WOODWARD, WATSON, AND WHITE SUPREMACY: EXAMINING RACE IN THE HISTORIES OF THOMAS E. WATSON, 1899-1912

by

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ABSTRACT

HANNAH TANDY. Woodward, Watson, And White Supremacy: Examining Race in the Histories of Thomas E. Watson, 1899-1912. (Under the direction of DR. DAVID GOLDFIELD)

This study asked if there was evidence of Thomas E. Watson's (1856-1922) shifting racial views in the histories he published between 1899 and 1912. Watson is famous for his integrated populist campaigns of the early to mid-1890s, and infamous for his subsequent call for black disenfranchisement in Georgia in 1904. Although scholars since the 1970s have identified that Watson held white supremacist beliefs throughout the entirety his career—overturning one of C. Vann Woodward's key assertions in his 1938 biography *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*—these scholars have primarily focused on Watson's political career between 1890 and 1896 and have done little to revisit Watson's literary career or his political activities after 1904.

Examining Watson's essays, his private correspondence with his publishers, and his books reviews, this study contextualized why Watson decided to write history after the defeat of the People's Party in the 1896 election, supplementing the analysis Woodward provided in *Agrarian Rebel*. After providing this context, this study examined how Watson discussed race in six of the histories he published between 1899 and 1912. Finding evidence of Watson's shifting racial views in these histories, this study provides a clearer and more nuanced picture of how Watson's racial ideology shifted between the late 1890s and into the first decade of the twentieth century.

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DEDICATION

To my friend and husband, Evan Tandy.

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PREFACE: DISCOVERING TOM WATSON

In 1892, a white politician in northern Georgia sheltered Seb Doyle, a black preacher who had spoken on the white politician's behalf, from a lynch mob. The white politician, who supported black voting rights, gathered a militia of several hundred fellow white populists to guard Doyle for roughly two days until the threat of mob violence diminished. Twelve years later in the same state, a white politician demanded that Georgia, like its neighboring states, amend its constitution to include a white primary, effectively disenfranchising black voters in Georgia and further securing white dominance over the black population.[1] In 1917, the same politician who supported a white primary defended lynching and racial violence in a self-published weekly newspaper: "In the South, we have to lynch him [the Negro] occasionally, and flog him, now and then, to keep him from blaspheming the Almighty, by his conduct, on account of his smell, and his color."[2] While these examples illustrate the spectrum of complicated race relations in the American South, they also demonstrate the fluctuating racial attitudes of Georgia Populist Tom Watson, whom all of these episodes concern.

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[1] C. Vann. Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (London: Macmillan, 1938; reprint New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 239-40; 372. Citations refer to the reprint edition. In this study, I will reference Watson's disenfranchisement of Georgia's black voters on a number of occasions. During this time in Georgia's state history, women did not possess the right to vote, regardless of their skin color. Consequently, Watson's call for disenfranchising blacks only directly affected black men who possessed voting rights, and not black women who were unable to vote in the first place. References to the disenfranchisement of Georgia's black voters more accurately should be phrased Georgia's black male voters. The detail is important to acknowledge so that readers have a clearer understanding of the racial and sexual discrimination that existed the United States at the time. However, in the interest of simplicity in writing, in this study I will be referring to Watson's efforts to disenfranchise Georgia's black male population as the disenfranchisement of Georgia's black voters.

[2] Thomas E. Watson, *The Weekly Jeffersonian*, Jan. 4, 1917, **quoted in** Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 432.

Certainly, unpacking Watson's vacillating support for black civil rights warrants a closer examination of his life. This observation rings even more true when considering the final two decades of Watson's life and his strident opposition against Jews, Catholics, eastern and southern European immigrants, and other non-white non-Protestant groups. Furthermore, Watson's lifetime (1856-1922) encompassed a number of major events that played a formative role in the shaping of the modern-day United States: the Civil War, Reconstruction, the rise of the Jim Crow era, the election of 1896, the Spanish-American War, and the First World War. In turn, a study of Watson's life enriches our collective knowledge of these events, in part because Watson wrote so prolifically about these topics and did not hesitate to make his opinions known.

Born in 1856 to a modestly wealthy slaveholding family in northern Georgia, crippling poverty plagued Tom Watson's youth and hindered many of his opportunities to obtain an education. In the wake of Appomattox, the Watson family and estate would suffer through the same economic hardship experienced by many white southerners, having lost family members and their once-enslaved labor force. Eventually, after a series of small teaching jobs, the young Watson succeeded in funding and pursuing his law degree, earning a reputation in northern Georgia as a gifted speaker and a talented lawyer. Watson's interest in the law soon transferred to the political arena. Like most white southern males, Watson actively supported the Democratic Party and attended political meetings and caucuses. Concern over the Party's newfound commitment to protecting industrial interests at the expense of farming and agriculture, however, pushed Watson into the Populist ranks.[3] Known also as the People's Party,

[3] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 1-145; For more on the industrial interests of the Democratic Party and the rise of the New South, see Henry W. Grady's *The New South*, with a character sketch of Henry W. Grady by Oliver Dyer (New York: Robert Bonner's Sons, 1890). For a comparative study of Henry Grady and Tom Watson's rhetorical struggle during the 1880s, see Ferald Joseph Bryan's *Henry Grady Or Tom Watson? The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1994). For more on the economic and social conditions that

this agrarian-based third party movement originated in Texas as the Farmer's Alliance, sweeping across the western and southern United States in the 1880s and 1890s.[4] Elected to the House of Representatives in 1890, Watson became the first Democrat from the South to abandon the Democratic Caucus and instead attend that of the People's Party, solidifying his role as leader in the third-party movement. From this influential position, Watson would generate the Populist policy on matters ranging from rural free delivery to race relations, attempting to unite black and white farmers under the banner of an agrarian-based political movement.

As the Southern leader of the Populist movement, Watson encouraged white and black farmers to unite under the banner of agrarian interests and vote for the People's Party. While scholars have challenged Watson's intentions and sincerity when it came to black voters, it remains that Watson did actively support black voting rights during a time when these rights were evaporating across the southern United States. Watson became the target of smear campaigns set out by Democrats and Republicans alike, as the Populists aimed to lure away black voters from the Republicans and poor white farmers away from the Democrats. Although Watson would only serve a single term as a Georgia state representative in the House, his career with the Populists remained active after 1892. At the apex of his political career, Watson appeared on the 1896 People's Party ticket as a vice presidential nominee, listed alongside William Jennings Bryan—the presidential nominee for both the Democratic Party and the People's Party. The election would prove disastrous for the Democrats and the populists as Republican William McKinley ultimately secured the White House. Financially and emotionally

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contributed to the rise of the People's Party in the South, see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 113-5.

[4] For more on the advent of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party movement in Texas, see the first three chapters of Lawrence Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

devastated by the Populists' defeat on the national stage, Watson retreated from his political career for an eight-year hiatus, dedicating himself to work as a lawyer, a public lecturer, and as an author and historian.[5]

Although Watson enjoyed success in these more private endeavors, recouping his financial losses from the failed campaign and strengthening his reputation as a litigator and public figure, he could not stay out of the political arena for long. In 1904, Watson made an infamous return to Georgia state politics, publicly advocating for an amendment in the state constitution to disenfranchise black voters and promising his political support to whichever gubernatorial candidate could deliver such an amendment. Back in the political spotlight, Watson extended his influence by self-publishing a number of books, magazines, and newspapers.[6] Scholars such as Gregory Mixon have acknowledged the influential scope of Watson's publications, identifying the race-baiting in Watson's newspapers and magazines as one of the main contributors to the deadly 1906 Atlanta race riot.[7]

Watson remained active as a muckraker and sensationalist journalist in the first two decades of the twentieth century despite his poor health, regularly maligning Catholics, Jews, African Americans, and eastern European immigrants in his publications. Most notably, Watson suggested that a second Ku Klux Klan might become necessary to ensure home rule in the South and wrote in support of lynching. In 1920, Watson returned to Congress, this time representing Georgia in the Senate. Watson would serve two years of his term before succumbing to a cerebral hemorrhage in 1922. Obituaries from national news outlets such as *The New York Times* struggled to reconcile Watson's earlier career as a populist racial crusader with the latter years of

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[5] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 146-354.
[6] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 355-95.
[7] Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 54.

his life and his intense opposition to those of different races and religions.[8] In spite of Watson's confusing persona, thousands of people attended the funeral services in Georgia as a testament to his continued popularity. Friends and admirers richly decorated Watson's home, Hickory Hill, with memorial flowers. Notably, one of these floral arrangements included a conspicuous eight-foot cross covered in red roses, sent to the Watson family by the Ku Klux Klan.[9]

Contentious in his own lifetime, Watson's divisiveness has continued into the twenty-first century. Ten years after his death, a statue of Watson was placed on the front steps of the Georgia state Capitol building in Atlanta. For eighty years, Watson's likeness, with both fists clenched and one raised defiantly over his head, greeted those visiting Georgia's seat of government. However, in 2013, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal signed an executive order instructing contractors to relocate the statue to a nearby park, citing construction on the building as the cause for the statue's removal and the excessive cost of moving the statue twice as the reason it would not return to the steps of the Capitol.[10] While some groups like the Anti-Defamation League applauded Deal's decision to remove the statue, others demanded that the statue be returned to its original place once renovations were completed.[11] Today, the Capitol steps remain vacant, and the Watson statue remains in the less prominent park location.

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[8] These obituaries, like Woodward had also done in *Agrarian Rebel*, viewed Watson's racial reform efforts during his populist campaigns of the 1890s as extremely radical and progressive for the time period. Watson's obituaries struggled to understand why his radical political actions became just as reactionary after 1904.

[9] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 396-486.

[10] Alan Blinder, "Bid to Move Atlanta Statue Opens Window To Past," *New York Times*, October 22, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/23/us/bid-to-move-ga-statue-opens-window-to-past.html.

[11] James Salzar, "Confederate Vets groups wants Watson statue back," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 31, 2013 https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/confederate-vets-group-wants-watson-statue-back/BQvczLxn4sYBvsHSdKJoAN/.
Shelley Rose, "Good Riddance to Watson Statue," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 30, 2013

Aside from the disputed removal of his statue, a modern problem not unique to Watson's story, elements of his legacy continue to swarm today's headlines. Racism and white supremacy in the United States, while not absent from news stories and classroom discussions in the century since Watson's death, have dominated headlines over the last five years. The 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, the global sweep of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the tragic deaths of African Americans Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd dominating news cycles in 2020 certainly indicated that the United States is experiencing a pivotal moment when it comes to race relations and the weight of America's history on its present and future.

Likewise, the widening cultural and political rift between urban and rural areas of the United States and the increasingly heated debate concerning voter rights and discrimination seem to mirror the issues Watson took on in his own day.[12] The meteoric rise of Donald Trump within the Republican Party and divisive, populist-style rhetoric utilized by the former president to create a cult of personality around himself within the Party has contributed to America's history with populist movements and warranted further study of this subject.[13] The connection between a political leader's charged public speeches and subsequent mob violence, specifically, the

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https://www.ajc.com/news/opinion/good-riddance-watson-statue/VzC8BIuyWYUbZc7cExw37L/.

[12] Readers interested in the widening political divide between urban and rural areas may find the following article beneficial: Rahshaan Maxwell, "Why are urban and rural areas so politically divided?" *Washington Post*, March 5, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/03/05/why-are-urban-rural-areas-so-politically-divided/.

