

Chapter 8

Revolt of the Rednecks, 1900-1932

Chapter Preview

PEOPLE

Theodore G. Bilbo, Andrew H. Longino, Anselm J. McLaurin, Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt, Laurence C. Jones, John Sharp Williams, LeRoy Percy, Woodrow Wilson, Ida B. Wells, Belle Kearney, Nellie Nugent, Mattie Plunkett, G. A. Hobbs, Lee Russell, Henry L. Whitfield, Richard Wright

PLACES

Winona; Greenwood; Parchman Farm; Godbold Wells; Vardaman; Seneca Falls, New York; Flora; Greenville; Juniper Grove; Poplarville; Yazoo City; Chicago, Illinois; Hattiesburg; Biloxi

TERMS

inaugural address, charter, New Capitol, direct primary, white cappers, lynching, Piney Woods School, centennial, armistice, women's suffrage, bribe, protégé, property assessment, dipping, Great Migration



You will remember that, in Chapter 1, we learned how important geography has been in shaping Mississippi history. We briefly discussed the “rednecks,”

a term that described the state’s white small farmers and day laborers, who were also known as “poor whites.” We also learned in Chapter 7 that a small ruling elite known as Bourbons gained control of the Democratic Party after Reconstruction and exercised almost complete domination in state government. The Bourbons were concentrated in the counties with black majorities, and they neglected the social and economic interests of poor whites, who greatly outnumbered this ruling class.

Eventually, white small farmers and laborers in the Piney Woods and the coastal region joined with poor whites in northeast Mississippi to take control of state government. This takeover is called the “Revolt of the Rednecks.” Two of Mississippi’s most famous politicians, James K. Vardaman and Theodore G. Bilbo, were proud to be identified with the poor whites. The rednecks controlled Mississippi politics until the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Left: Mississippi’s new state capitol, completed in 1903, was larger and more ornate than the old capitol. The chamber of the Mississippi House of Representatives features this beautiful stained glass dome.

Signs of the Times

EXPANSION

Oklahoma became the 46th state in 1907. New Mexico and Arizona were added in 1912. Our nation held at 48 states until 1959. In 1920, the population of Mississippi was 1,790,618. The U.S. was 106,021,537. In 1930, Mississippi hit a new milestone at 2,009,821. The U.S. was 123,202,624.

EXPLORATION

In 1909, Americans Robert Peary and Matthew Henson and their Inuit crew became the first people known to reach the North Pole. In 1911, Roald Amundsen and four Norwegian crew members were the first to reach the South Pole.

MUSIC

Popular songs included "Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee." The blues were born in Mississippi.

LITERATURE

In 1900, L. Frank Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Between 1929 and 1932, Mississippi writer William Faulkner published some of his most famous works: *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August*.

ARCHITECTURE

In 1930, the Chrysler Building in New York City was completed, at 1,047 feet, the tallest man-made structure in the world. It was surpassed a year later by New York's Empire State Building at 1,454 feet.

SCIENCE & INVENTIONS

Many products we use today were invented in the early twentieth century: the escalator, a practical vacuum cleaner, windshield wipers, air conditioning, cellophane, and crayons, to name a few.

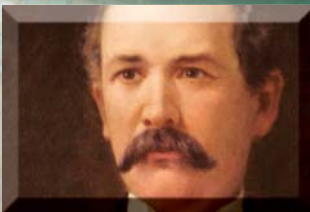
FASHION

During the Roaring Twenties, fashionable young women called "flappers" began to bob their hair and wear shorter dresses.

TRANSPORTATION

In 1903, the Wright Brothers made their first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Figure 20 Timeline: 1900-1932



1900
Andrew J. Longino began term as governor

1902
President "Teddy" Roosevelt hunted bear in Mississippi
Direct primary law passed

1903
1st direct ("white") primary election held

1904
James K. Vardaman began term as governor

1908
State child labor law passed

1912
Earl L. Brewer began term as governor; Theodore G. Bilbo as lieutenant governor

1913
James K. Vardaman began term in U.S. Senate

1916
Theodore G. Bilbo began 1st term as governor

1917
Statehood centennial

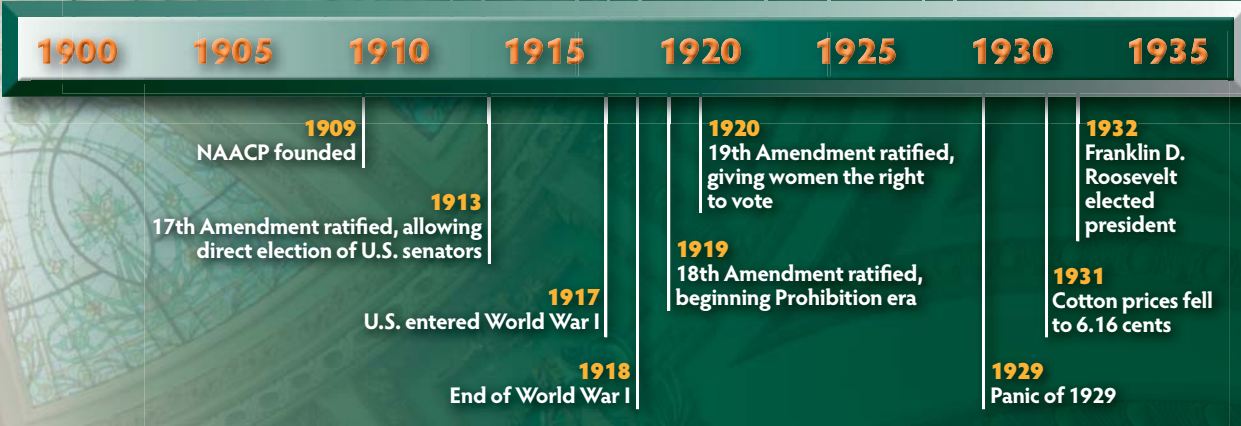
1918
James K. Vardaman defeated for reelection to U.S. Senate

1922
Vardaman defeated for election to U.S. Senate

1924
Henry L. Whitfield began term as governor

1927
Great Flood on the Mississippi River

1928
Theodore G. Bilbo began 2nd term as governor



FOOD

In 1930, Clarence Birdseye patented a system that packed foods into waxed cartons, which were flash-frozen under high pressure, starting the frozen food industry.

ENTERTAINMENT

Dance crazes of the 1920s included the Charleston, fox-trot, and tango. Commercially licensed radio stations began broadcasting in the U.S. around 1920.

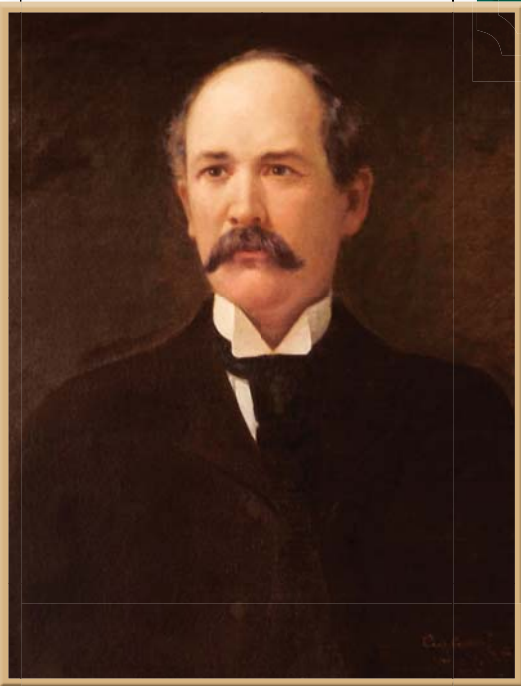
Section 1

The New Mississippi

Below: The economy of Mississippi took a leap forward under the governorship of Andrew Longino, who actively pursued new industry for the state. **Bottom:** In this panoramic view of Jackson in 1910, you can see both the New Capitol, on the far left, and the Old Capitol, just to the right of center. Jackson underwent dramatic growth during this period.

