

The New South

Henry Grady (right) was the young, dynamic editor of the South's leading newspaper, the *Atlanta Constitution*. In his editorials, speeches, and writings, Grady tried to advertise to the rest of the nation, and to the world at large, a South that was no longer the South of the old plantation days, of the sleepy towns, of the magnolia blossoms, but a South that was dynamic, alive, ready to receive economic investment, ready to grow and prosper. Grady had his greatest opportunity when he was invited to speak in 1886 before an organization called the New England Society. This was probably the most prestigious organization of the Northeast.



On December 21, 1886, Henry Grady appeared before the prestigious New England Society in New York City. He faced an impressive audience of businessmen, politicians, and industrialists. Knowing that great Union general William Tecumseh Sherman was in the audience, the man who had burned the city of Atlanta to the ground in the Civil War, Grady said: "I want to say to General Sherman, who is considered an able man in our parts, though some people think he's a kind of careless man about fire, that from the ashes he left us in 1864, we have raised a brave and beautiful city. Some how or other we have caught the sunshine in the bricks and the mortar of our homes and have builded therein not one ignoble prejudice or memory." Grady went on to say that the Old South of secession was dead. That there was a "New South," a South of Union, a South of freedom, vibrant and prosperous. Grady's speech, made three very important points:

- ★ The U.S. was no longer two separate nations.
- ★ The Southern economy had changed—industrialization had replaced plantation agriculture.
- ★ Race relations had changed—blacks were now partners in the "New South."

So, let's examine Grady's claims about this "New South."

The Economy of the New South

Grady was not alone in advertising a movement, as many put it at the time, a movement from "farm to factory" in the states of the old Confederacy. Many people after the war began to argue that the war proved King Cotton was no longer king. Agriculture alone was not sufficient. The economy of the South must diversify. It must follow the pattern of the North. There were many who argued Southerners

should bury their old feud with the North and do all that they could to bring outside capital to the Southern states. Grady himself was one such.

Another was a fellow named Richard Edmonds. By the age of 23, Edmonds had become the assistant editor of the most important economic journal that the South published. By age twenty-five, he owned a magazine called *The Manufacturers Record*.

- ★ Edmonds had two goals. First, encourage capital investment in the South. Second, he urged all forms of industrial advancement.
- ★ Edmonds pushed for Southern states to grant tax exemptions to industries that would locate within their borders.
- ★ He encouraged Southern commercial fairs where new products that were manufactured in the South could be displayed.
- ★ He was opposed to labor unions, as were most Southerners, and many other Americans as well. He was opposed to bargaining with workers.
- ★ Edmonds was ambiguous about whether blacks should be hired in industry. Sometimes he said they would make good menial laborers in the industrial workforce. Sometimes he said African-Americans were incapable of doing any kind of industrial work.

Edmonds was widely respected in the North. He served as a member of the board of directors of several northern banks. He held vast real estate properties. He was, perhaps, the best example of the gospel he himself preached. He was a materialistic, business-worshipping Yankee at heart, in the clothes and demeanor of a Southern gentleman.

Areas of Southern Industrial Advancement

There were three main areas of industrial advancement in the South.

- ★ cotton milling
- ★ iron production and manufacture
- ★ tobacco industry

But, before these three industries could really grow it was necessary to rebuild the transportation and communication systems that had been destroyed during the Civil War. Southerners first turned to rebuilding and expanding their railroad lines.

- ★ Between 1865 and the early 1870s, nearly 8,000 miles of track were laid in the South.
- ★ By 1880 there were some 20,000 miles of track compared with the total of 10,000 before the war broke out.
- ★ By the end of the 1880s, the track mileage of the South had increased to over 40,000 miles.
- ★ The federal government invested millions of dollars, in Southern port cities like New Orleans, Mobile, and Galveston, Texas, to rebuild their ports and to help make the South a major commercial center.

The expansion of transportation and port facilities in the South helped to prepare it for further industrial expansion.

Cotton Mills in North Carolina

Following the rebuilding of the transportation system, Southerners turned first to the creation of a new cotton industry. The cotton industry there was the first sign of industrial advancement in the post-Civil-War South. Before the Civil War, for the most part, the bulk of Southern cotton, was sent outside the South for processing. Some went to England and to France in international trade. Much of the South's cotton went to the textile mills of New England.

Workers at a North Carolina cotton textile mill, c. 1882.



