

The Democrats appeal to voters

News and Observer (Raleigh, N.C.), November 3, 1898.

As you read...

On November 3, 1898, five days before the election, the front page of the *News and Observer* carried this editorial by Democratic state party chairman Furnifold Simmons. In the editorial, Simmons summarized the issues on which the Democrats had campaigned and made a final plea for votes.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. According to Simmons, what was the 1898 election about?
2. What were Simmons' arguments in favor of white supremacy?
3. Why did Simmons believe that it was improper for white men to be subject to the authority of African American men? What evidence did he have to support this claim?
4. What did Simmons claim happened to white women in the state?
5. What evidence did Simmons have that the Fusionist government was not effective?
6. According to Simmons, what shady or illegal voting practices were the Republicans or Fusionists contemplating to win the election?
7. Why did Simmons believe whites were turning to the Democratic party?

It was charged and proved that, knowing Senator Pritchard to be a gold Republican¹. nineteen Fusionists, elected as Populists and pledged to silver, betrayed the cause of the honest Populists, who voted for and elected them, and sold their votes to Senator Pritchard, in consideration of appointments under McKinley's administration.

It was charged and proved that public office was made a commercial commodity, and bartered and sold for a price, unblushingly, openly and systematically.

It was charged and proved that the superintendent of the penitentiary had squandered and misappropriated the public property of that institution until his conduct had become notorious, and the Governor then transferred him to the head of the Agricultural Department, where, he said, the opportunity for despoiling the people would be less.

It was charged that the books of the penitentiary would show pilfering, PECULATIONS, FALSE ENTRIES, and untold CORRUPTION. This charge was not proved only because the custodians of the books closed them to the public gaze.

Nor were the scandals and disgraces of the Fusion administration confined to venality, corruption and pilfering. As the superintendent of the penitentiary was removed for his misconduct in one line, so the physician for the insane at the penitentiary fled the State upon charges of vile conduct too repulsive to name, and the penitentiary farms were shown to be dens of iniquity, too foul to be described.

As these and other like charges, one after the other, were presented, and the proofs adduced, the chief witnesses being members of the party in power, the Fusionists attempted to take refuge first behind one cover and then behind another. But all in vain. They were drive from every position by the inexorable logic of FACTS — FACTS that could neither be successfully denied, controverted nor explained. Pressed to the wall, exposed in all their nakedness, they resorted to a campaign as despicable as the cause which they defended. Against evidence, facts, and argument, they opposed falsehoods, misrepresentations and slander. As disgraceful as had been their administration of public affairs, their method of defense, when brought sharply to the bar of public opinion, was still more despicable.

For the first time in the annals of political campaigning in the State, their desperate leaders threw away all reserve and semblance of truth, and deliberately sought by misrepresentations and falsehoods to deceive the people about the damning facts which make up their well-established record. Most palpable truths with reference to their record were disputed and denounced as "Democratic lies." But like the letters on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, they blazed forth in the public view² to their utter confusion and dismay.

In the midst of all this din and conflict, there came a voice from the East, like the wail of Egypt's midnight cry³. It was not the voice of despair, but of rage. A proud race, which had never known a master, which had never bent the neck to the yoke of any other race, by the irresistible power of fusion laws and fusion legislation had been placed under the control and domination of that race which ranks lowest, save one, in the human family.

The business of two of the largest and most prosperous cities in the State had been paralyzed by the blight of negro domination.

In another city a white majority had been discriminated against in favor of a black minority, and the white man, who bore all the burdens and expense of government, had been given only one-half the representation of the ignorant and non-taxpaying negro.

WHITE WOMEN, of pure Anglo-Saxon blood, had been arrested upon groundless charges, by negro constables, and arraigned and tried and sentenced by negro magistrates.