As you read, look for

- the accomplishments of Andrew H. Longino, Mississippi's first twentieth-century governor;
- the growth of the capital city and the building of the New Capitol;
- the initiation of the direct primary and its influence on the election of 1903;
- terms: **inaugural address, charter, New Capitol, direct primary.**



The turning of a century is an exciting event. In 1900, celebrations, ceremonies, and extravaganzas were held throughout America to welcome the twentieth century. The new century was hailed as an era of progress and change. But even the most imaginative Mississippians in 1900 would be dazzled by the new technology that has revolutionized the way we live. They would be dumbfounded by the social and racial changes that have come to Mississippi. History takes time. While we are living through fundamental changes in our social and political environment, we are not always aware of the breadth and depth of those changes. The changes in Mississippi during the opening years of the twentieth century were epic in their proportions.

A New Governor: Andrew H. Longino

The first governor of the new century represented a major turning point in Mississippi history. Andrew H. Longino was the first



governor elected after the Civil War who was not a Confederate veteran. He was also the last governor nominated by the convention system. In this respect, Longino represents the end of an era. He was the last governor to be handpicked by the ruling elite that dominated the state Democratic Party.

Governor Longino anticipated the sweeping changes the twentieth century would bring to Mississippi. In his **inaugural address** (the speech made by a governor or a president at the beginning of his or her term), he warned the people to brace themselves for those changes. He advised Mississippians not to look back toward the past but ahead toward the future.

New Industry for Mississippi

Governor Longino believed that Mississippi's future economic prosperity depended on industrial expansion. He encouraged the legislature to offer tax exemptions to new industries locating in Mississippi. On the basis of the number of charters issued during his administration, Governor Longino was highly successful in attracting new industry to our state.

A **charter** is the document that creates a new corporation or a new city or educational institution. During his four years in office, 1,312 charters for new businesses in Mississippi were issued. Governor Longino's plans to expand the state's manufacturing base might have solved the economic problems of Mississippi's sharecroppers and day laborers had the proposals been continued for a longer period of time. But the program of industrial expansion was abandoned by Governor Longino's successor, James K. Vardaman.

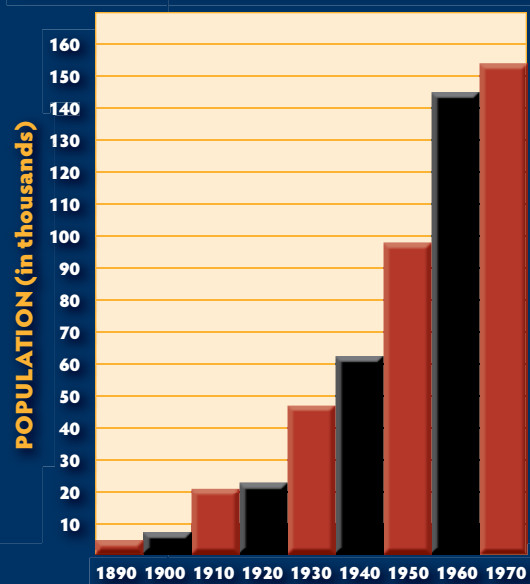
A New Capital

The impact of Governor Longino's industrial program was especially evident in Jackson. In July 1902, a local newspaper reported that over \$2.1 million in new construction was in progress in the capital city. From his inauguration in 1900 to the end of World War I in 1918, the population of Jackson more than tripled. Jackson is uniquely a city of the twentieth century. Before 1900, the state's capital grew very slowly. After the turn of the century, Jackson experienced phenomenal growth.

Something Extra!

A graduate of Mississippi College in Clinton, Andrew H. Longino was the first Mississippi governor to hold a degree from a Mississippi institution of higher learning.

Figure 21 Jackson's Population Growth





Above: This architectural rendering shows an early design for the New Capitol. Compare it to the photograph on the facing page. What are some of the changes made in the final design? **Opposite page, below:** Mississippi's new state capitol was designed by Theodore Link. The construction cost of \$1,095,681 was paid by the Illinois Central Railroad, which owed the state back taxes. In 1979, the New Capitol underwent a complete renovation at a cost of \$19 million.

A New Capitol

In addition to encouraging industrial expansion, Governor Longino recommended the construction of a new state capitol building. The old capitol, which had been in use for over sixty years, was in need of extensive repair. In 1888, an architect who examined the building predicted that the capitol might collapse at any time. After this report, a bill was introduced in the legislature authorizing the construction of a new capitol. But the bill was vetoed by Governor Anselm J. McLaurin, who objected to both the size and design of the new capitol building. Governor McLaurin said the new building would be too small and was more suitable for a county courthouse than a statehouse. No further action was taken until Governor Longino took office.

In his inaugural address, which was given in the old dilapidated capitol, Governor Longino recommended a new building that all Mississippians could be proud of. The legislature reacted favorably to his suggestion. Following groundbreaking ceremonies on January 1, 1901, construction of the capitol, which cost just over \$1 million, proceeded with few delays or difficulties. Two years later, on June 3, 1903, the **New Capitol** (the name that our statehouse is still called) was officially dedicated, and state officials moved into their new quarters in September.

A New Electoral System

The most sweeping change the new century brought to Mississippi was a new system of nominating and electing public officials. During the Bourbon era, candidates for state and county offices were nominated by state and local Democratic conventions or executive committees. Because the Bourbons controlled the Democratic Party, they handpicked the candidates for public office. Although redneck voters outnumbered the Bourbons, they could not

get their candidates elected because they could not get them nominated. Bourbons defended the existing system as a defense of white supremacy, because it kept blacks from being nominated for public office.

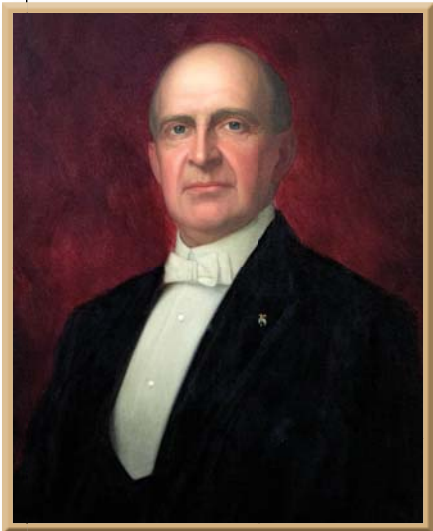
By 1900, the demand for a new system of nominating candidates had wide popular support among voters and among a large segment of the state press. In a special message to the legislature in 1900, Governor Longino said that white Mississippians were “impatient and displeased with the dubious and devious methods of the party nominating machinery.” In response to the demand of white citizens, the legislature passed a direct primary law on March 4, 1902, and Governor Longino signed the bill into law. A **direct primary** is a nominating election in which all the party’s members—not just those attending a nominating convention—vote for the candidates of their choice.

On June 22, 1903, the Mississippi Democratic Party Executive Committee met in Jackson and passed a resolution stating that only white Democrats would be entitled to vote in the party’s direct primary. The direct primary, which soon became known as the white primary, or popular primary, eliminated blacks from politics because the Democratic Party was the only *viable* (capable of succeeding) party in the state. This new method of nominating candidates transformed Mississippi politics. No longer could a few men handpick the candidates for public office, because voters nominated the candidates in a popular election. Candidates for office made their appeals directly to the people rather than to a few party leaders.

Something Extra!

The dome of the New Capitol reaches a height of 180 feet above the ground. Atop the dome is an eagle made of copper covered with gold leaf. It spreads 15 feet from wingtip to wingtip and stands 8 feet high.





Top: James K. Vardaman defeated Frank A. Critz and Edmund F. Noel to win the governorship in 1903. **Above:** Noel was elected governor in 1907.

As you have already learned, in a one-party system, elections are not usually decided on the important issues, but on the personality and style of the candidates. The primary system produced a new breed of *flamboyant* (showy, colorful) politicians who used gimmicks and oratory to gain the approval of voters. James K. Vardaman often traveled around the state on a wagon drawn by several teams of oxen. Theodore G. Bilbo and several other candidates used their red neckties to emphasize their identification with rednecks.