Much of the capital that men like Henry Grady and Richard Edmonds lured South was spent to build cotton textile mills. Textile mills sprang up all over the South in the 1870s and early 80s, especially in the Carolinas. It became a matter of civic pride to build a mill in your community. Much of the investment in these mills came from the North. New England textile manufacturers, eager to escape northern labor unions and more expensive northern labor, began moving some of their operations south in the 1880s. They began investing more and more heavily in building new mills in Alabama, in North Carolina, and elsewhere. By 1880 there were 160 cotton mills throughout the South. By 1890, there were over 400 cotton mills.

Both blacks and whites worked in the cotton mills. The blacks, however, rarely, if ever, were allowed to work on any of the machinery. Male African-Americans were hired for a variety of unskilled labor tasks. Many Southern mill owners argued that blacks were inferior to whites when it came to skilled labor. They said that whites were far more qualified to work on complex machinery. But, there was a much more significant reason why black workers were sort of kept in the background in the mills. They represented a reserve labor pool. If white workers in Southern cotton mills threatened to join a union or go on strike, the mill owners would say, "Fine. You boys go out on strike if you want to. But I'll fire you because I've got other people I can bring in." Blacks workers were insurance to make sure that unionization did not take hold in the South.

Iron and Steel:

There had been some iron manufacturing in the South before the Civil War. The biggest factory was the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia. Richmond had been the South's leading industrial city before the Civil War. The Tredegar Works in Richmond was one of only a handful of such iron and steel producing plants in the South before the Civil War.

By the mid-1870s, Southerners were beginning to tap the rich iron and coal regions of the Southern Appalachians. By 1875, Southerners were mining about four and a half million tons of coal per year. By 1900, coal production in the South had become one of the two most important sources in the entire world.

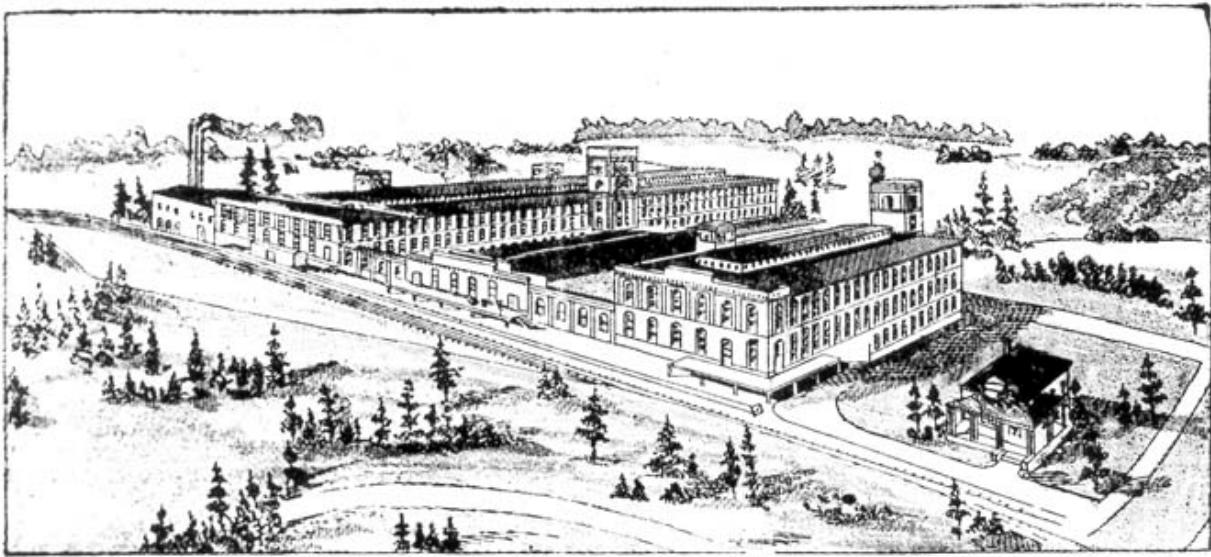
Southerners began building iron works to tap into the rich deposits of iron ore throughout the region. By the end of the 1870s, the iron industry had grown impressively throughout the entire nation, but, Southern iron production and manufacturing growth was really impressive. Whole new towns mushroomed up around the new furnaces and the factories. The best example of a city built by iron was Birmingham, Alabama, which essentially did not exist in 1879, but was a major regional city of some forty to fifty thousand people 1890. Increasingly, investment came from outside the borders of the South. By the 1880s, major iron production interests from the North had begun to invest heavily in the Southern iron and steel industries.

