neighboring South Carolina, voted minors, and repeated votes. In fact, "their zeal seemed to outmatch their good sense," historian Barton Shaw stated, "for Augusta reported twice as many votes as it had voters."[101] One Democrat later asserted, "We *had* to do it. Those d___ Populists would have ruined the country!"[102] But Populists were not totally innocent. Throughout the state, Populists partook in the same frauds and intimidation the Democrats did. Watson's home county of McDuffie had 267 more ballots cast than eligible voters as did many other Populist counties. While both the Democrats and Populists used the same tactics, the Democratic machine was stronger and better able to bribe, coerce, and fake, and therefore claimed victory.[103] When Watson challenged the election in the House, Democrats on the election committee, for the first time in Congress' history, denied Watson or any of his party the right to testify in his favor.[104]

Many black voters did find hope, as did Doyle, in the message of the Populists. Some, after the Doyle incident, allegedly viewed Watson as a "savior" and "were anxious even to touch

[99] Woodward, *Tom Watson,* 241.
[100] "Tom Watson's Antics," *The Augusta Chronicle*, October 28, 1892, 4.
[101] Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys,* 75-76; Woodward, *Tom Watson,* 241-242.
[102] Quoted in Alex Mathews Arnett, *The Populist Movement in Georgia: A View of the "Agrarian Crusade" in the Light of Solid-South Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), 184.
[103] Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys,* 75-76; Woodward, *Tom Watson,* 241-242.
[104] Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 258. Stealing elections was common for all parties during the Gilded Age and was often justified by the alleged outrages of opponents. Both sides generated a sense of moral outrage amongst their rank and file, making it seem that their opponents posed an existential threat that warranted bribery, coercion, and vote stealing. See Mark Wahlgren Summers, "Party Games: The Art of Stealing Elections in the Late-Nineteenth-Century United States," *Journal of American History* Vol. 88 No. 2 (Sep., 2001), 424-435.

him." At a hotel owned by a white woman, some men were so willing to see Watson they abandoned all etiquette and got rough when told to leave.[105] Nevertheless, many black men were unable to separate class from race as they saw them intricately connected. The same men claiming to be their friends in the plight of "the people" were often the ones who donned red caps and rode through the night committing violence and terror.[106] Although the rhetoric was appealing, the realities were all too visible and many blacks did not know who to trust. In the national elections, many black men stayed at home and voted for neither the Democrats nor the Populists.[107] One historian even asserted that due to the *actual* policies of the Democrats under Governor Northen's leadership compared to the *promised* policies of the Populists, many African American voters chose the Democrats as "the lesser of two evils."[108]

During the campaign, the Populists put forward a vision in which all men, white and black, could freely exercise their political rights without fear of intimidation. Politics under the Populists would be clean and true. The Democratic city bosses had maintained their power through whiskey, bribery, and violence. At the same time, the Populists contended, the Democrats worked for the wealthy elite at the expense of the working masses. Using the same rhetoric of corruption the Democrats used against the Republicans twenty years earlier, the Populists hoped for the same results. By tying Democratic boss rule and financial malfeasance to the economic and social plight of farmers and workers, the Populists implied that those who

[105] *Watson vs. Black*, 296, 782; William Holmes asserted that in Taliaferro County black votes were largely responsible for Populist victories in the 1890s, see William F. Holmes, "Populism in Black Belt Georgia: Racial Dynamics in Taliaferro County Politics, 1890-1900," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* Vol. 83 No. 2 (Summer 1999): 259.
[106] Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys,* 90. However, Litwack argued that poor whites were not alone in terrorizing African Americans as every class of whites was represented. Like the men who stood accused of threatening Doyle or the man who shot at the preacher during the state elections, prominent men were central and were in no way "above" threatening and committing violence. See Litwack, *Trouble in Mind,* 294-296. See also, Kantrowitz, "One Man's Mob," 70.
[107] Irvin D.S. Winsboro and Moses Musoke, "Lead Us Not into Temptation: Race, Rhetoric, and Reality in Southern Populism," *Historian* Vol. 65 Issue 6 (Winter 2003): 1373-1374; Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys,* 90.
[108] Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered," 110.

claimed to have "redeemed" their states were the same as those who ruled during Reconstruction. Yet what was interesting about the Populists' critiques of Democratic corruption was that they also tied this political corruption to the social "perversions" of miscegenation and "Negro rule."[109] As the election results reveal, though, the Populists' flipping of the rhetoric of corruption back onto the Democrats was not successful.