The winners of the August Democratic primaries were assured of victory because they did not have any opposition in the November general election. It was not until the revival of the Republican Party in the 1960s that Democratic candidates had any real competition.

New Politics: The Election of 1903

The first direct primary election was held in August 1903. That campaign set the tone and style of Mississippi politics for many years. The three major candidates for governor were Frank A. Critz, James K. Vardaman, and Edmund F. Noel. Although blacks were prohibited by Democratic Party rules from participating in the primary, and they could not influence the outcome of the election, race was still the dominant issue in that campaign. Vardaman advocated the repeal of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and accused blacks of being lazy, dishonest, and mentally unfit for citizenship. He played on the fears and negative instincts of white Mississippians and excited the people on the issue of race. Vardaman promised to keep blacks “in their place” if he were elected governor. He also promised to close black schools. Why deny the rights of citizenship to blacks, Vardaman asked, and then educate them to fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship? Vardaman said that if black schools were discontinued there would be more money for white schools throughout the state.

Vardaman’s racial rhetoric was matched by his attacks on big business, banks, and railroads. The wealthy class, he warned, ran the world for their own selfish desires and possessed no conscience or pity for the poor. During the 1903 campaign, Vardaman called for regulation of big business and the abandonment of Mississippi’s industrial expansion program. He predicted that government might have to take over the railroads and other businesses if

something was not done to curb the power of big corporations. Vardaman claimed that Governor Longino was controlled by a clique of businessmen and politicians in the state capital that he called the “Jackson Ring.” Because he was poor and had risen from a humble background, Vardaman said he was the only true representative of the people. This campaign style proved highly successful for Vardaman and other politicians for many years. Vardaman led the ticket in the first primary and then defeated Frank A. Critz in the runoff.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: inaugural address, New Capitol, direct primary.
2. What were two “firsts” associated with the election of Governor Andrew H. Longino?
3. Why did James K. Vardaman say that he was the only true representative of the people in the election of 1903?

Of Special Interest

Holt Collier, the Roosevelt Hunt, and the Teddy Bear

In 1902, President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt came to Mississippi to assist in the settlement of a boundary dispute between Louisiana and Mississippi. While he was in the state, he went bear hunting in the Yazoo River swamps. He was accompanied on the hunt by a few local residents and a guide named Holt Collier. This black hunter and famous guide claimed to have served in the Confederate army as a fighting soldier and not merely as an orderly or cook as some other blacks had done.

After a couple of days, the Roosevelt hunting party had not seen any bears and "Teddy" was getting ready to return to Washington. Shortly before the president left the hunt, a bear cub was spotted, and the other hunters offered "Teddy" the first shot. However, the president refused to shoot the cub. One of the reporters who was traveling with the president wrote a story about "Teddy's" refusal to shoot the cub. Soon a cartoon showing Roosevelt walking away from the cub appeared in newspapers throughout the country. After seeing the cartoon in a New York newspaper, a Brooklyn toy manufacturer designed a bear cub that he called a "Teddy bear" and began selling the stuffed animal. The teddy bear has remained one of the most popular toys in America for more than a hundred years.

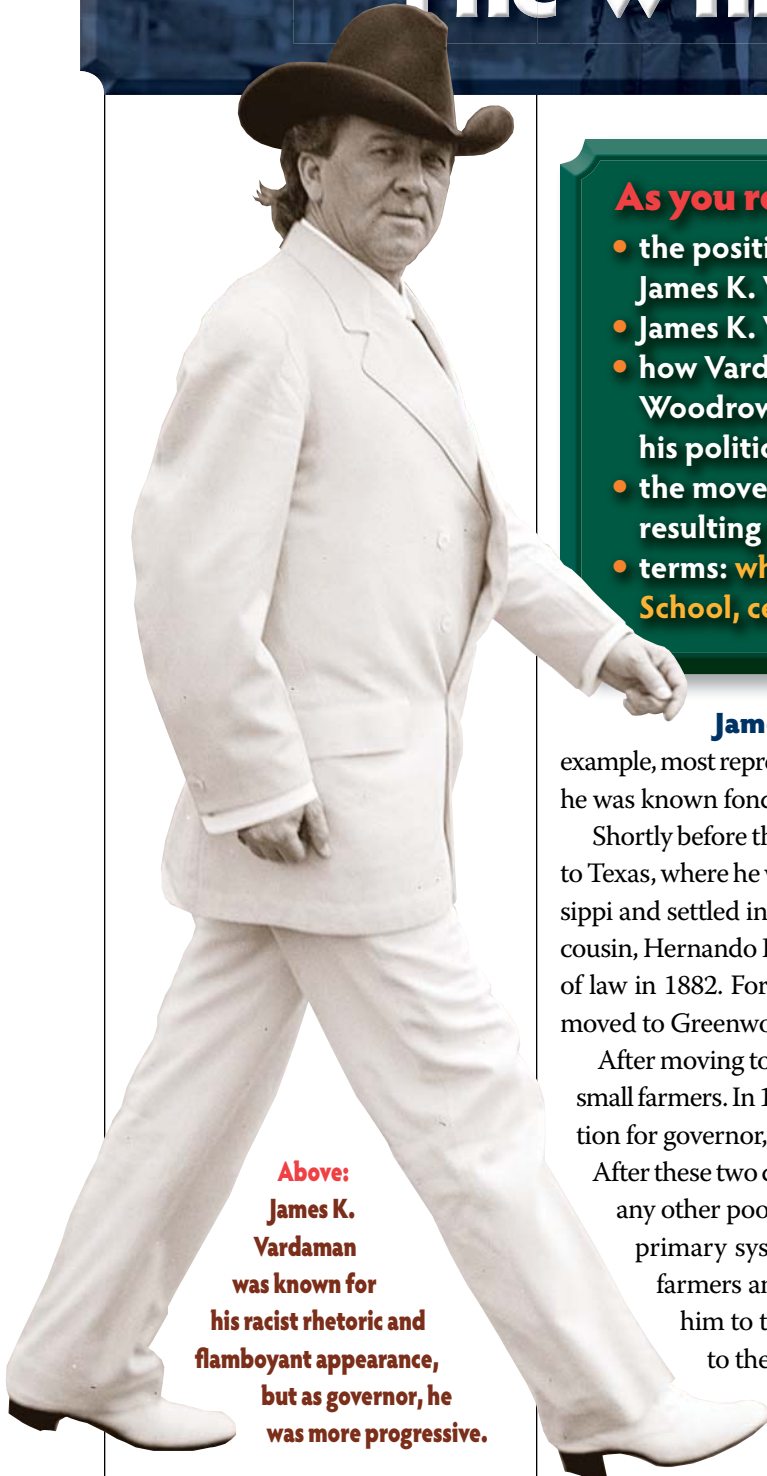


Above: President Roosevelt's famous bear hunt in Mississippi is the subject of one of the murals by Robert Dafford that decorate the waterfront at Vicksburg. In this detail, Roosevelt is mounted on horseback on the left; the guide, Holt Collier, is fourth from the right. Roosevelt's unwillingness to shoot a bear tied to a tree became a national news story and led to the creation of the teddy bear.



Section 2

James K. Vardaman, “The White Chief”



Above:
James K. Vardaman was known for his racist rhetoric and flamboyant appearance, but as governor, he was more progressive.

As you read, look for

- the positive and negative impacts of Governor James K. Vardaman’s administration;
- James K. Vardaman’s U.S. Senate campaigns;
- how Vardaman’s opposition to President Woodrow Wilson’s World War I policies led to his political downfall;
- the movement for women’s suffrage and the resulting Nineteenth Amendment;
- terms: **white cappers, lynching, Piney Woods School, centennial, armistice, women’s suffrage.**

James K. Vardaman was the quintessential (best example, most representative) redneck politician. For his vivid racial rhetoric, he was known fondly among his supporters as “The White Chief.”