[13] Readers interested in a brief analysis of the Trump administration might find the following article helpful: Matt Spetalnick, Andrea Shalal, Jeff Mason, Steve Holland, "Analysis: Trump's Legacy, A more divided America, a more unsettled world," *Reuters*, January 20, 2021 https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-trump-legacy-analysis-int/analysis-trumps-legacy-a-more-divided-america-a-more-unsettled-world-idUSKBN29P0EX.

storming of the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6th, 2021 or the Atlanta Race Riots in 1906, also strongly suggest that Watson's life story warrants further investigation.

I first encountered Tom Watson's story in the Fall of 2018, conducting research for a graduate-level nineteenth century European history class. While I had intended to focus on populism in American history during my time at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the history department wisely requires graduate students to broaden their horizons by enrolling in non-American history classes during their course of study. Fortunately, most instructors permitted students who did not specialize in European history to submit term papers that ventured from European topics or that were only vaguely related to European history. By accident, I came across a book titled *The Story of France* (1899), a two-volume history of France written by Tom Watson. Gratified by my good luck, my term paper ultimately focused on how Watson drew parallels between American populism and the French Revolution in *The Story of France*, using precedents in French history to justify populist reform in the United States.

In hindsight, this research paper did not offer anything dramatically insightful to the history of Tom Watson, and merely expanded on an observation made by C. Vann Woodward in *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (1938). A distinguished Southern historian and authority on Tom Watson's life and career, Woodward acknowledged that Watson explicitly dedicated himself to writing populist history during his brief hiatus as an author.[14] However, what my research paper lacked in dramatic insight, it made up for in its contribution to my course of graduate study and my newfound interest in Tom Watson, a research topic that would ostensibly leave me with more questions than answers.

[14] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 335.

My first reading of *Agrarian Rebel* focused on finding the necessary background information on Tom Watson that a research paper on his French histories would necessitate. I prioritized understanding his political career prior to becoming an author and his subsequent switch from populist politician to historian in the mid-1890s. As I read Woodward's account of Watson's life, I began to question why I had not heard of Watson prior to this biography. Originally from Ohio, I do not have as much familiarity with the specifics of Southern history as someone who has lived in the South for their entire life. To me, however, it seemed as if Watson's support for African American political rights decades before the Civil Rights era and his heroic defense of Seb Doyle in the presence of a lynch mob warranted more attention and acclaim in American history.

Confused by this portrait of a heroic defender of African American rights, I continued reading *Agrarian Rebel* and eventually discovered how Watson's views on people of different races or religions violently transformed in the last two decades of his life. By the time I finished *Agrarian Rebel*, I understood why Watson's time as a racial crusader had been overshadowed by his violent opposition to non-white and non-Protestant groups. Although the second half of *Agrarian Rebel* satisfied my curiosity concerning Watson's legacy as a racial reformer, the question still remained: Why did Tom Watson seemingly transform from a racial crusader into a violently reactionary bigot? Determined to uncover the truth behind these contradictions in Watson's character, I began sifting through the existing scholarship concerning Tom Watson. Quickly, I realized that I was not alone in my confusion and curiosity, and that scholars had puzzled over the same question in Watson's own lifetime all the way into the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: TOM WATSON: HISTORIOGRAPHY, HISTORIAN

After Tom Watson's death in 1922, the earliest scholarly attempts to analyze his life and legacy came in the form of biography. Watson's first biographer, a young, white lawyer from Georgia named William W. Brewton, wrote with the permission and assistance of Watson himself. After over a decade of working on the project and having exclusive access to Watson's personal papers, Brewton finally self-published *The Life of Thomas E. Watson* in 1926 in Atlanta, Georgia.[15] Although the work received very little critical attention, Brewton's portrayal of Watson's racial reforms and the sentiment expressed in the single available review of the biography make *The Life of Thomas E. Watson* a valuable starting point for a survey of how historians have understood—or misunderstood—Tom Watson.

Brewton's biography, while informative about the general details about Watson's birth, career, and death, also provides today's reader with a unique window into the social values of the time and place in which it was written. *The Life of Thomas E. Watson* took shape during the Jim Crow era, a time period which saw *de jure* and *de facto* racial discrimination against blacks and a strict adherence to white supremacy in almost all outlets of public life. Consequently, Brewton's biography reads entirely unsympathetic to African Americans and the demise of black civil rights which Watson oversaw and encouraged.

In his account of Watson's call for black disenfranchisement, Brewton made no lament of the loss of political rights for black Georgians, instead reporting the event in a matter-of-fact style suggesting that, at best, Brewton saw Watson's actions as a necessary evil to protect Georgia's white democracy. Brewton appeared to accept Watson's explanation for supporting

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[15] William W. Brewton, *The Life of Thomas E. Watson* (Atlanta, GA: printed by the author, 1926), n.p. A handful of other early biographical studies and memorials on Tom Watson are also available in The Thomas E. Watson Papers digital collection.

disenfranchisement with little question. After a brief summary of Watson's 1904 speech supporting black disenfranchisement, where Watson explained that corrupt black votes endangered the integrity of white votes and the possibility of reforms, Brewton acknowledged: "The speech made a lasting impression, probably more lasting on the politicians than on the people, though such a measure in Georgia, of course, could meet with no popular disfavor."[16] Brewton did not even consider black disenfranchisement in Georgia as Watson's most revolutionary decision in 1904. Brewton considered the endorsement of newspaperman William Randolph Hearst as Watson's noteworthy political decision in 1904, since New York judge Alton B. Parker was already the presumed favorite for the Democratic presidential ticket that year.[17]

In a similar manner, Brewton did not exhaust himself trying to explain why Watson had previously targeted black voters during the Populist campaigns of the 1890s. According to Brewton, black voters had the power to sway the election in favor of Watson, which is why Watson made an effort to appeal to this demographic.[18] In a similar manner, Brewton also diminished the importance of the attempted lynching of Seb Doyle, the black preacher who capaigned on Watson's behalf, and Watson's efforts to protect Doyle from the lynch mob. Brewton never mentioned Doyle by name or explained his relationship with Watson. In Brewton's eyes, the Doyle episode, which has been intensely scrutinized by scholars decades after Watson's death, warranted little examination, simply appearing in a laundry list of political violence heroically faced by Watson during his Populist campaigns. From Brewton's account of

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[16] Ibid., 305.
[17] Ibid., 325; 293.
[18] Ibid., 157. Brewton diminished the racial integration of the southern Populist movement led by Watson, viewing his efforts to secure black votes as simply a means to secure an electoral victory, and not a concerted effort to improve the lives of black farmers.

Watson's life, one gets the sense that Watson's behavior towards African Americans was not unique to Watson, his support of black voting rights and subsequent opposition made a figurative footnote in the narrative of his life. Typical of the early twentieth century United States, Brewton significantly diminished, if not erased, most black stories from his celebratory biography of Thomas Watson.

Brewton's indifference towards African Americans in *The Life of Thomas E. Watson* becomes even more pronounced when reading his analysis of Watson's legacy and its shortcomings. The closing sentences of the biography summarized Brewton's highly-favorable portrait of Watson: "Against tyranny of rulers, oppression of priests, and those who offer affected excuses for knuckling to both, he hurled his mighty wrath, emboldened in the consciousness of his own eternal justice; insomuch that I rank him, in the order of time—Luther—Voltaire— Settembrini—Watson."[19] The decision to compare Watson to famous philosopher-reformers such as Luther and Voltaire suggests that Brewton believed Watson's perceived ingenuity would resound throughout the centuries, and that his reputation as scholar and reformer would improve with time. Given Watson's relative obscurity in American history, outside of being a notorious bigot, Brewton's optimistic predictions for the future of Watson's legacy were particularly striking.

In spite of this lofty praise, Brewton did express some wariness of Watson's beliefs and made the occasional critique. Outlining his examination of Watson, Brewton confessed in the preface: "the first examination into [Watson's] life reveals many strange things boding good and evil" and "there are facts to support the cursory verdict of evil genius." In a similar manner, Brewton also indicated some discomfort with Watson's opinions on Catholicism. Prior to his

[19] Ibid., 401.

discussion of Watson's anti-Catholic efforts, Brewton explained that he did not intend to apologize for any of Watson's opinions about Catholics and instead meant to only outline Watson's beliefs. While Brewton's personal opinions concerning Catholicism remain unclear, his attempt to stem criticism by including a caveat indicates that at least some of Brewton's audience took issue with Watson's anti-Catholic views.[20]

Brewton's discomfort with Watson's religious opinions, however, did not extend to Watson's most notorious anti-Semitic behavior. When discussing the 1915 lynching of Jewish factory manager Leo Frank, Brewton made repeated efforts to exonerate Watson as the architect of Frank's death, distancing Watson from the situation while also implicitly approving of lynchings in general.[21] While Brewton's evaluation of Watson's legacy and its pitfalls provides a small window into the values of white society in 1920s Georgia, a review of *The Life of Thomas E. Watson* in the December 1927 issue of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* illustrated how extensively Jim Crow values permeated academia during the late 1920s.

In an untitled review of *The Life of Thomas E. Watson*, reviewer William Tate awarded the biography extremely high marks for its style and mastery of a complicated subject. Like C. Vann Woodward observed a decade later, Tate believed that Watson's life and the challenges of his political career paralleled those of his home state of Georgia: "His own struggles are truly representative of the struggles of many people since the dark days of the Civil War and Reconstruction."[22] Over the next three pages of his review, Tate provided a short summary of

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[20] Ibid., 2, 338-45. For more on Watson's anti-Catholic views, see Chapter 22 in *Agrarian Rebel* "The Shadow of the Pope." C. Vann. Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (London: Macmillan, 1938; reprint New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 416-30. Citations refer to the reprint edition.

[21] Ibid., 338-45; For more on Watson's involvement with the death of Leo Frank, see Chapter 23 in *Agrarian Rebel*, "The Lecherous Jew." Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 431-450.

[22] Woodward's' observation concerning Watson representing the struggles of his home state can be found in the preface to *Agrarian Rebel*; William Tate, review of *The Life of Thomas E.*

Watson's life, commenting on Watson's resilience, the complexity of his character, and the unique nature of Georgia politics and society during Watson's lifespan. After once again observing that Brewton's portrait of Watson "is well done" and "well balanced," Tate challenged Brewton's suggestion that the Georgia populist ranked among the likes of Luther and Voltaire. Tate explained: "[Watson] was not the greatest scholar to attack the Roman hierarchy….but he did muster and handle with a master hand the forces of anti-Semitic, anti-foreign, anti-Catholic sentiment which gave birth to Georgia's present contribution to American civilization--the Ku Klux Klan."[23] Tate's praise of Watson's anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, and the Ku Klux Klan seems to speak for itself in terms of outlining the values of white Georgians in the late 1920s. Watson's anti-black efforts, in addition, do not appear on Tate's list of Watson's "accomplishments." One can speculate that anti-black Jim Crow era discrimination was so effective in Tate's time that it did not even occur to him to highlight this quality in Watson.

The anti-black prejudice presented in Brewton and Tate's writings were not unique to Georgia or the South during the first few decades of the twentieth century, as illustrated by one of the earliest studies of the populist movement. Published by the University of Minnesota Press in 1931, John D. Hicks' *The Populist Revolt* saw much acclaim from scholars who welcomed the study as the new authority on the history of the movement.[24] Cutting-edge as the work might

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Watson, by William W. Brewton, *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (December 1927): 359-361. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40575932. Tate did not specify what he meant by describing Watson's "struggles," however, he seems to be referring to the challenge southern whites faced trying to maintain control over the black population in the South.

