

(4) "History has many lessons to teach us on just how deep the roots of the continuous struggles of the Negroes are. None is more amazing than the birth of 1 and 1/2 million Negro populists known as the National Colored Farmers Alliance in white supremacy South during rule of the violent KKK lynch lawlessness, rope and faggot rule. The South was shaken to its very foundations within one short decade after the removal of the Union Army. This revolutionary upheaval came from within, not without. It arose out of the great discontent of the farmers with the new form of monopoly planter-merchant-railroad vested interests which brought the "new South" its greatest crisis. Populism spread like a prairie fire bringing the "Solid South" fundamental challenge since the Civil War.

Most amazing of all was the organization of the National Colored Farmers' Alliance. Just as the history of the slave revolts, when it was finally revealed, put an end to the myth of Negro docility, so this still little-known glorious chapter puts an end to the myth that the Negro "can't be organized." Think of it:

At the very height of the prejudice-ridden post-Reconstruction period, when the South was supposedly solidly white in thought and action, the Populist movement that was sweeping the country found its most radical expression in the South.

The National Colored Farmers' Alliance alone numbered one and one-quarter million members and, although separately organized from the white agrarians, waged their class battles as one. It was a power to be reckoned with both in state and national politics, and was instrumental in the elections of Populist governors as well as national and state representatives.

"Now the People's Party says to these two men," the reference was to one white and one Negro, and the speaker was white Georgian Tom Watson, "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because on that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both."

Fantastic as it may sound coming from the mouth of one who, with the turn of the century, was to become the typical white supremacist, it was characteristic during the height of the Populist groundswell in the South. Populists not only spoke that way but acted as the Abolitionists had in their day. When a young Negro preacher, H.S. Doyle, was threatened with lynching, Watson not only hid him in his home, but sent a call for Populists to protect him. Farmers rode all night to get there, and with arms stacked on Watson's veranda, and fully 2,000 farmers there as a defense guard, Watson said: "We are determined that in this free country that the humblest white or black man who wants to talk our doctrine shall do it, and the man who doesn't love who shall touch a hair on his head without fighting every man in the People's Party."

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Watson made hundreds of such speeches in the decade of the 1890's. He spoke repeatedly from the same platform with Negro Speakers to mixed audiences of Negro and white farmers, all on the theme of the need of white and Negro solidarity to fight the "money kings" who are to use "the accident of color" to divide the unified struggle: "This is not a political fight and the politicians cannot lead or direct it. It is a movement of the masses, an uprising of the people, and they, and not the politicians, will direct it. The people need spokesmen, not leaders, men in the front who will obey, not command."

Here is how the distinguished Southern historian, C. Vann Woodward, no fire-eyed radical, sums the decade of the 1890's in his study of Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel: "Never before or since have the two races in the South come so close together as they did during the Populist struggles."