Tobacco:

Although the South had grown lots of tobacco in the years before the Civil War, it had processed very little of it. A very few large plantations that grew tobacco had tobacco factories. Mostly, tobacco was sent elsewhere for processing into finished product. In the 1870s, Southerners eager to move from farm to factory, began to build tobacco processing plants. The number of these plants grew rapidly over the first two decades after the war.

In 1880, a teenager from Virginia patented a cigarette rolling machine that made it possible to manufacture cigarettes in mass quantities. The days of the old roll-your-own were over with. Durham, North Carolina became, during the 1880s, the center of a growing and booming tobacco empire that began to spread throughout the United States. Soon, Virginia and Kentucky began to compete with North Carolina as centers of tobacco processing and manufacturing. By 1900, the Southern profits from tobacco were about fifty-five million dollars a year.

As in cotton, as in iron, the initial investment in the manufacturing and processing of tobacco came from Southerners themselves. And, here again, the story, I'm sure, is becoming very familiar to you: Northern investors and foreign investors began, by the turn-of-the-1880s, to take control of the industry. By 1900, the economic control of the nation's, tobacco industry, lay firmly in the hands of the great banking houses of New York City, like J. P. Morgan, the most important financial institution in the nation.



Cigarette factory in Durham, North Carolina, 1885.

Conclusion

While the “New South” made an important economic transition from farm to factory in the years after the Civil War, in many respects it never really gained the kind of economic independence that some Southern boosters had hoped for. In virtually every economic sphere, in tobacco, in iron, in cotton, and elsewhere, Northern investors, ultimately achieved control.

In the years before the Civil War, Southern leaders complained that the lack of industrial development in the South held the region back and gave the North an economic advantage. As a leading Southern writer put it in the middle of the 1850s, “Southern children are born in Northern-made cradles, they are buried in Northern-made coffins, and, throughout their lives, they use Northern-made goods.” If the aim of the Gradys, and the Edmonds, was to achieve Southern economic independence, in large measure, they failed in that task.

The Bourbons

There was a growing movement in the South by the 1870s to restore control of the South to Southerners. Southerners resented Northerners governing Southern states under the Reconstruction Acts. These new southern leaders came to be known as the “Redeemers,” or the “Bourbons.” The title referred to the French Bourbons who tried to restore the monarchy in France in the early nineteenth century. Napoleon had once said that the Bourbon family forgot nothing, and had learned nothing from the ordeal of revolution. Critics of the Redeemers said that the Southern Bourbons had learned nothing from the Civil War.

Some Redeemers were members of the old planter class. Some were members of the new middle and upper-middle class of southern industrial capitalists—the people like Richard Edmonds, the Henry Grady. Perhaps the best example of the rise of Bourbon government for us to look at is the state of South Carolina.

South Carolina, more than any other Southern state, was heavily influenced by black voting and by some black officeholding. The Reconstruction government of South Carolina set up a system of integrated public schools. Although the schools offered free education to both black and white students, white South Carolinians refused to have their kids educated with blacks. They pulled their children out of the public schools, turning them into nearly all black schools. At about the same time, a coalition of mostly northern white reformers (carpetbaggers) and black voters established an extensive public works system as well as a system of poor relief. Of course, all of these reforms cost a great deal of money. Within a few years, the state of South Carolina had the highest debt of any state in the South.