Finally, as a result of the insolence and aggressiveness which his sudden elevation to power had engendered in the negro, a leader and representative of that race, dared openly and publicly to assail the virtue of our pure WHITE WOMANHOOD. Suddenly the venality, the corruption in office, the extravagance, the peculation of funds, and the miserable scandals that had disgraced the State, passed out of the public mind, and in a whirl of indignation, which burst forth like the lava from the pent-up volcano, there was thrust to the front the all-absorbing and paramount question of WHITE SUPREMACY.

Frantically, the Fusion leaders thought to stay the storm of indignation, which swept like a tornado over the State.

In their desperation, the Fusionists had recourse to their old device of denial, of evasion, of subterfuge. They said it was the "old negro racket;" they said there was no truth in it; they said there might be a negro officer here and there, but they held only minor officers, and insignificant places; that the East had no cause of grievance; that it was all a baseless clamor for political effect.

Then came the evidence, disclosing the actual condition of affairs, in that section of the State, which astonished and shocked the consciences and moral sensibilities of the people.

NEGRO CONGRESSMEN, NEGRO SOLICITORS, NEGRO REVENUE OFFICERS, NEGRO COLLECTORS OF CUSTOMS, NEGROES in charge of white institutions, NEGROES in charge of white schools, NEGROES holding inquests over the white dead, NEGROES controlling the finances of great cities, NEGROES in control of the sanitation and police of cities, NEGRO CONSTABLES arresting white women and white men, NEGRO MAGISTRATES trying white women and white men, white convicts chained to NEGRO CONVICTS and forced to social equality with them, until the proofs rose up, and stood forth "like Pelion on Ossa piled."⁴

Before this overwhelming array of evidence, the weak and puny wall of defense set up by the apologists of negro rule, crumbled away, and then there came the collapse. They had seen the handwriting on the wall. Everywhere they read in the face of the brace and chivalrous white men of the State, a cool, calm, fixed resolution and determination that these things must stop; that hereafter white men should make and administer the laws; that negro supremacy would forever end in North Carolina.

Men of less determination and less desperation than the leaders of Fusion in North Carolina, would have quietly submitted to this inexorable decree of the WHITE RACE; but they did not. One recourse was left to them. With a strange fatality they seized upon it. If WHITE MEN would not quietly submit to negro domination, then they determined to force them to submit. The arm of the Federal Government was invoked for this purpose. Armed troops were asked to be sent here to force the WHITE PEOPLE of the State, at the point of the bayonet, to submit to the continuance of conditions which to the Anglo-Saxon are worse than death. But where his honor and his conscience are concerned, the Anglo-Saxon fears not the power of mortal man. Louder and still louder, they proclaimed their defiance. Closer, and still closer, from Currituck to Cherokee, from Wilmington to Asheville, from Newbern to grand old Mecklenburg, the sympathy of blood brought WHITE PEOPLE together, until party lines and past party affiliations were wiped out, and men grown old in the service of the Republican party, men who had been strongly rooted in the faith of the Populist party, from one end of the State to the other, gave their adherence to the cause of

WHITE SUPREMACY and pledged their faith to their brethren in the East, despite Federal bayonet and executive proclamation, to redeem that fair section of the State from the reign and domination of the negro. And now, right on the eve of the election, after three months of frantic denial that there was negro domination in the East, these desperate men, at last aroused to a realization that they can no longer deceive and humbug the people, and that their fate is settled, begin "a process of taking down the wretched creatures, whom they had sought in some counties, to elect to office over the white people of the East, and with humble apologies (thereby admitting all the charges of negro domination that the Democrats have made), ask the white people whom they had sought to put in subjection to the black man to forget the wrongs they had done them, and compromise the issue with them by agreeing to support a mongrel ticket. But there are some things which white men who are white men do not compromise, as this whole array of office-traders are at last beginning to discover.