[23] Ibid., 361.

[24] Favorable reviews of Hicks' *Populist Revolt* include the following: Avery Craven, review of *The Populist Revolt. A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, by John D. Hicks, *Journal of Political Economy* 41, no. 2 (April 1933): 247-248, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1821695 and E. Pendleton Herring, review of *The Populist Revolt. A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, by John D. Hicks, *American Political Science Review* 26, no. 4 (Aug. 1932): 742-3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1946550.

have been, Hicks' indifference and hostility towards African Americans in his history of the Populist movement resembled the racial prejudices expressed by Brewton and Tate in their respective publications. Discussing the broken democratic system in the south at the turn of the twentieth century, Hicks wrote in favor of disenfranchising blacks, citing their corruption at the polls as a threat to democracy: "the colored voters were tempted by whatever bribes the opposing forces could muster, the standard price for votes….being only a dollar apiece" and "political rights were of course denied the negroes, and the landlords….controlled nominations and elections to office." In a similar manner, Hicks also blamed African Americans for the lack of political power held by poor whites in the South, insisting that the large population of blacks concentrated power in the hands of white elites, to the detriment of lower-class whites; white elites were, notably, not to blame for abusing the situation. In his assessment of the Populist movement, Hicks appeared to share Watson's opinions concerning black disenfranchisement, making *The Populist Revolt* not only a history of the movement but a testament to the longevity of reactionary politics and Jim Crow segregation in the early twentieth century.[25]

While Brewton, Tate, and Hicks' works confirm the widespread nature of anti-black prejudice in American academia, this is not to suggest an absence of dissenting opinions in the 1920s and 1930s. The second of the two existing biographies on Watson, C. Vann Woodward's *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, would seek to displace the racial and religious prejudices found in the earlier histories of Tom Watson and the populist movement. A southerner from Arkansas, raised in a Methodist home that valued education and denounced white racial violence, Woodward desired to see a change in the racial status quo, and sought inspiration for race reform

[25] John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1931. Reprint, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 334; 52; 252-3. Citations refer to the University of Nebraska Press edition.

in the story of Tom Watson. Originally composed as Woodward's doctoral dissertation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *Agrarian Rebel* reached bookshelves in 1938, launching a profoundly different interpretation of Watson's life and career than had previously been published.

Student-activist turned progressive historian, C. Vann Woodward saw Tom Watson as a tragic beacon of hope that briefly flickered in the Georgia political landscape before erupting into a fireball of reactionary politics. Woodward described Watson as a "paradox" and understood his life story as a tragedy of a class and of a region. In the preface, Woodward explained that the "impersonal forces of economics and race and historical heritage" ultimately shaped Watson into who he was, defeating him in his early populist days and corrupting the aspirations of his later political career. In spite of this tragic and paradoxical life story, Woodward remained deeply sympathetic to Watson when it came to his race reform efforts with the Populists.[26] Structurally, Woodward understood Watson's life as a two-part act divided by a brief eight-year interlude: the first part as the reformer, and the latter part as the reactionary. Woodward, who firmly disagreed with the bigotry and prejudice of Watson's later years, remained adamant in his belief that one could not fully understand Watson's life and legacy by only examining one part of his political career. The two, in Woodward's eyes, must be reconciled into one complete picture. Thus, Woodward's biography provided an artful combination of sympathy and critique for its subject, heaping praise on Watson for the ideals of his early days and lamenting the bigot that came crashing onto the political scene after 1904.[27]

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[26] John Herbert Roper's *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner* provides a detailed account of Woodward's youth and upbringing. Readers interested in learning more about Woodward's student-activism and writing career prior to his dissertation on Tom Watson should examine the first three chapters of Roper's biography: John Herbert Roper, *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 6-79.

[27] Woodward, preface to *Agrarian Rebel*, n.p.

Woodward's progressive mindset and his affection for Tom Watson manifested itself most clearly in his description of Watson's relationship with African Americans during his populist days. Woodward celebrated Watson's willingness to reach across the color line, writing:

> Tom Watson was perhaps the first native white Southern leader of importance to treat the Negro's aspirations with the seriousness that human strivings deserve. For the first time in political history the Negro was regarded as neither the incompetent ward of White Supremacy, nor as the ward of military intervention, but as an integral part of Southern society with a place in its economy.[28]

Woodward went on to explain how Watson spoke out against lynching, nominated black men to serve on Populist committees and shared campaign stages with black populists.[29] Unlike Brewton, Woodward saw Watson's desire to secure black votes as a sincere effort to unite the interests of farmers for the betterment of both races. Woodward viewed Watson as a pioneer of racial reform and a champion of black civil rights: "Under Watson's tutelage the Southern white masses were beginning to learn to regard the Negro as a political ally bound to them by economic ties and common destiny…Never before or since have the two races come so close together as they did during the Populist struggles."[30] Expanding on this sympathetic view of Watson and Populist race reform, Woodward also took pains to research blacks who worked alongside Watson and include their stories in his narrative. He provided a thoroughly detailed account of the racial and political violence that threatened Watson's political campaigns and his black supporters, mentioning Seb Doyle by name and detailing the terrors of political manipulation faced by southern blacks.[31] In contrast to Brewton's *Life of Thomas E. Watson*, which gave little to no importance to Watson's relationship with blacks, Woodward viewed

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[28] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 221.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 222.
[31] Ibid., 239; 240-1.

Watson's support and subsequent opposition to black voters as the major turning point of his career.

Although Woodward became an expert on Watson's life and celebrated his efforts as a racial reformer, he struggled to understand the conflicting phases of Watson's political career. Reflecting on Watson's changing opinion on black political rights, Woodward wrote: "There is no doubt that Watson thought of the negro problem as the Nemesis of his career. He fled it all his days, and in flight sought every refuge—in attitudes as completely contradictory and extreme as possible."[32] Later on, when discussing Watson's call for black disenfranchisement, Woodward continued to puzzle at Watson's behavior: "How Watson managed to reconcile his radical democratic doctrine with a proposal to disenfranchise a million citizens of his native state is not quite clear."[33] Woodward's confusion regarding Watson's contradictory behavior, as this chapter will examine, seems rooted in Woodward's belief that Watson maintained unselfish motives while promoting race reform. Watson's allegiance to white supremacy, as discussed later in this chapter, appears to be the main aspect of Watson's character that Woodward could not fully comprehend at the time he wrote *Agrarian Rebel.*

Woodward, like Brewton, cited Watson's own reasoning for supporting disenfranchisement, explaining that Watson believed the corruption of black voters rendered white voters ineffective and inhibited real reforms from taking place. In addition, Woodward also observed that having eliminated black voters, Watson and the Populists could now leverage their votes between the Democratic and Republican parties in the same way black voters had previously done. Woodward's confusion concerning Watson's race relations, however, did not prevent the biography from receiving sterling reviews from a number of historians and

[32] Ibid., 220.
[33] Ibid., 371.

humanities journals.[34] *Agrarian Rebel* launched Woodward's tremendously successful career, as he would go on to become "one of the greatest historians of 20th-century America and the most influential scholar ever to interpret the history of the American South."[35] His biography of Tom Watson, in turn, became the touchstone for future studies of the Populist movement and one of its most complex and notorious leaders.

In the decades that followed *Agrarian Rebel*, no new biographies of Tom Watson emerged to challenge Woodward's interpretations, a testament to the quality of the work and Woodward's reputation as a scholar. Woodward's optimistic view of Watson's efforts in race reform clearly influenced subsequent research on the Populist movement. Landmark studies of the Populists such as Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R*. (1956) and Lawrence Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (1976) echoed Woodward's optimistic interpretation of the Populists' efforts to reform race relations. Reminiscent of Woodward's interest in race reform efforts in the South, Hofstadter singled out the southern Populists as a moment of hope in the history American race relations: "In at least one important area of American life, a few Populist leaders in the South attempted something profoundly radical and humane—to build a popular movement that would cut across the old barriers of race—until persistent use of the Negro bogey distracted their following."[36] Goodwyn

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[34] Favorable reviews of Woodward's *Agrarian Rebel* include the following: John D. Hicks, review of *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel*, by C. Vann Woodward, *Journal of Southern History* 4, no. 4 (Nov. 1938): 538-9, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2192083 and Elliot Goldstein, review of *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel*, by C. Vann Woodward, *Yale Law Journal* 48, no. 1 (Nov. 1938): 169, https://www.jstor.org/stable/791769.

[35] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "In Memoriam: C. Vann Woodward, 1908-99," *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association* (March 1, 2000) https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2000/in-memoriam-c-vann-woodward.

[36] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 61. Hofstadter, notably, also referred to a handful of Watson's histories in this study,

tackled this narrative even more extensively than Hofstadter, perhaps having the perspectives gained during the success of the Civil Rights movement to assist him. Although many considered Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise* a seminal text and the new authority on the history of the populist movement in the United States, his analysis of Watson and the southern Populists strongly resembled Woodward's conclusions in *Agrarian Rebel*.

Goodwyn's interpretation of Watson and the southern Populists concurred with Woodward's regarding the populist's stance on race, the movements shortcomings, and Tom Watson's subsequent regression into reactionary politics. Identifying the era as a brief glimmer of hope in southern race relations, Goodwyn wrote: "In the South, the Populist era was one of those moments in American history when things could have changed somewhat."[37] While Goodwyn's assessment seems to use 'somewhat' as a caveat, slightly dampening Woodward's professed optimism, he maintained a generally positive view of the movement and its potential to improve race relations. Goodwyn understood Tom Watson as "clearly more open-minded than his rivals" and "the most persistent and vocal critic of lynching and of the convict lease system."[38] Concerning Watson's regression into reactionary politics, Goodwyn upheld the corruption claims previously made by both Brewton and Woodward, stating that Watson's "successive defeats through the Democratic custom of fraudulent voting of blacks altered the thrust of his public calls for political and economic rights for Negroes."[39] While much of Goodywn's analysis seems to parallel Woodward's, he addressed white supremacy and its

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citing them as evidence of Watson's political views. See Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 62-3, 81-4, 91-2, and 94.

[37] Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in Am*erica (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 297.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 296.

influence over the Populists more directly than Woodward, expanding this facet of Populist history beyond what Woodward had attempted in *Agrarian Rebel*.

Echoing Woodward's mention of Watson's economic and cultural inheritance, Goodwyn addressed the effects of white supremacy and the challenges it posed to the viability of the People's Party. Perhaps benefited by the end of Jim Crow and the perspective gained by distance and time, Goodwyn could better articulate the existence of white supremacy and its role in southern politics: "the received cultural inheritance of white supremacy continued to hold a greater sway over Southern whites than issues of economic reform did, however ably such issues were discussed by Populist spokesmen" and "race demagogy, along with the received cultural tradition, drove thousands of Populist-leaning white Southerners back to the party of their fathers."[40] Goodwyn's interpretation of the Populists, it seems, aimed to expand Woodward's interpretations rather than to challenge it. Sharing Woodward's progressive mindset, Goodwyn also devoted a chapter of *Democratic Promise* to the history of the black Populists, prefacing the chapter with a disclosure that readers should not consider his chapter a true in-depth study because he lacked source material from black populist authors.[41] Goodwyn's progressively-minded research and his interest in the southern Populists, however, only exposed the proverbial tip of the iceberg when it came to studies of Watson and the Populists during the 1970s and 1980s. These critically-minded scholars, unlike Hofstadter and Goodwyn, aimed to challenge many of Woodward's conclusions about Watson's efforts in race reform, ostensibly dismantling the consensus surrounding Watson's sincerity and motivation when it came to race reform.