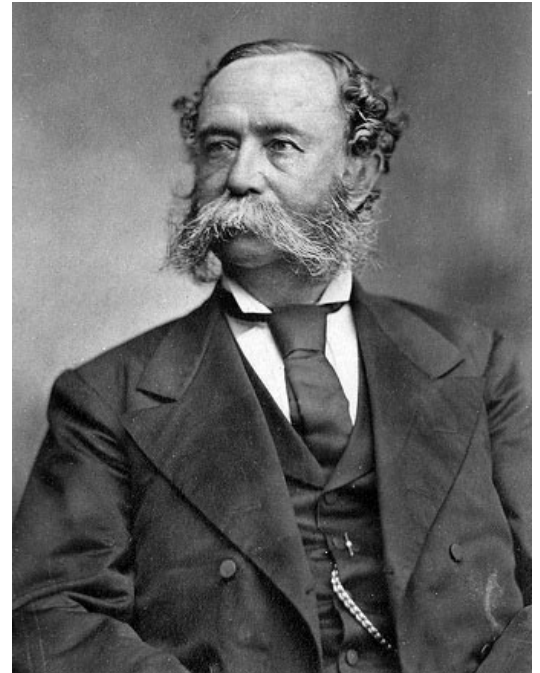
The problem was, as it is now, that social reform is costly, especially government sponsored social reform (especially when some of the reformers are skimming just a bit off of the top). In order to provide free public education, poor relief, extensive public works and other reforms, Reconstruction governments had to raise state taxes. Now, remember that the first day of class, I talked about the economic beating that the South had taken. Truth was that there wasn't much of anyone left with cash to pay those taxes. Also, for the first time, white small farmers were taxed as well as the big planters, and, everybody was pretty broke. So, the social reform, which was often seen only as benefitting the black man, anyway, was *very* unpopular.

The Redeemers offered an alternative to the big-spending carpetbag governments. By 1874, the Redeemers of South Carolina had triumphed—the white majority was back in the saddle; the state was back in the hands of a white leadership that really wasn't very different from the leaders before the War. Bourbon governments cut spending and cut taxes as well. They are often accused of giving the wealthy big tax breaks, but the fact is that they cut *all* taxes on everybody. The South was pretty

democratic as we will see, and Bourbons didn't want any constituents complaining of a tax burden. Now, of course, they cut services as well, so many of the reforms of the Reconstruction governments were dropped.

The Bourbons and Race

The attitudes of Southern Bourbons toward blacks might best be illustrated by a man named Wade Hampton. Hampton (right) was one of the best known South Carolinians both throughout the South and throughout the nation in the later years of the nineteenth century. He had served with distinction in the Confederate army during the war. He ran and won the governorship of the state of South Carolina in 1876. He finally went as a Senator from the state to Washington, D.C. from 1879 to 1891. Hampton was always proud of the fact (and never missed an opportunity to brag about it) that he had been the very first man in the South to advocate that blacks be given the vote. As he constantly reminded his black audiences, "the best friends of the colored man are the old slaveholders. We're the ones who know how to take care of you." As long as black voters kept their place, as long as black voters voted for men like Hampton, the Redeemers were happy to let blacks vote.



In fact Bourbon politicians were fairly comfortable with letting blacks vote. They felt no real need to limit their voting rights because they believed that blacks would be well-disposed to them, would naturally defer to their "betters," and support Bourbons who "naturally knew what was best for the black."

This is maybe the ultimate paradox of the Bourbons' rule in the South. The Redeemers generally even tolerated black voices in southern politics. Bourbons weren't in a big hurry to raise barriers of racial separation in public places. In fact, in the 1880s, southern politics remained surprisingly open and democratic.

- ★ voting qualifications were pretty democratic—most males over the age of 21 could vote.
- ★ 64% of eligible voters, blacks and whites, participated in state and local elections.
- ★ African Americans sat in most Southern state legislatures. In fact blacks served in the state Assembly of South Carolina until 1900, in the state legislature of Georgia until 1908, in the Louisiana legislature until around 1902; some of them were even Democrats.
- ★ The South sent African American congressmen to Washington in every election except one until 1900. Now, these black politicians always represented gerrymandered districts that had been created during Reconstruction.

- ★ But the important thing here is that after Reconstruction, the largely black districts were kept and a black political class served them.
- ★ The Bourbons allied themselves with the black politicians rather than actively campaigning to get rid of the largely black voting districts.

Under the Redeemers, black voters and black politics were tolerated unless the blacks offered resistance or political difficulties to the white Bourbon “ruling class.” In that case blacks were controlled by local whites, usually Democratic Party activists by means of fraud and intimidation.



Members of the South Carolina State Legislature, 1880.

Similarly, the color line was drawn less strictly immediately after the Civil War than it would be by the end of the nineteenth century. In some places, racial segregation appeared before the end of Reconstruction, especially in schools, churches, hotels, and rooming houses and in private social relations. In places of public accommodation such as trains, depots, theaters, and diners, discrimination was more sporadic, less frequent, and not really “officially sanctioned” by law.