While the Populists attempted to impugn Democratic rule by using the same rhetoric the Democrats used against the Republicans, they stood on a shaky foundation. The most effective tool in the Democratic arsenal was the linking of political corruption with race. Although the Populists attempted to make this link, their insistence on the political equality of African Americans along with suggestions of armed self-defense weakened the previously effective tactics of the Redeemers. More so, the Populists' stances on African Americans in politics opened them up to Democratic rejoinders that the Populists posed the true danger to white political supremacy. Many whites still feared armed African American voters, and Democrats regularly recalled the legend of Republican misgovernment that was founded, like the Populists, on biracialism and black martial manhood. Additionally, biracial men like Seb. Doyle who openly challenged white supremacy appeared to challenge the new Democratic status quo. Democrats stated that as long as white men stood united as whites under a Democratic banner, they could stave off both of these possibilities. To Democrats, the only way to ensure order and good government was to ensure the "solidity" of the white South and the Democratic Party.

The Populists nevertheless continued fighting against the Democratic machine, but became increasingly disillusioned with the promise of biracial politics. No matter how sincerely

[109] For more on the contradictions in Populist rhetoric and the differences between rhetoric and reality, see Kantrowitz, "Ben Tillman and Hendrix McLane," 497-524; Irvin D.S. Winsboro and Moses Musoke, "Lead Us Not Into Temptation: Race, Rhetoric, and Reality in Southern Populism," *Historian* Vol. 65 Issue 6 (Winter 2003): 1354-1374.

Populist leaders tried to make the contests about class, economics, and political corruption, they were never able to escape the specter of "Negro Domination." An editorial in the *People's Party Paper* in August, 1892, summed up Southern elections perfectly: "The argument against the independent political movement in the South may be boiled down into one word – NIGGER!" It continued by putting forward the fears of whites, saying, "Pious Southern people never dreaded death so much as they do now. They fear that when they knock at the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem St. Peter will peep through the key-hole and say: 'You can't come in.'" When asked why, St. Peter would respond, "'NIGGER!'"[110] Attempting to use the Democratic rhetoric of corruption against them, the Populists failed because the link between corruption and race pulled race to the forefront. And as the Democrats were more experienced and were, in fact, the representatives of white supremacy, the Populists touched a third rail and received a larger shock than expected. With this failure of the previously successful rhetoric of corruption, the move toward white-only Populism is not surprising. True political reform could not simultaneously lean on black votes and the linking of racial perversion with political corruption, so the Populists chose the latter. Eventually they called for stronger disfranchisement to remove allegedly corruptible voters from the electorate, and, in the name of ridding politics of corruption, disfranchised the people they sought to help.

Formal disfranchisement had come in stages since the overthrow of Reconstruction. Other forms of disfranchisement had been a constant as members of every party bought, stole, and coerced votes to win even the most minor offices. In 1887, five years before the formation of the People's Party, Georgia passed a poll tax law as one of its first attempts to formally remove undesirable voters from the lists.[111] White primaries predated even this in some urban areas, but

[110] H.C. Faiman, "Nigger," *People's Party Paper,* August 26, 1892, 7.
[111] John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 94.

they would not become an official rule for the state Democratic Party until 1898.[112] Although this combination removed most black voters from the polls, African Americans still had the ability to vote if Democrats split over any issue in the general elections as the conservatives could, according to Watson, "pay up the negro's back taxes, register him as a voter, *and use him as a prop to* [their] *power*" (original emphasis). This was a strategic tool that conservative Democrats used against independent or intraparty reformers as they could call on a reserve of black votes.[113] Tom Watson proved to be one of the most vocal opponents of conservatives' control of the white primary as a barrier against reform and led the call for a constitutional amendment fully disfranchising blacks.[114] In the 1906 gubernatorial race, the issue of constitutional disfranchisement was key.