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 277.

One of the best-articulated challenges to the Woodward consensus on Tom Watson came from Charles Crow in his 1970 article "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered."[42] In this essay, published by *The Journal of Negro History*, Crowe argued that Woodward incorrectly interpreted Watson and his fellow Populists' actions and intentions when it came to black voters. While acknowledging that he greatly admired Woodward's scholarship and his efforts to celebrate racial reform, Crowe explained that Woodward greatly underplayed the white supremacist ideology that motivated Watson's actions and over-emphasized their efforts in racial reform. Citing the benefit of time and an improved understanding of black voting habits, white supremacy, distinctions between social and political equality, and concepts such as the Lost Cause, Crowe insisted that the time had come to displace some of Woodward's conclusions and reassess the racial prejudices of Tom Watson and the Populists.

After contextualizing *Agrarian Rebel* within the historiography of the 1920s and 1930s, which Crowe described as "heavily burdened with racist assumptions," he turned to a thorough dissection of Watson's actions during his Populist campaigns. Highlighting instances of black manipulation at the hands of Watson, the populists, and other political groups, Crowe addressed the influence of white supremacist ideology in the populist ranks: "It is clear that Populist leaders wished to harvest black votes without compromising any major doctrines or practices of white supremacy." Additionally, Crowe discussed Woodward's positive interpretation of Watson's reform efforts, suggesting that Woodward did not thoroughly examine the racial sentiment present in Watson's campaign speeches:

> Although Woodward did quote Watson accurately and Watson did make conciliatory remarks in 1892 and 1894, the collation of all the surviving speeches and newspaper accounts of public meetings suggests a pattern of duplicity in which Watson made three

[42] This article was published six years before Lawrence Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise*.

> kinds of speeches, one for whites, one for blacks, and one which featured the perilous attempt to accommodate simultaneously both white supremacy and Black aspirations.[43]

Crowe also observed that Watson seemed to constantly make appeals to black voters, apologize to white voters for these appeals, and subsequently walk-back his promises to black audiences.[44] Given the high praise Woodward's analysis of Watson has received, it is very surprising how much material Crowe was able to pull together to undermine Woodward's interpretation.

At the close of his article, Crowe challenged Woodward's suggestion that the two parts of Watson's career substantially differed while also acknowledging the shortcomings of his own analysis: "Although Watson's life-long devotion to white supremacy, the South and 'states rights' provided a thread of continuity for his entire political career, it is foolish to suppose that all paradoxical elements in his life and thought can be easily resolved in a brief article." Further reflecting on the contributions of his own article and the historiography of Tom Watson, Crowe acknowledged that "only an extremely precise and thorough modern biographer could hope to provide the proper answers" to the paradox of Tom Watson. In his parting words, Crowe summarized the turning tide in the historiography of Tom Watson and populism, writing: "[I]t is necessary to recognize the fact that Watson and his movement had little to do with radicalism or with the fate and aspirations of Black people."[45] Robert M. Saunders shared Crowe's skepticism of Watson's actions and Woodward's interpretations, publishing his critical article "The Transformation of Tom Watson, 1894-1895," in the same year.

Closely examining Watson's final years with the People's Party movement, Saunders challenged Woodward's suggestion that two substantially different Tom Watsons existed during

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[43] Charles Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered," *Journal of Negro History* 55, no. 2 (April 1970): 102-4; 106, https://doi:10.2307/2716444.
[44] Ibid., 110-12.
[45] Ibid., 114.

the course of his life: the populist reformer and the regressive bigot. According to Saunders, Watson had already moved in a conservative direction between 1894 and 1895, one year before the proverbial end of the People's Party. Defeated in special elections, impeded by fraud allegations, and scrambling to drum up support for the populist ticket, Watson allowed some of the more radical and socialist-leaning portions of the populist campaign fall to the wayside. Saunders carefully studied Watson's paper trail during this transformative year, locating speeches and newspaper articles in which Watson admitted his own desperation to appeal to more voters and distance himself from more radical members of his own party. Concerning Watson's intolerance of non-Protestants and non-whites, Saunders also observed that by the end of 1895, Watson freely expressed anti-Catholic sentiment and no longer defended pro-black political measures. If Watson mentioned blacks between 1894 and 1896, he only attacked the Democrats' position on black issues or walked back his previous claims that supported black rights.[46]

The increased skepticism of Tom Watson's racial views expressed by Crowe and Saunders persisted throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1976, notably the same year as Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise*, Eugene R. Fingerhut published his article "Tom Watson, Blacks, and Southern Reform," in which he analyzed Watson's publications from his early populist days until his death in 1922. Fingerhut examined Watson's racial views as expressed in these documents and contextualized them for the modern reader: "By today's standards, the Tom Watson of the 1890s may have been an ardent advocate of limited Negro rights. However, in his Populist heyday, he was too pro-black for many of his supporters."[47] In his analysis of Watson,

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[46] Robert M. Saunders, "The Transformation of Tom Watson, 1894-1895," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 340-5; 347-52. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40579087.
[47] Eugene R. Fingerhut, "Tom Watson, Blacks, and Southern Reform," *Journal of Negro History* 55, no. 2 (April 1970): 334, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40580313.

Fingerhut likewise made a valuable observation concerning perceived lack of consistency and the "paradox" of his character. Discussing the anti-black, anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic beliefs Watson clung to in his later days, Fingerhut summarized the arc of Watson's political career:

> By his death in 1922 he had attacked virtually every group in the nation which he believed hostile to white Ango-Saxon Protestant southern farmers. In doing this he was consistent. He was constantly finding racial, economic, political and cultural enemies which seemed to threaten his agrarian constituents and his ambition….[F]or the small town businessman and farmer, he advocated political alliances. The southern black was such a prospective ally in the 1890s. When the blacks were no longer useful, Watson discarded them. Their political rights were a means to an end.[48]

Watson's perceived inconsistencies, his white supremacy, and skepticism towards the race reform efforts of the Populists would reappear in subsequent histories of the Populist movement in Georgia. While small in geographic scale, these studies greatly enriched the historiography of Tom Watson and lent substantial credibility to criticisms of Woodward's interpretations.

Concerned with why populism gained significant traction in northern Georgia, where Watson lived and worked, Steven Hahn examined the economic conditions and social values of the region in the four decades leading up to the Populist movement. His monograph, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*, was published in 1983. While Hahn did not discuss Watson at length, other than identifying him as the source of the Populist's stance on racial matters, he did address the racial values of the Populists in a manner starkly different from Woodward. Hahn wrote: "white Populists could hoist the banner of white supremacy even as they assailed its partisan manifestation" and "the enduring racism of Populism's rank and file was rooted in deeper class relations and attitudes."[49] Hahn, possibly inspired by Goodwyn's attempt to study black populists

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[48] Ibid., 341-2.
[49] Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 285.

and benefitted by the smaller geographic scale of his research, also cited a number of sources that speak to the skepticism Georgia blacks had of their white populist neighbors.[50]

One year after Hahn's *Roots of Southern Populism*, Barton C. Shaw's *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (1984) posed an even greater challenge to Woodward's interpretation of Watson and the Populists. Discussing the Populists and race relations, Shaw cited Woodward's assertion that "Never before or since have the two races in the South come so close together as they did during the Populist struggles."[51] Shaw, however, countered Woodward's argument, writing: "For a time, the [Populists] vigorously tried to win blacks to their cause….Yet blacks gave Populism little support. Contrary to Woodward's findings, Georgia Populists were hostile to the former slaves, some occasionally donning the regalia of the Ku Klux Klan to intimidate them."[52] Shaw's analysis of Watson mirrored his intense criticism of the Populist Party: "[Watson] was a reformer but one who had no love for blacks."[53] Examining Watson's famous defiance of a lynch mob to protect Seb Doyle, Shaw continued his dissection of Watson's racial views:

> What of the famous day in Thomson, when Tom Watson protected the black minister, Seb Doyle, and hundreds of poor whites galloped to the rescue? How can that response be reconciled with the Populists who, in the same locale, rode the countryside at night terrorizing black people? The answer is fairly simple. The farmers rushed to Thomson to save Watson, not Doyle. The word that went out into the country was that Watson had been murdered, or at least was in danger.[54]

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[50] Ibid., 284.
[51] C. Vann. Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 221.
[52] Barton C. Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 3.
[53] Ibid., 211.
[54] Ibid., 88.

To support this interpretation of the Doyle episode, Shaw, curiously, cited a Congressional investigation which Woodward also frequently quoted in *Agrarian Rebel*.[55]

While Shaw's poignant criticisms of Watson seems to diminish any sense of improved race relations during the life of the People's Party, Shaw did take a short break to reflect positively on Doyle's role in the populist movement. On a brief note of optimism, Shaw wrote: "White Populists did indeed feel sympathy for Doyle. For weeks he had campaigned for the third party at considerable personal risk….It is doubtful, however, that they would have ridden only to save the black minister." According to Shaw, this dramatic episode in the history of the Georgia populists "demonstrated that in the Populist mind there were two kinds of blacks: those that supported the third Party, and those that did not." Shaw, unlike Woodward, also understood the Populists' policies toward African Americans as "compromise[s]" or "concessions" rather than as a sincere effort to better African American lives.[56] Furthermore, Shaw believed that Watson's alleged 'transformation' was entirely consistent with the character he exhibited throughout his life. Writing on Watson's "seemingly irrational" actions, Shaw explained:

> [T]hey occurred not because Populism was irrational but because Watson was irrational. Although many people were baffled by what appeared to be a serious change in Watson's personality, those who knew him well could not have been too surprised. Indeed, no drastic transformation in [Watson's] nature ever took place. From his boyhood to his days as a Populist, he was a profoundly troubled individual.[57]

Reminiscent of Fingerhut's discussion of Watson's consistency and loyalty to his white constituents, Shaw's analysis challenged the dichotomous interpretation of Watson's political career originally suggested by Woodward. Shaw and Fingerhut's revisions, however, still

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[55] Ibid., 89. See Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 240-1 for examples of Woodward citing this congressional investigation.
[56] Ibid., 79.
[57] Ibid., 209.

supported Woodward categorizing Watson a paradox. At the very least, it seems scholars could agree that Watson was a profoundly complicated individual.

The work of scholars in the 1970s and 1980s dealt a serious blow to the heart of Woodward's interpretation of Tom Watson. However, a new biography did not appear that displaced Woodward's *Agrarian Rebel*. Interest in Tom Watson dropped off significantly in the 1990s, only to be picked up again in the early 2000s. C. Vann Woodward's passing in 1999 appears to have contributed to this resurgence in scholarly interest, as symposiums dedicated to honoring Woodward's memory were held and circulated in collections of essays.