It is difficult to come up with a simplistic interpretation about the Bourbon leaders. They were, of course, all Democrats. Republicans in the South were very rare and generally despised as the party of Reconstruction. The Democratic party of the time was a mongrel coalition that threw Unionists, secessionists, businessmen, small farmers, hillbillies, and big planters together in an alliance against the Reconstruction Radicals. Democrats, therefore, even those who bore the Bourbon label, often marched to different drummers. Bourbon regimes never achieved complete unity in philosophy or government.

By the end of the century, a series of factors led Democrat Redeemer politicians to tighten control over their political positions. This was especially the case with the political rights of blacks. Starting in the late 1880s, southern political leaders began

to systematically reduce the political, civil and social rights of African-Americans in the Southern states. A number of factors contributed to this departure from traditional Redeemer policies. Let's take a look at them:

- ★ Many southern whites resented signs of black success and social influence. An Alabama newspaper editor declared that “our blood boils when the educated Negro asserts himself politically.”
- ★ The agrarian protest movement called Populism (we will talk about this movement in a later lecture) became a third political party in the 1890s. Some southern Populists courted black votes and brought African Americans into party leadership positions. The Populists offered a political challenge to the Redeemers in many southern states. Frightened Redeemers revived racial hatred in order to lure rural voters back to the Democratic fold.
- ★ Some urban based Redeemers wanted to eliminate rural voters altogether, black and white, in order to shut the Populists and both rural and urban black politicians out of state politics.
- ★ The rise of Progressivism (we will talk about this movement in a later lecture) among the educated class, North and South, led to a new racism all over the nation at the turn of the twentieth century. Many areas of the North were beginning to limit the civil rights of blacks based on Progressive notions of racial inferiority. Southern Redeemers felt justified, based on Progressive ideas about race, to limit the rights of blacks in their states as well.

Voting Restrictions: In 1890, a constitutional convention in the State of Mississippi wrote a new constitution. One clause stated that Negroes were denied the right to vote because as long as they had voted, corruption and fraud had characterized government in the state of Mississippi. I dare say that if folks looked hard enough they might have come to the conclusion that corruption and fraud characterized government in most southern states (and northern states for that matter) whether blacks voted, or not. The new constitution contained a “purity” clause that stated:

“To restore purity to the governance of the state of Mississippi blacks must no longer be allowed to vote.”

The Mississippi Plan was pretty subtle. Since the Fifteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution made it impossible to deny African Americans the right to vote directly based on race, disenfranchisement had to be accomplished indirectly. The Mississippi Constitution contained a three tier system that could be used to disenfranchise, not only black voters, but poor whites as well, if the Bourbons decided to do so. The system worked as follows:

- ★ a residence requirement—two years in the state, one year in an election district—struck at those African American tenant farmers who were in the habit of moving yearly in search of better opportunities.
- ★ voters were disqualified if convicted of certain crimes.
- ★ all taxes, including a poll tax, had to be paid before a person could vote. This proviso fell most heavily on poor whites and blacks.

★ all voters had to be literate. To protect illiterate whites, there was an “understanding” clause. The voter, if unable to read the Constitution, could qualify by being able to “understand” it to the satisfaction of the registrar. Not surprisingly, registrars declared far more blacks ineligible than whites.

There were some folks, especially Populists, who were outraged by this provision of the new Mississippi constitution, or, as it became known throughout the South and the nation, the Mississippi Plan. Some critics of the plan brought suit against this new state constitution. The suit made its way to the Supreme Court of the United States. In 1897, the Supreme Court heard a case entitled *Williams v. Mississippi*. The Court concluded that the 1890 Mississippi Plan was constitutional. I should note in fairness, that various forms of racial segregation and limiting the vote to blacks were also being employed in much of the North at the same time.

Other states added variations on the Mississippi plan. In 1898, Louisiana invented the “grandfather clause,” which allowed illiterates to vote if their fathers or grandfathers had been eligible to vote on January 1, 1867, when African Americans were still disenfranchised. By 1910, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Alabama, and Oklahoma had adopted the grandfather clause.

Every southern state adopted a statewide Democratic primary between 1896 and 1915, which became the only meaningful election outside isolated areas of Republican strength. With minor exceptions the Democratic primaries excluded African American voters altogether. The effectiveness of these measures can be seen in a few sample figures. Louisiana in 1896 had 130,000 registered black voters. By 1900, the number was only 5,320. In Alabama in 1920, 121,159 black men over twenty-one were literate, according to the census, however, only 3,742 of them were registered to vote.