Shortly before the Civil War, Vardaman’s family moved from Mississippi to Texas, where he was born on July 26, 1861. His family returned to Mississippi and settled in Yalobusha County in 1868. After studying law with his cousin, Hernando De Soto Money, Vardaman was admitted to the practice of law in 1882. For a short time, he edited the *Winona Advance*. He later moved to Greenwood and published the *Greenwood Enterprise*.

After moving to Greenwood, Vardaman became the champion of white small farmers. In 1895 and 1899, he sought the Democratic Party’s nomination for governor, but on both occasions he was rejected by party leaders. After these two defeats, Vardaman was convinced that the only way he or any other poor whites could get the nomination was through a direct primary system. In the first statewide popular primary, the poor farmers and workers rallied to Vardaman’s campaign and elected him to the state’s highest office. In 1911, Vardaman was elected to the U.S. Senate, but he was defeated for reelection in 1918, and again in 1922. After his second defeat, Vardaman moved to Alabama.

Administration of James K. Vardaman, 1904-1908

James K. Vardaman, who took the oath of office on January 19, 1904, was the first governor inaugurated in the New Capitol. In his inaugural address, Vardaman outlined the aims of his administration and promised reform and progress, at least for white Mississippians.

Improved Conditions for Blacks

Blacks did not suffer as much as might have been expected in view of Vardaman's racial theories. In two important situations, conditions for black people improved under "The White Chief."

First, Vardaman led the fight to end the convict lease system, which was still practiced in various forms even though it had been abolished under the Constitution of 1890. During his administration, several penal farms owned and operated by the state were established. The largest of these was Parchman Farm in Sunflower County, which eventually became the state penitentiary. Under the supervision of state officials, prisoners received better treatment than under private control. Because most of the convicts who had suffered abuses under the old system had been black prisoners, Vardaman's reforms worked more to the advantage of blacks than whites.

The second important way Vardaman helped blacks was in his fight against "white capping." In southwest Mississippi, black landowners aroused the anger of white farmers who were in competition with them for the sale of farm products. In an effort to reduce that competition, white farmers tried to drive black landowners off their land. These white farmers were known as **white cappers**, because they wore white hoods similar to the old Ku Klux

Something Extra!

James K. Vardaman is described as being a huge man with shoulder-length hair. His limp right arm had been mangled years before in a corn sheller. While campaigning, he often wore a white linen suit and a black broad-brim hat.

Below: Parchman Farm, officially named the Mississippi State Penitentiary, was founded in 1901 after the convict lease system was abolished. Located in the Delta, the wooded property was completely cleared for agriculture by the inmates.



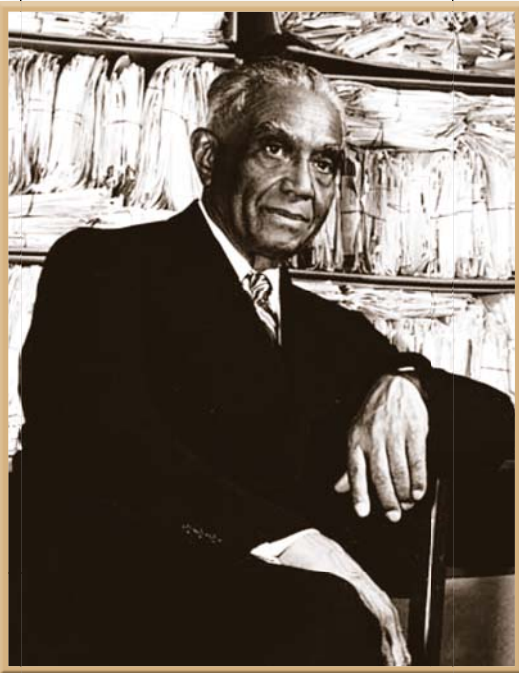
Klan. Under the orders of Governor Vardaman, state law enforcement officials infiltrated their organization. The evidence these agents accumulated was turned over to local police, and Vardaman demanded that the guilty persons be arrested and brought to trial. The governor warned local officials that, if they did not stop the terrorists from attacking the black farmers, he would order the attorney general to press charges against the white cappers. Vardaman's efforts were successful; by the end of his administration, the white cappers had ceased to exist.

Vardaman's racial actions were different from his rhetoric. During the 1903 campaign, Vardaman had said that, as a private citizen, he would help lynch a black man accused or strongly suspected of raping a white woman.

But as governor he said he would do everything within his power to prevent a **lynching** (murder by a mob, usually by hanging). On two occasions, Governor Vardaman sent the National Guard, once leading them personally, to rescue a black man from a lynch mob.

Laurence C. Jones and the Piney Woods School

In 1908, Laurence C. Jones (1884-1975) graduated from the University of Iowa. He was offered a teaching position at Tuskegee Institute, an historically black college in Alabama that is now Tuskegee University. Instead of accepting that prestigious appointment, Laurence Jones came to Mississippi and established the **Piney Woods School** in rural Rankin County. He founded the school with \$2, on forty acres that were given to him by a former slave. The first schoolhouse was an abandoned shed that he and his students repaired and painted. With thousands of alumni, the Piney Woods School is now an acclaimed educational institution spread out on two thousand choice acres with lakes, woods, and modern school buildings. The Piney Woods School is the flagship of the nation's four remaining historically African American boarding schools.



Above: Laurence C. Jones founded the Piney Woods School in 1909 to give black students in rural Mississippi the chance of a good education. Its curriculum, like that of Tuskegee Institute, combined strong academics with practical training in skills that could lead to employment.

Improvements for Poor Whites

Most of Vardaman's administration was devoted to improving the economic conditions of poor white farmers and workers. One of the most important reforms Vardaman supported was a child labor law. In the early 1900s, small children—some as young as eight years old—often worked ten or twelve hours a day in factories and mills or on farms. Governor Vardaman called for an immediate halt to this practice. Although he did not secure the passage of a law prohibiting child labor during his term, a child labor law was achieved by Vardaman's successor in 1908. Among the major reforms passed during Vardaman's administration were a school textbook commission, separate rural school districts, and a 30 percent teacher pay raise.

Other Reforms

In addition to the reforms he actually accomplished, Vardaman introduced many others that were enacted by his successors. In his farewell address to the legislature, he recommended legislative reapportionment



and an elected judiciary. He also called for state depositories to reduce the power of banks, regulation of interest rates and railroad companies, a state charity hospital, a home for elderly women, an institution for the mentally ill, and a teachers' college.

During Vardaman's four years in office, there were no accusations of corruption or graft made against him personally or his major appointees. A northern journalist touring the South shortly after Vardaman's term expired wrote that, except for his negative attitudes on race, Governor Vardaman's administration was one of the best in the state's history.

The Senatorial Election of 1907

In 1907, "The White Chief," while he was still governor, ran for the U.S. Senate seat held by his cousin, Hernando De Soto Money, who had announced that he would not seek reelection for the term that would begin in 1911. Vardaman lost that primary election to John Sharp Williams, who had represented Mississippi in the U.S. Congress for several years. After his term as governor expired in 1908, Vardaman remained in the state capital and edited the *Jackson Issue*.

The Senatorial Campaign of 1911

James K. Vardaman and LeRoy Percy were the favorite candidates for the senatorial primary election in August 1911. The winner of the primary would fill the United States Senate term beginning in 1913. Theodore G. Bilbo, a rising young star in Mississippi politics, endorsed Vardaman in this election.