Bertram Wyatt-Brown, who also wrote Woodward's obituary for the American Historical Association in 2000, stood at the forefront of this resurgence, publishing his article "Tom Watson Revisited" in 2002. While this article provided uniquely modern analysis of Watson's mental health and how manic-depressive episodes seemed to have characterized his life, Wyatt-Brown's discussion of *Agrarian Rebel* and Woodward's profound influence on southern history during the scope of his career make this article indispensable in understanding how the historiography of Tom Watson had progressed into the twenty-first century.[58]

Contextualizing his psychoanalysis of Tom Watson, Wyatt-Brown first addressed why Woodward did not extensively examine populist's mental health in *Agrarian Rebel*. Framing Woodward within the historiographical trends of the 1930s and 1940s, Wyatt-Brown explained:

> Writing during the Great Depression under the influence of Charles Beard, Woodward quite naturally stressed Watson's political life during economic crisis and his transformation from rebel to racist….The young scholar, a radical by the standards of his

[58] Wyatt-Brown's psychoanalysis and his diagnosis of Watson as manic-depressive certainly has some limitations, since Wyatt-Brown did not have a degree in clinical psychology and he could only delve into Watson's emotional state through personal letters and political speeches. However, given widespread interest in mental health in the present-day United States, it seems any new biographical study of Tom Watson would have to address the populist's mental health to some extent, making Wyatt-Brown's examination of Watson's mental health a valuable contribution to the study of Tom Watson.

> day, preferred to see Watson as a warrior in the class warfare of Populist underdog versus New South capitalist. Watson's later diatribes therefore seemed to spring from crushing political defeats and not from some inner fury.[59]

Wyatt-Brown understood Woodward's interest in Watson as an effort "to find a liberal strain in the South" who could "[represent] the possibilities of change in the South for the better." Woodward's work, according to Wyatt-Brown, even helped transform race relations in the United States: "By re-examining the past through *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, Woodward was pointing the way to a new order of human relations that broke old conventions. His biography helped to set a historical stage for the nonviolent civil rights movement."[60] This assessment of Woodward's legacy and the epic impact of his scholarship was not unique to Wyatt-Brown, as these views were also held by Woodward's biographer, John Herbert Roper.[61]

Although Wyatt-Brown could identify the historiographical trends that produced some blindness in Woodward's interpretations of Tom Watson, he acknowledged that his analysis of Watson's mental health paled in comparison to Woodward's sweeping and authoritative biographical study. Examining Watson's political career through the lens of his emotional and mental health, he explained, would reveal "a more accurate diagnosis of Watson's pathology" than Woodward previously offered. Wyatt-Brown, however, believed such a study of Watson could only supplement *Agrarian Rebel*, not displace it: "[I]t must be conceded that this concentration stresses the negative aspects of a brilliant and many-sided figure. Only a full-scale biography could perform that multidimensional task in which Watson's strengths as an orator, father, writer, and attorney would receive their due. That would be a daunting undertaking in

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[59] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Tom Watson Revisited," *Journal of Southern History*, 68, no. 1 (Feb. 2002): 9, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3069689. Woodward's biographer John Herbert Roper also noted that Woodward was not only untrained in psychoanalysis, he doubted the value and viability of its findings when it came to historical study. See Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 250.
[60] Wyatt-Brown, "Tom Watson Revisited," 29-30.
[61] See Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 75-79.

light of Woodward's formidable achievement."[62] Wyatt-Brown, as Charles Crowe had done 32 years earlier, signaled the need for an updated biography of Tom Watson while also acknowledging the challenge facing any scholar hoping to displace *Agrarian Rebel*. His call, like Crowe's, would go unanswered in the years that followed. Scholars interested in Tom Watson and the turn-of-the-century south, however, continued to chip away at Woodward's interpretation utilizing a wealth of new source materials.

One of the most significant challenges to Woodward's interpretation of Tom Watson's life and career in the twenty-first century came from Gregory Mixon in 2005. In his monograph *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City*, Mixon identified Watson and his news publications as substantial contributor to "the antiblack attitudes behind the Atlanta Riot."[63] Building on the criticisms and conclusions of scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, Mixon described Watson as a "[typical] reformer in the Progressive Era" who actively campaigned against the political and social rights of African Americans, a marked difference from Woodward's analysis of Watson's race reform efforts.[64] Mixon's research, additionally, yielded valuable information concerning the year Watson actually began to support black disenfranchisement. Discussing Watson's retreat from politics in 1896 and his subsequent return eight years later, Mixon wrote:

> After the collapse of 1896, Watson set out to transform the 'the hide-bound rock ribbed Bourbon South' with his own answer to 'the Negro question.' For Watson, African Americans were pawns manipulated by Democrats, Republicans, Populists, and Independents against various white political opponents. Although historians have identified the 1904 presidential campaign as the moment when Watson publicly committed to disenfranchisement, a private letter Watson wrote in 1902 to political

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[62] Wyatt-Brown, "Tom Watson Revisited," 9-10.
[63] Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 54.
[64] Ibid., 57.

> independent, feminist, and racist commentator Rebecca L. Felton establishes the earlier landmark transformation in Watson's personal beliefs.[65]

Mixon's discovery of the 1902 letter, coupled with Robert Saunders' analysis of Watson's conservative shift between 1894 and 1895, suggests that Woodward's periodization of Watson's political career as a two-part act divided by a brief eight-year interlude adequately describes these stages in Watson's political career. The contents of the letter, considered alongside the criticisms from the 1970s and 1980s concerning Watson's racial reform efforts, likewise suggests that Watson's eight-year absence from politics deserves to be studied in greater detail.

Mixon's discovery of new source material and subsequent challenge to the periodization of Watson's life and career mirrored the findings and conclusions of Gerald Gaither, who published a revised edition of his 1977 monograph *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South* in 2005. Initially receiving mixed reviews concerning issues with clarity and quantitative research, Gaither updated and expanded his research, publishing a revised edition in 2005 with the University of Alabama.[66] Hoping to produce a "more fully articulated regional portrait of Populism's biracial experiment," Gaither's revised edition incorporated a number of previously untouched Southern newspapers and recent monographs on the Populist movement.[67] These source materials were, perhaps, the ones Goodwyn lacked at the time he wrote *Democratic Promise* in 1976.

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[65] Ibid., 56.
[66] Mixed reviews of Gaither's *Blacks and the Populist Revolt* include the following: Edward C. Williamson, review of *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in "The New South"* by Gerald H. Gaither, *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no.1 (Jul., 1978): 101-3. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30147479 and Robert F. Durden, review of *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in "The New South"* by Gerald H. Gaither, *North Carolina Historical Review* 55, no. 3 (Jul., 1978): 358-9, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23535257.
[67] Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South*, rev. ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), ix.

Throughout *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, Gaither confronted Woodward's assertion that white Populists sincerely aimed to protect black political rights. Gaither believed Woodward erroneously portrayed the white populist as a man with a strong moral compass, and likewise painted Watson "with rose tinted brush strokes." Although Gaither admitted that Woodward never claimed that this racial inclusiveness held true for all white Populists, he believes Woodward's strong professional influence on the subject led some scholars, such as Goodwyn, to make such a generalization in later scholarship.[68] By analyzing the rhetoric of the Southern Populists through a more critical lens than Woodward had previously done, Gaither formulated a comparative study between the more 'liberal-minded' Populists and the remaining political parties in the South. According to Gaither: "Compared with their contemporaries, Southern Populist leaders were often no better or worse than fellow reformers in their racial attitudes and at least on par with many Republicans and Democrats."[69] While this critical approach allowed Gaither to situate the Populists within the Southern political and rhetorical context, it also gave him the opportunity to acknowledge that Woodward's interpretation did not entirely misconstrue Watson and the southern Populists:

> [T]here was a racial maturity and progressivism to Southern Populism even in its hours of peril that testifies to the validity of the Woodward Thesis. Populist did not, for example, often make blanket indictments about blacks as did their opponents but concentrated largely on specific personalities and events. In these incidents, Populist rhetoric was not a knee-jerk racist but rather colored by political expediency.[70]

Charles Postel, author of one of the most recent general studies of the populist movement *The Populist Vision* (2009), mirrored Gaither's attempt to synthesize Woodward's interpretation of Tom Watson and the Populists with the criticisms that had taken place since the 1970s. Echoing

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[68] Ibid., 97.
[69] Ibid., 112.
[70] Ibid.

Gaither's conclusions, Postel called "the white Populists' commitment to biracial cooperation….more rhetorical than substantive." Postel, however, maintained that the populists should be viewed as racial reformers in spite of their cultural white supremacy, citing that they did support modest race reform measures when convenient to their cause.[71]

The historiography of Tom Watson, in some ways, comes to an unsatisfying conclusion as it stands in 2021. An updated biography of the Georgia Populist has not appeared to reconcile Woodward's *Agrarian Rebel* with the challenges to Woodward's thesis that have circulated since the 1970s. While the lack of a new biography on Tom Watson may come as a slight disappointment for invested readers, the rise of populist movements across the globe during the 2010s offer Tom Watson scholars some reason for excitement.

As scholars, political leaders, and media outlets have tried making sense of the dramatic rise in populist movements during the last decade, an increased interest in the history of populism in the United States—and a slight increase in scholarly interest in Tom Watson—seems to have followed. Articles such as Donald R. Werhs' "Global populism and its 1890s Southern United States antecedent: the vexing case of Thomas E. Watson and William Faulkner's literary intervention" (2020) and Anton Jäger's "Caesarism and Republicanism in the Political Thought of Thomas E. Watson" (2021) both offer fresh perspectives on why Watson should remain a topic of interest in the present day. Each of these authors consulted Watson's published histories for evidence of his political ideology, acknowledging that most Tom Watson scholars had previously neglected to see the value of these sources.[72] While Werhs and Jäger did

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[71] Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19. One of the "modest" reforms the Populists supported was the protection of black voting rights.

[72] Donald R. Wehrs, "Global populism and its 1890s Southern United States antecedent: the vexing case of Thomas E. Watson and William Faulkner's literary intervention," *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 21, iss. 3 (2020): 298-9, DOI: 10.1080/17533171.2020.1772540; Anton Jäger, "Caesarism and Republicanism in the Political

not pioneer this methodological approach in the historiography of Tom Watson, that two different scholars in two different specialties would spontaneously write and publish articles concerning Watson's literary career within two years of each other gives one reason to pause and, at the very least, marvel at the coincidence. Revisiting Watson's literary efforts, one might argue, seems to be one of the next major steps in formulating an updated biography of Tom Watson.

Although Wehrs and Jäger have contributed handsomely to bringing scholarship on Tom Watson to a twenty-first century standard, Woodward's *Agrarian Rebel* still remains the authority on Watson's life. Consequently, those trying to understand the paradoxical nature of Tom Watson's populist career and racial policies uncover a protracted answer, dispersed in a number of articles and monographs on related subjects. One of the best summaries correctly addressing the nuances of Tom Watson's racial views during his populist crusade actually appeared in a biography of C. Vann Woodward, written by Herbert Roper in 1987. Describing the overturn of Woodward's analysis of Tom Watson and the Populists, Roper wrote:

> The most accurate picture now available would describe the Populists as people who shared the racism which permeated their respective regions of the South but who laid to one side their most extreme prejudices long enough to attempt a major economic reconstruction through the political process. In some ways, white populists attempted to manipulate black votes, but many blacks were politically shrewd enough to gain real opportunities, and most black successfully eluded manipulation.[73]

Although scholars have thoroughly examined and disproven Woodward's highly-optimistic interpretation of Watson's race reform efforts, questions about Woodward's thesis remain, namely: Why did Woodward, an expert on Tom Watson's life and a champion of southern history and progressive historical writing, interpret Watson's Populist career in such a positive

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Thought of Thomas E. Watson," *American Political Thought* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2021): 421, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/715054.

[73] Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 114.

manner? And, how do we reconcile Woodward's scholarly authority over Watson's life with the inherent flaws in his argument? The answers to these questions can be found in a closer examination of the historical context in which Woodward wrote and in the evidence he gathered to formulate his conclusions about Watson.