Driven from every position of defense, disappointed in their hope of intimidating and coercing the people into submitting to their scheme of negro domination, the desperate men, who are now at the head of affairs in North Carolina, and who are running the Fusion campaign, have still one reliance left. Their last hope is a large corruption fund, which they have extorted from Mark Hanna⁵, the financial agent of the monopolists of the United States, under assurances which they have given him, that if they could carry the State this year it will be easier to carry the State for McKinley in 1900. With this corruption fund they still hope to save something from the wreck. They hope to import negroes from the North and South of us, to buy up votes, to procure fraudulent and illegal voting, and otherwise to obtain by various means enough votes to control one branch of the Legislature, and thus block the efforts of the people to reverse the horrible conditions of the past two years. This hope will also prove delusive. If their corruption fund were TEN FOLD as large as it is, they could not bribe the sturdy manhood of North Carolina to longer submit to negro domination.

The battle has been fought, the victory is within our reach. North Carolina is a WHITE MAN'S State, and WHITE MEN will rule it, and they will crush the party of negro domination beneath a majority so overwhelming that no other party will ever again dare to attempt to establish negro rule here.

They CANNOT intimidate us; they CANNOT buy us, and they SHALL NOT cheat us out of the fruits of our victory.

The Democratic party has appealed in this campaign to the highest aspirations of the people. It has appealed to their patriotism, to their manhood, to their pride of race, to their immemorial custom and habit of ruling every other race with which they come into contact, to their self-interest, to the peace and happiness of the family, of the home, of the fireside, in the name of good government, in the name of peace and amity between the races, in the name of religion and, finally, in the name of civilization itself. It has promised fair and just laws, it has promised to all peace and security; it has promised good government, it was promised protection to property, protection to life, protection to virtue; and it has promised to undo the wrongs which have been done to our brethren in the East. It will faithfully keep and perform every promise it has made.

What good thing does the enemy promise in this contest? What measure of relief does he advocate? What principle does he stand for? Nay, verily, NOTHING, except the perpetuation of his own power and the retention of the offices which the people were

deceived into bestowing upon him. In these circumstances am I not warranted in appealing to the good people of North Carolina, without regard to party affiliations, to go to the polls next TUESDAY, and cast their votes for the success of the Democratic ticket, State, county and National?

It has been a great fight. The issues involved are pregnant with the momentous consequences to the people and State. In view of the present terrible crisis; in view of the incalculable consequences to follow to us and to our children from failure to redeem the State from the rule of the men who have debauched and despoiled it, I feel justified in appealing to all good men to close their places of business on the day of election and give that day, exclusively, earnestly, solemnly, to the State and the great cause for which we struggle.

F.M. Simmons

Chairman, State Democratic Executive Committee.

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Notes

1. In the 1880s, the United States and much of the Western world was on the “gold standard.” What this meant was that the government could only print as much money as it had in gold. This restricted the amount of paper currency in circulation, a major complaint of the Populist party. The party wanted to move to a “silver standard” because silver was more plentiful and the U.S. could print more money. More money in circulation would make it easier for farmers to pay taxes and creditors.
2. In the Biblical book of Daniel, Belshazzar, king of Babylon, has a vision of a hand writing on the wall during a feast. The Hebrew Daniel interpreted the writing as saying that Belshazzar had been judged and found wanting.
3. This is a reference to the Biblical story of the Hebrews’ deliverance from Egypt. God sent ten plagues on Egypt to convince the Pharaoh to release the Hebrews from slavery. In the tenth, the angel of death killed the firstborn of every family, and “there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.” (King James Bible, Exodus 12:30)
4. “Piled Pelion upon Ossa” is an expression which means useless or fruitless. The expression comes from a Greek myth in which two giants, who were the children of two of the gods, wanted to storm Mount Olympus, where the gods lived, to kidnap two goddesses. To reach the Olympus, the giants piled two smaller mountains, Pelion and Ossa, on top of each other, but they failed to reach the gods.
5. Mark Hanna was a wealthy businessman from Ohio who was President McKinley’s campaign manager in 1896.

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