Watson, although unable to win office himself, maintained control of a large portion of the Georgia electorate; gubernatorial candidates often sought his endorsement in close races. In the 1906 fight between the reformist Hoke Smith and conservative Clark Howell, Watson publicly endorsed Smith, but only after Smith promised to run on a platform of disfranchisement. Despite Smith's initial belief that disfranchisement would be a minor issue, the contest quickly turned into one of race-baiting and heightened racial divide that pushed disfranchisement to the fore.[115] Like Watson discovered in the 1890s, Smith learned the link between race and reform proved electrifying. This intense focus on race and the divisions between whites and blacks brought back the same feelings that talk of Seb. Doyle generated back in 1892, but this time there would unfortunately be a much bloodier finale.

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[112] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 311; Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, 95.
[113] Tom Watson, "Temperate Comment Upon a Peculiar Situation," *Tom Watson's Magazine,* Volume 3 Issue 3 (1906), 265; Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, 96-97. Dittmer asserts that "with the memory of the Populist revolt still haunting them, the Democrats were not yet ready to eliminate their Negro option."
[114] Tom Watson, "Temperate Comment Upon a Peculiar Situation," *Tom Watson's Magazine*, Volume 3 Issue 3 (1906), 263-265.
[115] Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958; reprint 1967), 139-140, 147-155.

Not long after Hoke Smith won the race for Governor, the racial tensions, exacerbated by the campaign, reached the breaking point. Atlanta broke out into a four-day "riot" in which white mobs murdered and terrorized innocent black men and women. News stories of rising crime, violent rapes, and black presumptuousness fueled the growing flames of race hatred sparked by the campaign. Ironically, many of the victims of this white violence were, like Doyle, success stories who preached that social separation of the races was best for the black community. In 1907, the Georgia legislature acted on Governor Smith's promises and passed a constitutional disfranchisement amendment that Georgians ratified the next year by a majority of nearly 40,000 votes.[116]

When W.E.B. Du Bois wrote his fictional account of Doyle's experience during the Populist revolt, he took some liberties with the truth. For instance, he suggested not only that Doyle led Watson to bolt the Democratic Party for the Populists, but that "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman was the true culprit behind the attempt to lynch Doyle. But in exaggerating Doyle's significance in the world of white supremacy and black politics, Du Bois was not too far off the mark. He wrote that, "Doyle had not only studied the Negro problem, he embodied the Negro Problem."[117] Doyle, as a mixed-race man, represented the consequences of social equality. While he and Watson exposed Democratic hypocrisy by accusing the Democrats not only of political and economic corruption, but also racial corruption, Doyle's own biracial ancestry was proof of it. But as Doyle also challenged the power of white supremacy by urging his followers to resist the white power structure by standing up to racial intimidation and coercion and pushing back, the Populists criticisms proved ineffective and ultimately backfired. As it had with the Redeemers, the Populists, and Southern Progressives, the rhetoric of reform resulted in an ever-

[116] Litwack, *Trouble in Mind,* 315-319; Dittmer, *Black Georgia,* 100-102; Grantham, *Hoke Smith*, 159-162.
[117] Du Bois, *The Ordeal of Mansart,* 162, 167-170, 174-175.

greater restriction of the franchise not only of African Americans, but many of the same whites who called for the reform. In the end, Doyle continued to preach both the circuit and the gospel of political and racial reform despite the fact that the former unintentionally came at the expense of the latter. Nevertheless, there was still hope because it was tuberculosis, not a bullet, a knife, or a rope that ultimately ended his life.[118]

[118] ; Kerr County, Texas. Death Certificate no. 175 (1913), Doyle, J. [sic] S.; Texas State Board of Health, Ancestry.com, accessed February 8, 2017, http://ancestry.com.

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