As described by John Herbert Roper in *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner*, Woodward selected Watson as an object for historical study in an effort to expose "the real issues" of Southern history. Raised in a Methodist family that valued education, he attended a number of schools where his relatives served as administrators. Active in student-reform efforts, Woodward's campaigns for institutional changes at his schools often flew in the face of his own family members, who created or enforced the policies against which he was rebelling. Modestly successful in the classroom, by 1932, Woodward had received a master's degree from Columbia University, uncertain about where his next career move would be. After briefly working for the Works Progress Administration conducting sociological surveys in central Georgia, Woodward determined that his skills and interests would better affect social change being applied to the study of history.[74]

As mentioned earlier by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Woodward found himself in the progressive historical paradigm set forth by Charles Beard, which trended towards economic history and class analysis. Beard, however, had not set his gaze to an analysis of the New South, making the region's history a fruitful area of study for the young Woodward. Historical research on the New South as it stood in the 1930s primarily came from a group of Columbia-trained students mentored by William Archibald Dunning. Known as "the Dunning school," this group of scholars produced the first studies of Reconstruction in the southern states. The majority of

[74] Ibid., 1-63.

scholars in the Dunning school were southern-born and had travelled north to study under Dunning, one of the best-respected American historians at the time. The scholarship of the Dunning school, cutting-edge in its own day, has since earned a reputation as an overwhelmingly racist analysis of the Reconstruction era.

While some exceptions to this generalization exist within this group of scholars, many of these studies concluded that Reconstruction failed because of blacks, and that the South had become corrupt at the hands of Republicans who tried to empower recently freed slaves.[75] The end of Reconstruction in the South and the return of Home Rule resulted in the demise of black civil rights in the South and the rising tide of Jim Crow racial segregation across the United States. The academic studies of the Dunning school and their racially-prejudice conclusions about Reconstruction reinforced these developments, as they lent credibility to further racial discrimination. John Herbert Roper described the influence of the Dunning school and the rise of Jim Crow segregation as "the moral and intellectual quid pro quo in which black civil rights were exchanged for white political unity." The authoritative sway of the Dunning school over southern history, along with the racial prejudice their scholarship helped legitimize, became one of the main obstacles against which Woodward and other "dissident" scholars would struggle.[76]

Initially when Woodward dedicated himself to writing southern history, he explored conducting a study of southern demagogues titled "Seven for Demos." In this work, he aimed to expose the unattractive parts of southern history that his predecessors had neglected or ignored. As Roper explained: "He had in mind then a thoroughly rebellious book, one that would take the

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[75] Roper wrote at length about the historical paradigm in which Woodward found himself, and discusses both Beard and the Dunning School. Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 63-75. For further reading on the Dunning School, see John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowry, eds., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013).

[76] Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 68.

flaws of the demagogues seriously while berating their conservative opponents for not taking the issues seriously." This book idea, however, fell through, impeded in its early stages by a lack of accessible archives.[77] Families of these notorious southern politicians denied Woodward access to the personal papers of their relatives, attempting to protect the legacy and public image of their family members. Woodward had a stroke of luck, however, when he contacted one of Watson's granddaughters, Georgia Watson, who enthusiastically supported his research plans and granted him access to her grandfather's private papers and interviews with living family members.[78]

Having determined the topic of his study and gained access to archival materials, Woodward enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where Tom Watson's archives had been deposited by the Watson family. Woodward's academic pursuits while at Chapel Hill have become the stuff of graduate student legend, according to John Herbert Roper: "the myth holds that Woodward was an indifferent student who came to near failure on his comprehensive examinations and nearer still to failure on his teaching assignments." Delving into the myth of Woodward the graduate student, Roper painted a portrait of a young reform-minded student who bristled against the racism of the history department's accomplished professors such as Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton, but greatly admired their scholarship and dedication to historical research. While at Chapel Hill, Woodward primarily viewed his pursuit of a doctoral degree as the quickest way to study the life and career of Tom Watson, a

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[77] In the early stages of "Seven for Demos," a title Woodward selected because of its connection to classical Greece, Woodward planned to study the life and careers of southern demagogues "Georgia's Tom Watson, Alabama's Tom Heflin, Louisiana's Huey Long, South Carolina's Ben Tillman, Mississippi's James Vardaman." See Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 76.
[78] Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 75-80.

feat which he hoped would make improvements beyond academia, inspiring race reforms across the United States but especially in the South.[79]

Woodward saw his research on Watson as a concrete way to make a positive change in race relations in the United States. He identified a "grander need for a usable past" when it came to the study of southern history, an idea which he borrowed from his friend and classmate Glenn Weddington Rainey. Rainey, progressively-minded like Woodward, "insisted that southerners must search their past for exemplary exceptions to the section's conservatism" and "must act by the light of their minority exemplars." Certainly, Rainey's influence can be seen in Woodward's selection of Tom Watson as a candidate for biographical study, and in Woodward's positive interpretation of Watson's racial reform efforts. Approaching his coursework at Chapel Hill, Woodward fixated on studying the less attractive parts of southern history, or, as Roper put it: "Exactly the dirty things which gentleman politicians kept from their discussions and exactly the dirty things which Woodward saw all around him." For Woodward, this meant researching racism, poverty, regional sense of inferiority, political corruption, and romantic ideas of lost causes in the south. [80] These components of southern history, prominent in *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel*, would hold Woodward's attention for the remainder of his career.

The University of North Carolina accepted Woodward's dissertation on Tom Watson in 1937, three years after he enrolled at the University. In 1938, a year that felt extremely long for Woodward as he searched for teaching positions and book publishers, the prominent New York-based firm Macmillan began publishing his dissertation manuscript under the name *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel*.[81] This year, it seems, proved to be a busy year for Woodward, as *The Journal of*

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[79] Ibid., 81; 85. Roper noted that Hamilton studied under William Dunning, making him a member of the famous Dunning "school."
[80] Ibid., 76; 42; 75.
[81] Ibid., 102.

Southern History also published his article "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics" in February. It is unclear whether *The Journal of Southern History* agreed to publish the article prior to Woodward receiving notice about Macmillan accepting his manuscript for *Agrarian Rebel*. However, the February 1938 publication date of "Tom Watson and the Negro" suggests that the article predated the publication of the biography.

While it is not unusual for historians to publish a portion of their book as an article prior to the book's publication, the subject of the article being Watson's racial views gives pause, especially in light of an observation by John Herbert Roper. Discussing *Agrarian Rebel*'s initial reception and how scholars viewed Watson after 1970, Roper stated: "As for the racial attitudes of the Populists, and specifically of Tom Watson, Woodward's evaluation now appears much too generous. Even when he originally wrote, a number of his friends cautioned him that his passion for interracial reform in his own day might make him read a similar liberalism back into the Populist's era…."[82] Woodward, perhaps, felt that his conclusions about Watson's reform efforts would stir up the most interest in his book, or that his readership might benefit from a more targeted analysis of this portion of Watson's career. Although most of the contents in "Tom Watson and the Negro" made an appearance in *Agrarian Rebel*, Woodward's brief discussion of how African American historian and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois viewed Tom Watson did not. Woodward's decision to include this information in his article on Tom Watson and not in the biography gives reason to pause and closely examine this unique reference to Du Bois.

In "Tom Watson and the Negro," Woodward cited Du Bois as one of his reasons he interpreted Watson's racial reform efforts in such a positive light. After a condensed discussion of Watson's Populist-era race reforms, and just before Woodward's analysis of why blacks might

[82] Ibid., 114.

have felt they benefited from the Populist platform, Woodward wrote: "The sincerity of Watson's appeal to the Negro has been called into question—as has the sincerity of any appeal to the Negro vote…..It is interesting to note in passing that W. E. B. Du Bois, a Negro leader not given to uncritical enthusiasm for Southern politicians, was sufficiently convinced of the sincerity of Watson to regard the failure of his movement as a calamity for the Negro race."[83] Woodward deeply respected Du Bois, and had even approached him with the intention of writing his biography, an offer Du Bois rejected.[84] A 1938 letter from Woodward to Du Bois further confirms Woodward's admiration. The letter accompanied a copy of "Tom Watson and the Negro," which Woodward described as "written in a spirit that I hope you [Du Bois] will approve." Woodward also confessed his admiration for Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* and cited it as a major influence over his own scholarship.[85] Du Bois' positive interpretation of Watson's reform efforts, combined with his authority as an historian of the South and a black civil rights activist, makes Woodward's own conclusions about Watson more understandable. Challenging a conclusion held by both Woodward and Du Bois seems like an extremely tall order, given their reputations as historians. However, revisiting some of Woodward's evidence and the distinctions Watson made concerning racial equality brings Woodward's conclusions into further doubt and highlights how interpretations of civil rights have changed since 1938.

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[83] C. Vann Woodward, "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics," *Journal of Southern History* 4, no. 1 (Feb. 1939): 23, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2191851. Woodward's citation for this Du Bois source is "W. E. B. Du Bois, "Georgia: Invisible Empire State," in Ernest Gruening (ed.), *These United States* (2nd Ser., New York, 1926), 339-40." [Possibly include this in an Appendix?]

[84] Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 111.

[85] Letter from C. Vann Woodward to W. E. B. Du Bois, April 3, 1938, *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers* (MS 312) Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b087-i148.

In *Agrarian Rebel*, Woodward described Watson's racial reform efforts in extremely positive terms, calling his "bold program" for the Populist platform "a reversal of deeply rooted racial prejudices." Listing Watson's pro-black efforts, Woodward explained how he shared stages with black politicians and spoke in favor of black education and voting rights. Woodward, however, ended the paragraph with the following:

> He [Watson] did not advocate 'social equality' and said so emphatically, since that was 'a thing each citizen decides for himself.' But he insisted upon 'political equality,' holding that 'the accident of color can make no difference in the interests of farmers, croppers, and laborers.' In the same spirit of racial tolerance he was continually finding accomplishments of the Negro race at home and abroad to praise in articles and speeches.[86]

In the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* United States and especially in the twenty-first century, most people would consider Watson's distinctions between social and political equality extremely prejudiced. Clearly, Woodward held a different view in 1938, and felt Watson's distinctions appropriate for a racially progressive politician. Compared to the views of his fellow politicians, especially in an era of increasingly frequent racial violence and segregation, Watson's opposition to lynching and efforts to reach across the color line might have rightly been considered progressive. Woodward's positive interpretation of Watson, therefore, speaks more to changing standards in American racial sensibilities and the progression of civil rights during the course of the twentieth century than to an egregious error in Woodward's thinking in the 1930s. However, the disparate views between Woodward in 1938 and American racial sensibilities in 2021 become even more pronounced when examining a speech Watson delivered in 1893, a time period that Woodward considered the peak of Watson's racial progressiveness.

In a speech titled "The Creed of Jefferson, the Founder of Democracy," delivered on July 4th, 1938 to a crowd in Douglassville, Georgia, Watson addressed his views on white supremacy

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[86] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 220-1.

and black civil rights. In a section titled "EQUAL AND EXACT JUSTICE TO ALL MEN," Watson acknowledged that his opponents had slandered him concerning his racial views. He went on to explain that racial and sectional division would ultimately prevent the United States from reaching its full potential. He followed this statement with an unequivocal admission of his own belief in white supremacy:

> I yield to no man in my pride of race. I believe the Anglo-Saxon is stronger in the glorious strength of conception and achievement than any race of created men; but from my very pride of race springs my intense scorn of the phantasm manufactured by political bosses called 'negro domination!' Socially I want no mixing of races. It is best that both should preserve the race integrity by staying apart. But when it comes to matters of law and justice, I despise the Anglo-Saxon who is such an infernal coward as to deny any man legal rights on account of his color for fear of 'negro domination!'