As we learned in earlier chapters, politics is one of Mississippi's favorite pastimes. Although the primary for the senate seat was set for August 1911,

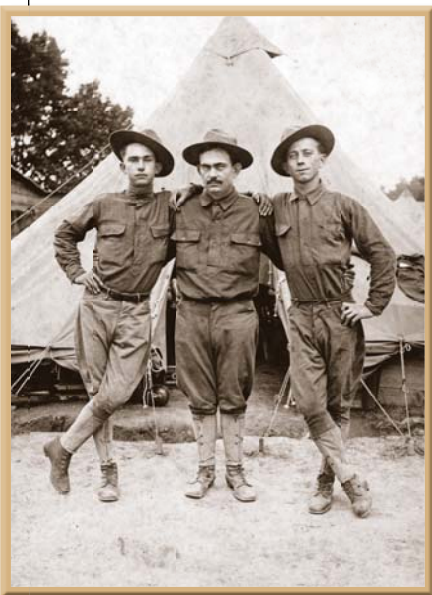
Above: The famous photographer Lewis Hine was a crusader against the use of child labor. He traveled around the country documenting the poor and often dangerous conditions children worked in. This photo was taken at the Priscilla Knitting Mills in Meridian in 1911, three years after Mississippi's child labor law was passed.

Something Extra!

The 1908 child labor law made it illegal to hire children under the age of twelve to work in factories. Six years later, the age limit for girls was changed to fourteen, but the age for boys was kept at twelve.

Something Extra!

The Seventeenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1913, called for the direct election of U.S. senators by a state's voters. Before that time, senators were chosen by a state's legislature.



Above: Soldiers of the 1st Mississippi Infantry, formed in 1916, take a break from their training to pose for a photograph. **Opposite page, above:** Senator James K. Vardaman is shown in Washington, DC, accompanied by Mississippi congressman Byron "Pat" Harrison (left) and General Clarence Edwards (right). Harrison would take Vardaman's seat in 1918 and serve for 22 years. **Opposite page, below:** Belle Kearny was the first woman elected to the Mississippi State Senate.

stump speeches and political rallies began in the spring of 1910. Vardaman, a folksy and flamboyant stump orator, waged an unrelenting personal attack on Percy, the soft-spoken aristocrat and Delta planter. Class antagonism—bitterness between the rich and the poor—was evident in this ugly campaign. It was in this contest that the term “redneck” took on a political meaning. During a speech at Godbold Wells on July 4, 1910, Percy was frequently interrupted and heckled by Vardaman supporters. Finally, an exasperated Percy shouted them down and called them a bunch of “cattle” and “rednecks.” Vardaman followers quickly picked up the term and used it in their campaign speeches and literature. Vardaman was proud to be identified with white farmers and laborers who toiled in the fields doing an honest day's work.

The 1911 election had the largest voter turnout of any primary election up to that time. Vardaman defeated Percy by a vote of 79,000 to 21,000. Theodore G. Bilbo was elected lieutenant governor, and Vardaman supporters won a majority in the state legislature. For the next several years, Vardaman's *machine* (a highly organized political group) controlled Mississippi politics. His machine was destined, however, for an early breakdown, and Vardaman was soon replaced by Bilbo as the state's most powerful and colorful politician.

World War I

In 1917, Mississippi was preparing to celebrate its **centennial** (100-year anniversary) of statehood, but America's entry into World War I caused the cancellation of that celebration. Although several military installations were established in Mississippi, and approximately 56,700 Mississippians served in the armed forces, World War I had only a temporary impact on the state's economy. Most of the new jobs available to Mississippians during the war were discontinued after the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. (An **armistice** is an agreement to stop fighting while coming to terms for a peace treaty.) Perhaps the most direct impact the war had on Mississippi politics was the defeat of Senator Vardaman.

Most Mississippians supported America's participation in the war that President Woodrow Wilson called the “war to end all wars.” One of Mississippi's U.S. senators, John Sharp Williams, voted for American involvement in the war and strongly supported President Wilson. Mississippi's other senator did not. James K. Vardaman was one of six U.S. senators to vote against the declaration of war on April 6, 1917.

Vardaman Defeated

Senator Vardaman, who was up for reelection in 1918, was defeated primarily because he had opposed President Wilson's wartime policies. After first criticizing Wilson's domestic program, which he said offered too little for the common man, Vardaman became one of the most outspoken opponents of Wilson's military policy before and after World War I. Vardaman not only voted against the declaration of war, he also voted against the draft. The Mississippi press, which almost unanimously supported America's entry into the war, often referred to Vardaman as “Herr von Vardaman,” and accused him of being worthy of the German Kaiser's Iron Cross military decoration.

During Vardaman's reelection campaign in 1918, President Wilson addressed a letter to the senator's opponents expressing his desire to see Vardaman defeated. President Wilson's letter was published in many Mississippi newspapers and helped Congressman Byron Patton Harrison defeat Vardaman by almost 13,000 votes. After he was defeated again in 1922, Vardaman moved to Alabama, where he lived until his death on June 25, 1930. The town of Vardaman in Calhoun County is named in honor of James K. Vardaman.



Women's Suffrage

Although America was one of the world's great democracies, the U.S. Constitution did not allow women to vote or hold public office until 1920. Strong public support for **women's suffrage** (women's right to vote) began with the 1848 Seneca Falls, New York, Convention. Three Mississippi women—Ida B. Wells, Belle Kearney, and Nellie Nugent—were active in the women's suffrage movement. One of the most important and enduring changes in American history came in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment extending the *franchise* (right to vote) to women. With their newly won right to vote, women refreshed American democracy and brought an earnestness to politics and public policy that the nation had not known before.

Mrs. Theodore G. Bilbo, who actively campaigned for her husband in his early races, may have been the first woman in Mississippi to participate in the political process. In the first state election after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, Belle Kearney of Flora was elected to the Mississippi Senate, and Nellie Nugent of Greenville was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives.



Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: lynching, centennial, women's suffrage.
2. Why was a child labor law such a needed reform in the early 1900s?
3. Why was James K. Vardaman defeated in his U.S. Senate reelection campaign of 1918?

Something Extra!

Mississippi was the last state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. It did not do so until 1948.

Section 3

“The Man” Bilbo

Below: Theodore G. Bilbo, from Juniper Grove in Pearl River County, started his career as a schoolteacher. He went on to become one of the most colorful and influential politicians in Mississippi history, serving as a state senator, lieutenant governor, two-term governor, and three-term U.S. senator. Always controversial, he was charged with bribery early in his career, and was under investigation by the U.S. Senate when he died in 1947.

As you read, look for

- the colorful political campaigns of Theodore G. Bilbo;
- the positive and negative impacts of Bilbo's terms as lieutenant governor and governor;
- the progressive leadership of Governor Henry L. Whitfield;
- the effect of the Great Migration on Mississippi's population;
- Bilbo's years in the U.S. Senate;
- terms: **bribe, protégé, property assessment, dipping, Great Migration.**



Although he was only five feet and two inches tall, Governor Theodore G. Bilbo is a towering figure in Mississippi history. From 1907 to 1947, Bilbo, who was often referred to as “The Man” by friends and foes alike, was one of Mississippi's most illustrious and controversial politicians. His long career was punctuated by scandals and bribery, by victories and defeats. Probably no other Mississippi public figure could elicit such unqualified loyalty on the one hand and such bitter opposition on the other.

Early Life

The youngest of several children, Bilbo was born at Juniper Grove in Pearl River County on October 13, 1877. His father was a small farmer who later became the president of a small town bank at Poplarville. Bilbo entered high school at fifteen and graduated four years later in 1896. Although he was “authorized” by the Baptist denomination to preach, as he often did, he decided not to become an ordained minister. After attending George Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee, he taught school in south Mississippi.

His first political campaign was in 1903, when he ran for circuit clerk of Pearl River County against a one-armed Confederate veteran. When he was told that he lost the election by fifty-six votes, he replied, "You know, I could see that empty sleeve myself when I went into the booth to vote." He then added, "I started to vote for him myself." After this defeat, Bilbo taught for two years at a boarding school in Wiggins.

State Senator Bilbo

In 1907, Bilbo returned to Poplarville to run for the Mississippi Senate. After winning that election, Bilbo took the bar examination and was admitted to the practice of law. When he entered the Senate chamber for the first time, Bilbo told a friend, "This is my world, and [I am] going to conquer it." Bilbo was very ambitious; within two years, his name would become a household word throughout Mississippi.