Segregation laws: From the late 1880s every Southern state also adopted laws that required separate accommodations for blacks and whites in schools, separate accommodations on public transportation, separate accommodations in the courts, in the libraries, in cemeteries. Under the laws of every Southern state, no black man and no white man could even be put in the same insane asylum together. These laws, collectively, all came to be known as “Jim Crow” laws (Jim Crow was a derisive caricature figure in the pre-Civil War South, an image of the kind of shiftless southern black). The point that I want you to take away from this is that these Jim Crow laws defined, in a far more strict, legalistic manner, race relations between whites and blacks than even had existed in the years before, or even after, the Civil War.

Jim Crow laws became subject to a number of lawsuits. Those lawsuits made their way through the federal courts. The legality of Jim Crow legislation finally was tested in the Supreme Court of the United States in 1896. In one of the great landmark decisions given by the Court in the nineteenth century, a decision titled *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court of the United States said that “separate but equal” facilities for blacks and whites was constitutional and legal in the United

States. The case centered on the question of the constitutionality segregated spaces on a New Orleans streetcar. In 1890, the state of Louisiana passed the *Separate Car Act*, which required separate accommodations for blacks and whites on railroads, including separate railway cars. Concerned, a group of prominent black, creole of color, and white creole New Orleans residents formed the *Comité des Citoyens* (Committee of Citizens) dedicated to challenge the law. They persuaded Homer Plessy, a man of mixed race who was an "octoroon" (person of seven-eighths white and one-eighth black ancestry), to participate in an orchestrated test case. Plessy was born a free man and was a fair-skinned man of color. However, under Louisiana law, he was classified as black, and was thus required to sit in the "colored" car. Plessy rode in a white car for most of a day before anyone actually realized that he was a "person of color," and therefore in violation of the law. The Supreme Court found that "separate but equal" facilities were acceptable, but, over time, Separate facilities became unequal as blacks facilities received less money for upkeep, and were generally inferior to facilities reserved for whites. That separate but equal status would be challenged from time to time between 1896 and our own day. But, again, it was not until 1954 that the law of the land changed and a different Supreme Court struck down the separate but equal facility clause.



Very soon the principle of racial segregation extended to every area of southern life, including streetcars, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, parks, sports stadiums, schools, stores, and places of employment. In 1900, the editor of the *Richmond Times* expressed the prevailing view:

It is necessary that this principle be applied in every relation of Southern life. God Almighty drew the color line and it cannot be obliterated. The negro must stay on his side of the line and the white man must stay on his side, and the sooner both races recognize this fact and accept it, the better it will be for both.

Unashamed violence accompanied the Jim Crow laws. From 1890 to 1899, lynchings in the United States averaged 188 per year, 82 percent of which occurred in the South. By the end of the nineteenth century, legalized racial discrimination—segregation of public facilities, political disenfranchisement, and vigilante justice punctuated by brutal public lynchings and race riots—had elevated government-sanctioned bigotry to an official way of life in the South. South Carolina senator Benjamin Tillman, an outspoken racist, declared in 1892 that blacks “must remain subordinate or be exterminated.”

Conclusion: The Thirteenth, the Fourteenth, the Fifteenth Amendments had defined a new legal status, a new legal position. Jim Crow legislation, the Grandfather clause, the Mississippi Plan, and other schemes by Southerners had denied the validity of that new legal situation for African-Americans. And so, here, it seems to me that, in this sense, the so-called New South was more than ever the Old South. So, when Henry Grady, in 1886, painted in glowing terms this rise of the New South, he was, in reality, only setting forth an advertising brochure. In some ways, to be sure, especially in industrial advancement, the South had the appearance of being a “new,” even though all of that industrial development affected only about fifteen percent of the total population of the South by 1900. In race relations, the situation was the same or, in many respects, worse than it had been in the years before the war, and even in the early years of the Redeemers. Henry Grady’s charming propaganda provided only a plain brown wrapper for an old book. By 1900, the cast of characters of this old book had changed, but the plot remained the same, and each chapter heading began with the words, “white supremacy.” We may argue that Grady’s vision of his New South was a path not taken. The New South as advertised by Grady and others, rather quickly became a myth—a self-serving myth built by Southerners eager for profit, eager for industrial advancement, eager to forget the pains and tragedy of war, and, above all, eager to restore the old southern order.