Following this selection, Watson further insisted that whites were so superior to other races that there should be no fear of being 'dominated' by another race, and reiterated that whites who were afraid of such things were "cowards."[87] Watson published this speech, along with several others, in a book titled *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* in 1908. Notably, Woodward cited this work several times in *Agrarian Rebel*, indicating his knowledge of the book's contents and Watson's professed allegiance to white supremacy.[88]

In fairness to Woodward's interpretation and to better understand Watson's racially charged declaration, some context concerning the southern political climate in the 1880s and 1890s seems appropriate. As described by Joel Williamson in *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, the racial, social, and economic climate of the South underwent significant turbulence during the 1880s and 1890s. The end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the return of Home Rule to white southerners, also called

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[87] Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (Nashville, TN: published by the author, 1908), 163-4.
[88] Woodward cited *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* on the following pages of *Agrarian Rebel*: 2, 307, 313, 322-3, 335, 360, 377, and 489.

Redemption, left the South with an unstable power vacuum occupied by ex-Confederates and formerly-enslaved blacks who could no longer count on federal protection to ensure their rights. Two decades of explosive racial and political violence would follow.

Threats to traditional southern conservatism became one of the major forces affecting change in the South during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Throughout the Civil War and up until the 1880s, as Williamson explained, white southerners held overwhelmingly conservative political views. The return of white southern political power in 1877, however, threatened this conservative consensus; for a brief period of time in the 1880s and 1890s, white liberals jockeyed for the spotlight in southern politics. While their conservative peers did not entertain the possibility of blacks being anything but inferior and subservient to whites, liberals "flirted with the idea of equality in important categories—as in religion, in educational and economic opportunity, and civil rights."[89] The strong conservative impulse in the South meant that even southern liberals, such as Tom Watson during his Populist days, were relatively conservative in their goals.

By 1889, another force rose in opposition to the liberal strain of white southern political thought. Known as the Radicals, this varied group of white politicians, scholars, and activists believed that southern blacks had steadily regressed back into their natural state of savagery since Emancipation. Radicals felt particularly threatened by the rising generation of black men who were born free, never experiencing "the civilizing effects of slavery." As this generation reached adulthood in the 1880s and 1890s, white Radicals began to sensationalize the impending threat black males posed to white women. An economic depression in the South during the 1880s

[89] Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 107-8.

and 1890s, which left blacks and white alike wandering across the region looking for work, fueled the Radicals' belief that blacks could not care for themselves without white paternalism.

The economic depression in the 1890s, partly responsible for the rise of the populist movement, also contributed to a dramatic increase in lynching. Economic stress challenged Victorian-era gender roles in the South, feeding into an increasingly more violent loop of racial suspicion and economic hardship. White men, tasked with earning an income for their household and protecting the virtuous white woman from the outside world, struggled to feed their families. Frustrated by their inability to fulfill societal expectations, white men searched for a scapegoat and a means to right economic wrongs. Bands of "Whitecaps," similar to the Ku Klux Klan, began terrorizing black farmers who had set up homesteads on or near the fertile estates of their former masters. Driven from their land during an economic depression, black men, who had inherited some of the Victorian-era gender expectations from their white peers, went in search of a way to provide for their families. The wandering black male, in turn, fed into the Radical's myth of black bestiality, which threatened white society and especially the safety and virtue of white woman. Radicals such as Ben Tillman of South Carolina and Rebecca Felton of Georgia made impassioned speeches in favor of lynching, asserting the importance of protecting white women from the savage black male by any means necessary. Given the vocal nature of the southern radicals and the societal stresses imposed by an economic depression, it seems like no coincidence that lynching in the South reached record highs during the 1890s.[90]

With this context in mind, Woodward's positive interpretation of Watson's pro-black efforts during his populist days become slightly more palatable. Watson attempted to counteract the Radical's belief that blacks in the United States had an overwhelmingly bleak future, and that

[90] Ibid., 107-18.

whites should not waste money or time on black education or voting rights. Watson's belief that whites were so far superior to other races that they should not feel threatened by the modest progress of their black neighbors, however, throws an interesting twist into this narrative of southern race relations in the 1890s. While understanding the broader historical context plays an essential role in research and analysis, once considered, it seems there should also be room to conclude that the southern political climate in the 1890s was overwhelmingly anti-black. Whether Watson's unshakeable belief in white supremacy and the limited concessions white Populists made to southern blacks in the 1890s make Watson more or less racist than seems open for debate.

Likewise, it is difficult to comprehend why Woodward did not acknowledge Watson's pledges to white supremacy more directly in *Agrarian Rebel*. Writing in the 1930s, yet another decade of harsh economic realities, Woodward went in search of a hero who could serve as an example to mending racial and economic tensions in the South. At best, readers today can conclude that Woodward overstated Watson's reform efforts, hoping to inspire another generation of southern reformers. One can also speculate that the realities of white supremacy permeated Woodward's world and that of his readership so extensively that he did not feel the need to articulate this aspect of Watson's character more explicitly. Nevertheless, his failure to directly address his subject's white supremacy, combined with the revelations in Watson's historiography since 1970, indicates that Watson's life and career warrants a more careful examination.

Critics of Woodward's interpretation of Watson, as discussed previously, have focused on Watson's early career with the Populists. These scholars questioned Woodward's rosy conclusions about Watson's efforts and motives when it came to race reform, dredging up a

wealth of evidence that suggested otherwise. The majority of these studies, however, do not analyze Watson's activities after 1896, relinquishing the remainder of Watson's narrative back to Woodward. Scholars who looked beyond 1896 often jumped to 1904, when Watson publicly supported disenfranchising Georgia's black males. The eight years between the end of the People's Party and Watson's return to his political career have garnered little scholarly attention. Notably, Woodward's dichotomous understanding of Watson's political career may have played a role in this neglect.

In the preface to *Agrarian Rebel*, Woodward wrote the following: "[Watson's] life was a paradox. Especially is this true when the two parts of his career, divided by the interval of eight years that began in 1896, are contrasted. One cannot arrive at any fair or true judgement of Watson by considering either of these two aspects of his life in conclusion to the other."[91] Most scholars seem to conform to Woodward's two-part model for studying Watson's life, criticizing Woodward's interpretations about Watson's career with the Populist while generally agreeing with Woodward's lamentations about Watson's later career. The eight years in between Watson the reformer and Watson the reactionary have drawn little critical attention from scholars determined to demystify Watson's stormy political career. Watson, however, did not cease to exist during this time period. That scholars would pay little attention to his activities—and especially any developments in his racial views—during his hiatus from politics comes as a surprise, since Watson's political career could be roughly summarized by the following statement: Watson was a racial reformer, took an eight-year break from politics, and then returned as a bigot and a reactionary. While scholars have identified Watson's conservative shift leading up to 1896 and criticized the extent of his race reform efforts, they have not examined

[91] Woodward, preface to *Agrarian Rebel*, n.p.

how these developments eventually morphed into publicly supporting black disenfranchisement in Georgia in 1904. These eight years in Watson's life, therefore, will serve as the primary focus of this study.

As described by Woodward, Watson spent the years after the crushing defeat of the People's Party in debt and in anguish. To make a living, he returned to his law practice and delivered public lectures on a number of subjects. Although still a self-described Populist with a strong sense of doctrine, Watson lamented the demise of the People's Party and its incredibly bleak future. As the United States entered the Spanish-American War in 1898, Watson drew even further away from politics, denouncing the war as a means for banks, politicians, and privileged classes to profit while the lower classes suffered. Disgusted with the political scene, Watson retreated to his library, and dedicated himself to writing "populist history."[92] Watson's career as an author would prove extremely fruitful, as he published three histories on French subjects and two more on American subjects during his hiatus from the political scene. By 1906, he had established his own publishing firm, the Jeffersonian Publishing company, and published yet another American history using his own presses in 1912. While Watson wrote and published an overwhelming amount of other books, newspapers, and magazines in his lifetime, Woodward honed in on these six publications as examples of Watson's populist activism in historical writing: *The Story of France*, in two volumes (1899), *Napoleon: A Sketch of his Life, Character, Struggles, and Achievements* (1903), *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* (1903), *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* (1905), and *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson* (1912). Woodward's discussion of these works, notably, precedes the chapters concerning Watson's political activities in 1904.

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[92] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 333-6.

While scholars like Brewton, Fingerhut, and Wyatt-Brown made some mention of Watson's historical work, Woodward dedicated the most time and attention to examining these books in the context of Watson's life and career changes.[93] His doctoral dissertation on Watson had actually been titled "The Political and Literary Career of Thomas E. Watson," a testament to the significance Watson's literary efforts had in his biographer's eyes.[94] Woodward, according to Roper, felt motivated to demonstrate that "southern politicians were intimately and significantly involved with ideas."[95] Accordingly, Woodward painstakingly illustrated Watson's influence over the development of the People's Party platform, and took special care to discuss Watson's efforts as an historian and author. Providing very brief summaries of Watson's six histories, Woodward collected reviews on each work and inserted his own opinion on the overall style and quality of Watson's writing. In general, Woodward observed that the quality of Watson's histories worsened over time, as his French histories received much higher marks than his later American ones. Woodward described Watson's 1903 biography of Thomas Jefferson, for example, as "a poor book, marred by laxness of style and undisciplined garrulity."[96] This study, while interested in Woodward's interpretations of Watson's histories, is also concerned with what Woodward did not say about Watson's histories. Specifically, how Watson discussed race and perpetuated white supremacist ideology in historical writing.

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[93] Mentions of Watson's ventures into historical writing can be found on the following pages of these respective studies: Brewton, *Life of Thomas E. Watson*, 282-91l; Fingerhut, "Tom Watson, Blacks, and Southern Reform," 336; Wyatt-Brown, "Tom Watson Revisited," 15. For authors that have consulted Watson's histories as a source of his political ideology, see also Richard Nelson, "The Cultural Contradictions of Populism: Tom Watson's Tragic Vision of Power, Politics, and History," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1988): 1–29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40581767.

[94] Roper, *C. Vann Woodward* 102; 108-10. The title of the Tom Watson manuscript only changed to *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* after Macmillan agreed to publish the work pending some modifications

[95] Ibid., 102.

[96] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 352.

Watson's hiatus from politics in 1896 and his infamous call for disenfranchisement in 1904 indicate that his attitude towards race became increasingly more reactionary over this eight-year period. Watson admitted to such a development in his racial beliefs and black civil rights in the 1902 letter to Rebecca Felton, as previously mentioned.[97] Accordingly, one might ask if Watson's histories, which occupied a significant amount of his time during his political hiatus, reflect a change in Watson's racial beliefs? While the publication dates of these histories, which appeared between 1898 and 1912, do not match the exact parameters of Watson's 1896-1904 hiatus, Woodward's recognition of these works as an outlet for Watson's political beliefs indicates that these histories may contain evidence of Watson's shifting perspective on race and civil rights. An examination of how Watson discussed race in these histories, first, confirms that Watson maintained the white supremacist beliefs that he had previously outlined in his Fourth of July Speech in Douglassville, Georgia, and that Woodward's critics have also examined. One of the most conspicuous details about race in these histories is how often Watson used historical events as a platform to discuss white supremacy and racial difference. On several occasions, his writings incorporated a seemingly random detail about race, information that could easily be omitted from the narrative if not for Watson wanting to include it. While obsession carries too strong of a connotation to describe Watson's interest in discussing race, modern readers of Watson's histories may suspect that he simply could not stop himself from mentioning race.