During a special session of the Mississippi Senate to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate caused by the death of Anselm J. McLaurin, Bilbo became as famous as the two men seeking the senate seat. Bilbo accused the supporters of LeRoy Percy of paying him a \$645 bribe to vote for Percy, who, in the end, won the election and served from 1910-1913. A **bribe** is money or a favor given or promised in order to influence a person in a position of trust. Instead of bringing charges against Percy and his supporters for offering the bribe, the Senate formally charged Bilbo with accepting a bribe. A resolution to expel Bilbo fell one vote short of the two-thirds majority required for his expulsion. However, a resolution asking him to resign because he was "unfit to sit with honest, upright men" passed by a vote of twenty-five to one. Claiming that he had been framed, Bilbo refused to resign and vowed to take his case directly to the people and let them decide his political future.

Lieutenant Governor Bilbo

After the Mississippi Senate reprimanded him, Bilbo entered the race for lieutenant governor in 1911. Running as a martyred victim of the aristocracy that had tried to bribe him, Bilbo campaigned with his characteristic fury. The 1911 campaign was one of the most exciting contests in Mississippi's stormy political history. Class antagonism was the keynote of the campaign. "The fight between the classes and the masses is on," Bilbo announced. Throughout the campaign, Bilbo not only wore a red necktie, he also wore red suspenders. When asked why he wore both, Bilbo replied, "The red suspenders keep up my pants, and the red necktie keeps up my courage."

On some occasions, the political struggle actually became a physical struggle. When an opponent made some derogatory remarks about Bilbo, "The Man" leaped up on the platform and physically assaulted the speaker. This incident was only one of several situations in which Bilbo was involved in a physical as well as a political confrontation. In a speech in east Mississippi, Bilbo referred to Washington D. Gibbs of Yazoo City as "Old Wash Gibbs, a



Above: In 1910, LeRoy Percy, a wealthy planter from Greenville, ran against James K. Vardaman to fill the U.S. Senate seat of Anselm McLaurin. Percy won, but following the election, Theodore Bilbo claimed that Percy supporters had bribed him. Bilbo was charged with accepting a bribe.

Something Extra!

As lieutenant governor, Bilbo became the presiding officer of the Mississippi Senate, which a year earlier had declared him unfit to sit among honest and upright men.

renegade Confederate soldier.” When Bilbo later spoke in Yazoo City, Gibbs walked up to Bilbo and, without warning, hit “The Man” in the head with a walking stick. Known among his friends as the “War Horse of Yazoo,” Gibbs hit Bilbo so hard that he broke the walking stick. Bilbo fell semiconscious to the gutter. After lying there for a few minutes, “Bilbo deguttered himself and made a quick pass at Gibbs, missing the ‘war horse’ completely.” Gibbs offered to continue the fight, but Bilbo declined, stating he had a speaking engagement in Belzoni. When the election finally took place, Bilbo won by 23,000 votes.

Bilbo and Bribery Charges

To investigate corruption among state officials, Mattie Plunkett, the state librarian, also acted as an undercover agent. Miss Plunkett hid a recording machine in the law library in the state capitol building. Bilbo and his law partner, G. A. Hobbs, were among the officials whose conversations were recorded by the unsuspected lady detective. On the evidence recorded by Miss Plunkett, they were indicted and tried for accepting a \$2,000 bribe from a Delta businessman who wanted their help in establishing a new county in the Delta. Although both Bilbo and Hobbs were eventually acquitted, this episode led Bilbo to again seek vindication from the people. He announced that he would run for governor in 1915.

Governor Bilbo's First Administration, 1916-1920

Political factionalism and bitterness reached an all-time high during the 1915 campaign. Fred Sullens, the editor of the *Jackson Daily News*, said that, if Bilbo were elected governor, the eagle on the dome of the state capitol should be taken down and replaced by a buzzard. In spite of this opposition from one of the state's best known and most powerful editors, Bilbo defeated four other candidates in the first primary. Lee Russell, a Bilbo **protégé** (a

person being trained by a more experienced person), was elected lieutenant governor and succeeded Bilbo to the governorship in 1920.

Governor Bilbo inherited a \$1 million deficit. To pay off the state debt, Bilbo recommended an equalization of property assessments. A **property assessment** is an official valuation of property for tax purposes. When he took office, real estate was assessed at only 25 or 30 percent of its actual value. Bilbo recommended that all property be assessed at its actual value.



Above: Midway through his first term as governor, Bilbo ran for the U.S. House of Representatives. He lost to Paul Johnson Sr., who gave speeches accompanied by the sound of cowbells to remind voters that Bilbo had signed an unpopular livestock dipping law.

He wanted the wealthy property owners to pay higher taxes and the poor to pay lower taxes. This new tax plan was enacted by the legislature and allowed the state to balance its budget for the first time in many years.

Educational reforms would naturally be of interest to an ex-teacher. Governor Bilbo considered the governor to be head of the public school system in the same way that he was head of the state militia. He took several educators on a tour of northern schools to find new methods that could be used to modernize Mississippi's school system.

Additional reforms accomplished during Bilbo's first term included a board of pardons, a state highway department, an expanded public health program, and a livestock dipping law. **Dipping** is immersing animals in a solution to eradicate disease by killing bacteria or parasites.

In 1918, the young and ambitious Bilbo ran for the U.S. House of Representatives but lost to Paul B. Johnson Sr. However, his defeat was not as crucial as Vardaman's loss in the U.S. Senate race. Vardaman not only lost that election, he also lost his position as the leader of Mississippi rednecks. Theodore G. Bilbo was the champion of the rednecks after 1918.

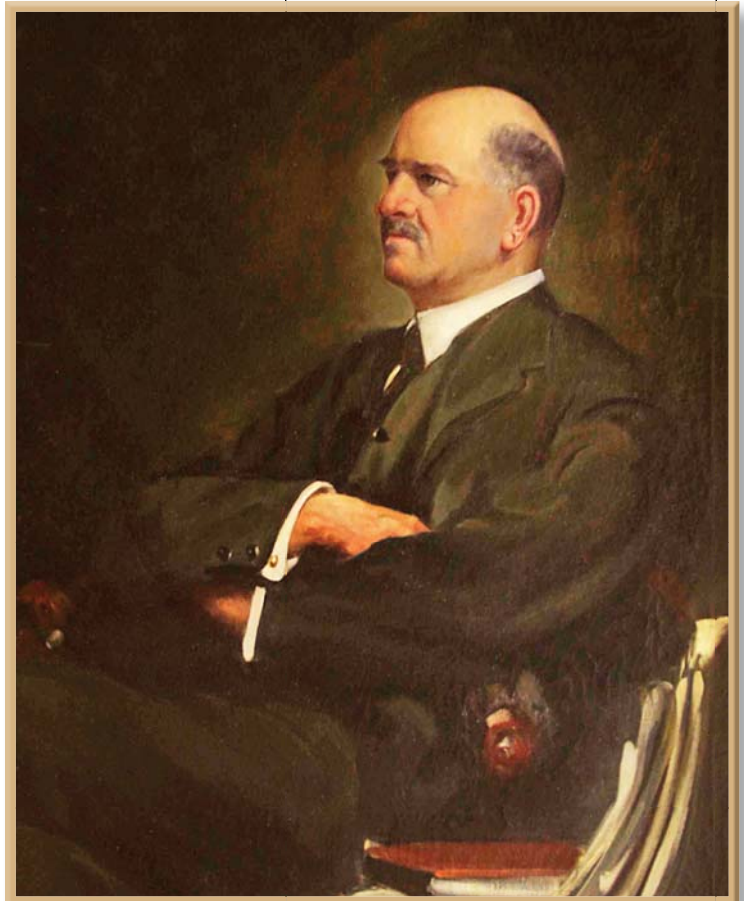
Something Extra!

Bilbo's signature on the 1916 livestock dipping law was one of the key factors in his defeat in the 1918 congressional race. Mississippi farmers considered it a dangerous nuisance to drive their animals to public vats every two weeks and immerse them in arsenic.

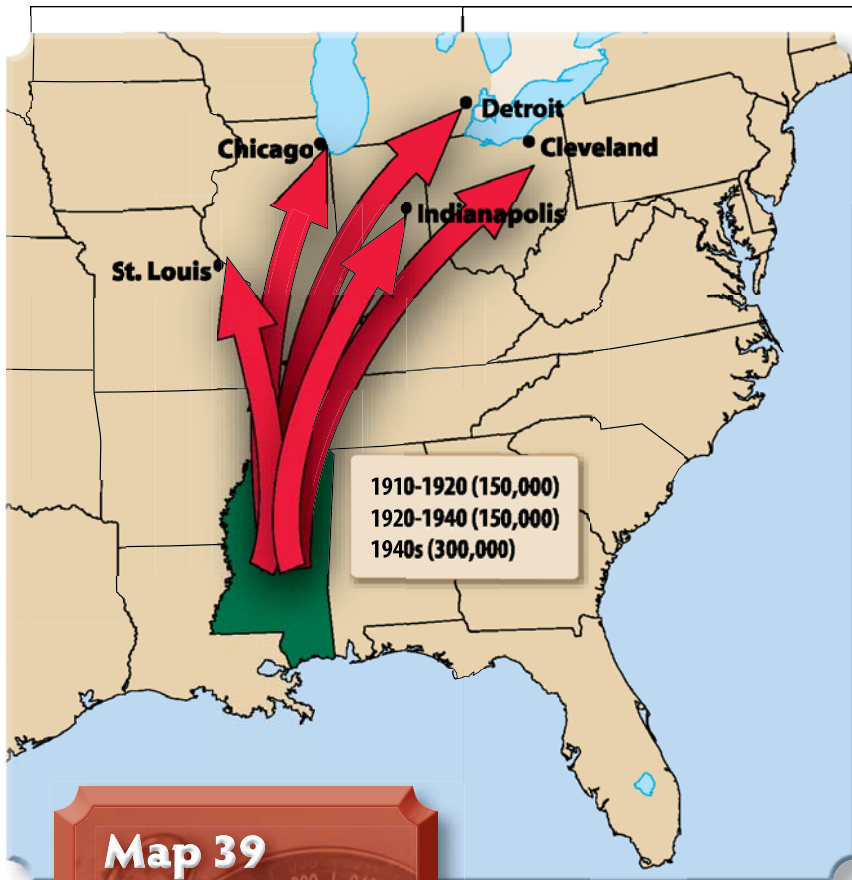
Administration of Henry L. Whitfield, 1924-1927

In 1923, women in Mississippi voted in a *gubernatorial* (pertaining to the governor) campaign for the first time. Their vote undoubtedly gave Henry L. Whitfield, the former president of Mississippi State College for Women, his narrow margin of victory over Theodore Bilbo. After taking office, Governor Whitfield embraced a broad agenda that included better mental health care, expansion of vocational training, attracting industry to Mississippi, and improvement in the quality of life for Mississippi blacks. Whitfield's moderate position on race received a generally favorable response and even praise from some of the state's leading newspapers. The Committee of One Hundred, an organization of prominent Mississippi black men, also praised Governor Whitfield for his racial concern.

After taking office, Governor Whitfield established a state-sponsored program to attract industry to Mississippi. New industry, Whitfield said, was the only means of providing employment to farmers who were no longer able to make a living from their exhausted and eroded small farms. Though his success was modest, a later administration would revive and expand upon Whitfield's initial efforts to balance agriculture with industry. Governor Whitfield's progressive leadership was unfortunately shortened by his death in 1927.



Above: Henry L. Whitfield defeated Bilbo in 1923 with help from women, who were voting in a Mississippi governor's race for the first time.



Map 39

The Great Migration

Map Skill: Which states contain the five cities where most blacks moved?

The Great Migration

In the 1920s, farm tenancy and rural poverty were on the rise, and racial violence showed a corresponding increase. The old Ku Klux Klan was revived, and public lynchings became a national disgrace. The racial brutality and mob violence that Governor Whitfield condemned in his inaugural address were so widespread in Mississippi that a group of lawyers published a book titled *Mississippi and the Mob*. The purpose of the book was to persuade all Mississippians that mob violence must be stopped. Lawyers, educators, doctors, politicians, and even schoolchildren were called upon to do what they could to discourage lynching. Law enforcement authorities were especially urged to arrest individuals who participated in mob violence. The Klan was also accosted and condemned by the Mississippi

Council of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching.

After World War I, Mississippi's black population began a long period of decline that historians call the **Great Migration**. In the early years of the Great Migration, an estimated 150,000 African Americans left Mississippi between 1910 and 1920. From 1920 to 1940, another 150,000 migrated to northern states. The *Chicago Defender*, a popular black newspaper in that city, lured many black Mississippians to Chicago, calling it the "promised land." The second wave of the Great Migration occurred from 1940 to 1970. During and immediately after World War II, from 1940 to 1950, more than 300,000 black Mississippians migrated to northern cities in search of jobs and a better life. Some historians have estimated that as many as 5 million blacks may have left the fields and farms of the Deep South during the Great Migration. In the 1960s, with the passage of the civil rights legislation, the outmigration began to decline. By the early 1970s, the Great Migration from Mississippi had ended, and the state's black population increased from 815,770 in 1970 to 1,098,385 in 2010.

White officials and businessmen, especially Delta planters, discouraged the migration because it created a labor shortage. They often took drastic measures to keep blacks in the state, in the fields, and in virtual bondage. In Greenville, policemen would board the outbound trains and physically force blacks off the train and back to the fields. In Hattiesburg and Jackson, authorities arrested blacks who tried to buy train tickets. In some cities, railroad officials would sidetrack the cars with black passengers and make them

get off the train. Such unlawful tactics only made blacks more determined to leave the state and seek freedom in the North.

In some rare cases, black leaders used the threat of migration to improve their working conditions. When a local school official told LeRoy Percy, the Delta planter, that blacks were more likely to remain in the Delta if racial violence and intimidation were eliminated, Percy persuaded other whites to support his effort to drive the Klan out of Greenville and the Delta.

Black organizations like the Committee of One Hundred—which included black ministers, businessmen, and educators—convinced friendly whites to improve the lives of black Mississippians as a means of keeping more blacks from joining the Great Migration. Under the leadership of Jonas Edward Johnson, the Committee of One Hundred persuaded the all-white College Board to expand the Alcorn A&M curriculum so blacks would not have to go out of state for a collegiate education.

In spite of all that black leaders and a few friendly whites could do, the social and economic conditions of black Mississippians did not improve, and the Great Migration continued and even increased after World War II. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Mississippi began to change. The Great Migration slowed and eventually came to an end. Many of the blacks who moved north began to come back home, and by the early 1970s the Great Migration had ended. Since then, Mississippi's population has steadily increased to 2,967,297 in 2010.

One of Mississippi's best known and most highly regarded African Americans who joined the Great Migration was Richard Wright, perhaps America's foremost black writer. Isabel Wilkerson, in her recent book, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (2010), quotes Richard Wright, who said that he left the South to feel "the warmth of other suns."

Governor Bilbo's Second Administration, 1928-1932

In 1927, Bilbo made his third race for governor. Bilbo's campaign, and those of all other politicians, were hampered by the devastation caused by the Great Flood of 1927. Bilbo and most politicians promised, if elected, to improve the levee system and prevent similar catastrophes in the future. His platform also called for the establishment of a state-owned printing press to supply free textbooks for public schools and a comprehensive highway program at a projected cost of \$82 million. He called for the merger of Mississippi A&M and The University of Mississippi into one university to be located at Jackson. Bilbo



Above: Theodore Bilbo's second term was less successful than his first, as a number of the reforms he proposed, including free textbooks and consolidation of the state's university system, failed to pass. This portrait of Bilbo hangs in the Mississippi state capitol.



Above: Governor Bilbo, third from the left, welcomes a group of visitors to his office in the New Capitol. The Great Depression had taken hold by the end of his second term, ruining the state's economy.

was elected by a majority of 16,500 votes. His free textbook proposal was not enacted, and his highway program was eventually abandoned during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The most controversial aspect of Bilbo's second administration was the crisis involving the state institutions of higher learning. There was such strong opposition to his plans to consolidate some colleges and move The University of Mississippi to Jackson that Bilbo eventually abandoned them.

Governor Bilbo's second administration commenced just as the Great Depression was beginning. It ended as the nation's economy reached the deepest decline in American history, and Bilbo was unable to prevent the state's financial ruin. When Bilbo left office in 1932, he was disheartened, and many believed that his political career was at an end. The economic depression was at its depth in Mississippi. The Mississippi press recorded Bilbo's political demise, and Fred Sullens printed this epitaph:

*Beneath this stone old Theo lies;
Nobody laughs and nobody cries;
Where he's gone or how he fares;
Nobody knows, and nobody cares.*

Bilbo's Senatorial Career

Like the sea that gives life and is unruly, Mississippi politics can also be unpredictable. In 1934, Bilbo ran for the U.S. Senate and was elected. He was reelected in 1940 and again in 1946. Most of his energy in the Senate

was expended in opposing civil rights bills, antilynching laws, and the Fair Employment Practices Commission. In 1947, the U.S. Senate took steps to deny Bilbo his seat on the grounds that large numbers of Mississippi blacks had been denied the right to vote in the 1946 senatorial election.

There were other charges also pending against Bilbo. During World War II, Bilbo had made some expensive repairs and improvements on his twenty-three-room mansion at Poplarville. Much of the work had been done by government contractors who were building Keesler Field at nearby Biloxi. Several Mississippi newspapers reported that the work was done without charge and in violation of federal laws prohibiting public officials from doing personal business with wartime contractors. The U.S. Senate was already investigating these charges when the question of Bilbo's right to take office became an issue in 1947. Senator Bilbo became ill, however, and the Senate postponed any action until he could return to Washington to defend himself against those charges. Bilbo did not recover; he died in New Orleans on August 21, 1947.

The bells that tolled the death of Bilbo also sounded for the rednecks. He was the last of his kind, the end of an era. The redneck faction of the Democratic Party had already lost control to a new breed of Mississippi politicians. A new period of conflict and change had begun. We will study that era in the following chapter.



Above: Bilbo found new political life by winning a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1934. He used this national forum to give voice to his views on white supremacy, which were extreme, even by the standards of the day. He proposed deporting all blacks to Africa to ease unemployment, and made public his membership in the Ku Klux Klan. He also carried on a feud with Mississippi's other senator, Pat Harrison, who refused to even speak to him.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: bribe, protégé, Great Migration.
2. What resulted from Mattie Plunkett's secret recordings in the Mississippi law library?
3. Why did the U.S. Senate take steps to deny Theodore G. Bilbo his Senate seat in 1947?

Chapter Review

Chapter Summary

Section 1 The New Mississippi

- Andrew H. Longino, the last governor picked by rulers of the state Democratic Party, attracted new industry.
- Between 1900 and 1918, Jackson grew rapidly; in 1903, the New Capitol was dedicated.
- The 1902 direct primary law allowed party members to vote directly for candidates.
- Democrats turned the direct primary into a white or popular primary.
- By promising to keep blacks “in their place” and attacking big business, banks, and railroads, James K. Vardaman won the governorship in 1903.

Section 2 James K. Vardaman, “The White Chief”

- Despite his rhetoric, Vardaman actually helped blacks by ending the convict lease system and fighting against “white capping.”
- In 1908, Laurence C. Jones established the Piney Woods School.
- In 1911, Vardaman defeated LeRoy Percy in a U.S. Senate race. During this race, the term “red-neck” took on political meaning.
- Because he opposed America’s involvement in World War I, Vardaman lost the 1918 U.S. Senate election. He was defeated again in 1922.
- In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment gave voting rights to women.

Section 3 “The Man” Bilbo

- In 1907, Theodore G. Bilbo was elected to the state Senate.
- During a special state Senate session, Bilbo was accused of accepting a bribe and was almost expelled from the state Senate.
- In his successful 1911 run for lieutenant governor, Bilbo wore a red necktie and suspenders.

- Bilbo was accused of bribery again, but he and his law partner were later acquitted.
- Bilbo won the governorship in 1915; he balanced the state budget by equalizing property assessments.
- Bilbo’s accomplishments included educational reforms and establishment of a board of pardons, highway department, expanded public health program, and livestock dipping law.
- Bilbo was defeated in a 1918 congressional race and lost to Henry L. Whitfield in the 1923 governor’s race.
- Governor Whitfield promoted better mental health care, expansion of vocational training, attracting industry, and improvements for blacks.
- In the 1920s, racial violence increased with the revival of the Ku Klux Klan and public lynchings.
- After World War I, Mississippi’s black population declined with the Great Migration. There was another wave of migration from 1940 to 1970.
- In 1927, Bilbo won the governorship shortly after the Great Flood and just as the Great Depression was beginning. He couldn’t prevent the state’s financial ruin, and many thought his political career was over.
- Bilbo was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1934, 1940, and 1946. He opposed civil rights bills, anti-lynching laws, and fair employment practices.
- In 1946, the Senate tried to deny Bilbo his seat because many blacks had been denied the right to vote. There was also a scandal involving improvements to his mansion. He died before he could defend himself against these charges.

Activities for Learning

Understanding the Facts

1. How did Governor Longino and the legislature attract new industry to the state?
2. Prior to 1902, how did the Democratic Party select candidates for public office? What new method was adopted?
3. What groups and entities did James K. Vardaman attack during his 1903 campaign?
4. Who founded the Piney Woods School? What was its purpose?
5. What reforms proposed by Governor Vardaman were intended to improve the condition of poor white farmers and workers?
6. Who was the first woman elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives? The Mississippi Senate?
7. List the offices Theodore G. Bilbo held during his political career.
8. Who pursued a progressive agenda during his term as governor?
9. What methods were used to discourage migration from Mississippi?

Developing Critical Thinking

1. How did James K. Vardaman's racist talk contrast with his first term as governor?
2. Why would Fred Sullens of the *Jackson Daily News* say that if Theodore G. Bilbo were elected governor, the eagle on the top of the state capitol dome should be replaced with a buzzard?

Writing across the Curriculum

1. Write a report or prepare a presentation on the extraordinary life of Holt Collier—the Civil War veteran, cowboy, and bear hunter mentioned in this chapter.

2. Bukka White, a Mississippi blues musician, served a three-year prison sentence at Parchman Farm. A verse from *Parchman Farm Blues*, one of White's most famous songs, is below:

You go to work in the mornin', just the dawn of day, just the dawn of day.

Go to work in the mornin', just at the dawn of day. And at the settin' of the sun that is when your work is done.

Now, listen you men: I don't mean no harm, I don't mean no harm.

Now, listen. You men. I don't mean no harm.

If you wanna do good you better stay off old Parchman's Farm.

Review page 221 and write your own lyrics about Parchman Farm.

Exploring Mississippi on the Internet:

Go to <http://www.digitaldocsinabox.org/images/LewisHine/duncanfamily.html>.

Examine and write a caption for this photograph of a family involved with child labor.

Building 21st-Century Skills: Recognizing Push and Pull Factors

When a large number of people move from one region to another, historians often look for push and pull factors that contributed to this migration. Push factors are conditions that led people to leave a certain area (e.g., war or disease). Pull factors are conditions that attracted people to a certain area (e.g., fertile land or freedom).

Review the Great Migration in this chapter and in other sources. Identify the push and pull factors that led to this movement.