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[97] A digital copy of the 1902 letter from Tom Watson to Rebecca Felton is available online in the Rebecca Felton archive, hosted by the Special Collections Libraries at the University of Georgia. See Box 4, Folder 7 in *Rebecca Latimer Felton Papers*, ms81, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries, http://sclfind.libs.uga.edu/sclfind/view?docId=ead/ms81.xml%3Bbrand=default.

As for a reactionary shift in Watson's racial views being detectable in these histories, this characteristic is more subtle. It is difficult to formulate a scale that quantifies how racially-prejudiced certain statements are in comparison to another, especially in an episodic survey of six histories on six different subjects. Statements in favor of racial violence seem to land on the extreme end of the spectrum, while those advocating racial tolerance land somewhere on the opposite end. It is also difficult to determine where other statements about race would land in between these two extremes, as these would likely depend on the racial sensibilities and values of the individual reader. Certainly, there is room for one to argue that one observation made by Watson is more intolerant and racially-prejudiced than another. The goal of this study, however, is not to formulate a scale of racial prejudice in historical writing. Rather, it is to examine how Watson discussed race in his histories and to discern whether these mentions of race can shed light on Watson's opposition to black voting rights in 1904.

Considering Watson's final three histories on American subjects, one can argue that Watson's discussions of race in these histories reflect a reactionary shift in his racial views. Watson's *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* in particular, presents Watson's version of the southern experience during the Civil War, promoting a Lost Cause interpretation of the conflict and lamenting the loss of Home Rule for white southerners. The publication of *Bethany* in 1904 also accompanied Watson's return to the political scene and his public call for disenfranchisement—not to mention Watson's muckraking publications that contributed to the 1906 Atlanta race riot. Watson's American histories perpetuate stereotypes of a happy, docile enslaved black population and a benevolent class of patriarchal whites who oversaw the South's welfare. However, as this study will show, contradictions in Watson's racial musings appear throughout his histories, weakening this interpretation of increasingly-reactionary racial views.

His American histories, on occasion, convey a sense of progressive racial attitudes (see footnote), while his French histories included conspicuous references to white supremacist beliefs and derogatory stereotypes about black and indigenous people.[98] Thus, while there is evidence to support a reactionary shift in Watson's racial views in the scope of his historical writing, this argument cannot be overstated. Consequently, the weakness of this argument may be attributed to the irrationality of the white supremacist beliefs Watson held; Watson could heap praise on the achievements of non-whites while simultaneously using these accomplishments as evidence for why whites should be capable of even more success.

What follows is an examination of how Watson discussed race in his six historical works, published between 1898 and 1912. In the interest of tracking how Watson's racial views may have become more reactionary over time, these books will be discussed chronologically and in two thematic chapters covering Watson's French histories and American histories. Readers should not assume that these chapters catalogue every mention of race in each respective history. Such an undertaking would produce a significantly more haphazard narrative of how Watson discussed race in his historical writing, and also become extremely repetitive given Watson's fondness for reusing phrases and epithets. An effort has been made to provide the reader with adequate context concerning what historical event Watson described when analyzing how Watson approached race at a given place in his narrative.

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[98] This study will use the common noun definition of the word "progressive," meaning someone in favor of liberal social reforms. Describing Thomas E. Watson, a professed white supremacist, or any of his ideas as "progressive," therefore, definitely requires a caveat explaining Watson's racial beliefs and further explanation for why any of his references to race could be labeled "progressive." Ideas described as "progressive" in this study are comparing Watson's "progressive" statements to his more reactionary statements about racial inferiority, such as his references to savagery, his belief that slavery benefitted blacks, and his suggestion that racial violence was necessary to protect white civilization and ensure that blacks remained inferior to whites. Instances where Watson mentions people of color and does not make these derogatory comments are considered "progressive" within the context of this study.

Likewise, an effort has also been made to underscore for the reader—who presumably have not read the entirety of Watson's obscure histories—the numerous occasions that Watson made a seemingly random mention of race. The number of times such an unexpected reference occurs played a large part in determining race as the main focus of this study. Watson's propensity for discussing race in seemingly unrelated historical narratives, in other words, seemed too bizarre to ignore.

Aside from this examination of race in Watson's histories providing a more nuanced understanding of how Watson's racial views became more reactionary over time, readers are also encouraged to reflect on the broader significance of these publications. When appropriate, references will be made to source material that helps contextualize Watson's intentions in writing and publishing these works. In addition to citing the interpretations of Woodward and other scholars who briefly examined Watson's publications, this study will draw from Watson's correspondence with publishing firms, book advertisements, records of book sales, and critical reviews of these histories to help provide a clearer picture of why Watson wrote and why a market existed for such writings. Through this approach, readers may obtain a better understanding of not only Tom Watson's racial values but also those of Watson's literary audience, who made his writings a profitable source of income.[99]

Although narrow in its subject matter and somewhat cumbersome in its methodological approach, this study aims to uncover Watson's racial sensibilities in the years between the fall of

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[99] Woodward noted that between 1896 and 1904, Watson's wealth increased considerably, more than doubling in the eight-year span. By 1904 Watson had become the largest landowner in the state of Georgia, and also owned valuable properties in Florida and Virginia. At least some of this increase in wealth, one can reasonably guess, could be attributed to Watson's book sales. *The Story of France*, by Woodward's account, saw "remarkable popular success" and sold around 50,000 copies for the duration of Macmillan's copyright. Several of Watson's books, in addition, saw multiple revised editions and secondary publications. See Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 339; 344.

the Populist movement and Watson's infamous return to his politics after the turn of the century, clarifying an under-studied portion of the life and career of Tom Watson. Additionally, this study enriches our understanding of what literary audiences tolerated in historical writing when it came to discussions of race and racial difference, permitting readers to reflect on how significantly racial sensibilities have changed in American academia since the early twentieth century.

CHAPTER 2: "MY CRAVING FOR BOOKS HAS LED ME FAR AND WIDE:"[100] THE MAKING OF TOM WATSON'S FRENCH HISTORIES

Tom Watson's decision to write histories after the collapse of the People's Party does not seem like an unusual progression of interests for a former politician with an enormous amount of free time and a sizable amount of debt. His biographer C. Vann Woodward even described Watson's lifetime as "the day when the tradition of the statesmen as historian flourished," implying that Watson's switch from politician to historian was relatively standard at the turn of the twentieth century.[101] During the populist campaigns of the early to mid-1890s, Watson frequently wrote short stories about French and Roman history, publishing his articles in popular magazines and party newspapers. In these serialized histories, Watson drew parallels between the political climate of the 1890s United States and that of ancient Rome or pre-Revolutionary France. In 1896, he even collected some of his articles on French history and published them in a short, one-volume history titled *The Story of France*.[102]

While these details provide some key information concerning Watson's shift from political campaigns to historical writing, his initial focus on writing only French history seems to warrant more of an explanation: Watson was, after all, an American politician from Georgia, with no formal training in historical research, working out of his personal library. Even more striking than Watson's relative lack of credentials, however, is the fact that one of the preeminent publishing houses in the United States, Macmillan, gave Watson a contract to write an enormous two-volume history of France as his first major book deal. Three years after this contract,

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[100] Thomas E. Watson, *Prose Miscellanies*, 3rd ed. (Thomson, GA: Jeffersonian Publishing Co., 1917), 55.
[101] C. Vann. Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (London: Macmillan, 1938; reprint New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 338. Citations refer to the reprint edition.
[102] Ibid., 336.

Macmillan agreed to publish yet another lengthy French history by Watson, indicating that his first publication turned enough of a profit to continue their professional relationship with him. In *Agrarian Rebel*, C. Vann Woodward made no explicit statements about whether he considered Watson's ventures into French history peculiar, and did not explain why a leading publishing firm would even want these histories. Addressing Woodward's relative silence on this matter, supplementing the background information he provided in *Agrarian Rebel*, and explaining how this context relates to understanding Watson's handling of race in his French histories will be the primary purpose of this chapter.

As this chapter will show, Watson's publisher, Macmillan, enthusiastically pursued a contract with Watson, citing his ability to produce histories that embodied his unique perspective as an American and as a populist. An in-depth examination of Macmillan's history reveals Watson's relative lack of credentials for historical writing did not make him unique from other authors Macmillan published at the turn of the twentieth century. His reputation as a politician that opposed elitism and claimed to represent for the interests of the "average" man likewise aligned with the internal goals of Macmillan during this time period, as they had a professed goal of publishing books with mass-appeal and of dominating the American market for educational texts;[103] Watson's French publications would have fulfilled both of these objectives.

[103] References to the "average" man appear frequently in this study. Watson, his publishers, and his reviewers all gesture toward the idea of appealing to the "average" man at one point or another. No definition of who the "average" man was is ever provided in these writings. It is possible that the reference to the average man could mean a person of average income, of any profession, of any skin color, and of any gender. It is also very possible that Watson, his publishers, and his reviewers all had a different definition of who this person was. Given the context of the time period, it seems likely that Watson's attempt to appeal to the "average" man targeted the working class white male, who he claimed to represent as a Populist. His efforts at racially integrating the Populist ranks might also indicate that Watson meant to appeal to the "average" working class black man as well, however, the white supremacist ideas expressed in these histories seem to discredit this theory.

A survey of how Woodward, Macmillan, and Watson's reviewers discussed Watson's histories additionally reveals no objection to how Watson discussed race in these histories. While their silence of the matter seems reflective of how racial sensibilities at the turn of the twentieth century differed from racial sensibilities today, the survey of how Watson discussed race in his French histories in Chapter 3 makes the implied indifference of his biographer, his publisher, and his reviewers all the more striking. The lack of resistance to how Watson discussed race in these histories seems to suggest that his white supremacist beliefs represented the predominant racial beliefs of the white American public during this time period. Even those who might have disagreed with Watson's white supremacist beliefs, like C. Vann Woodward, seemed unsurprised by the racial sentiment Watson expressed in Watson's histories, to the extent that he did not even decide to acknowledge them in *Agrarian Rebel*. This detail leads to further questions about Woodward's awareness of Watson's white supremacy, and why he did not address this ideology more explicitly in his biographical study of Watson.[104]

Woodward's analysis of Watson's decision to write French history in *Agrarian Rebel* seems intended for his audience in the late 1930s, who presumably would have been more familiar with Watson, the publishing standards of the early twentieth century, and histories written by more amateur gentleman historians like Tom Watson. Woodward cited an autobiographical essay Watson wrote about his decision to write history and his intention to defend populist ideals through historical interpretation. He also mentioned that Watson's grandfather presented him with a Napoleon biography at a young age, explaining that this gift

[104] Woodward, one can speculate, was not as equipped to identify and address white supremacist views in the late 1930s as those writing after the Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. Although this detail does not justify Woodward's decision to say nothing about Watson's allegiance to white supremacy during his Populist campaigns, the historical context in which Woodward wrote *Agrarian Rebel* is important to acknowledge to better-understand the shortcomings of his perspective and the shortcomings of present-day historical research.

inspired Watson to study French history. Further contextualizing Watson's efforts at historical writing, Woodward noted that Watson's private library "at one time contained over 10,000 volumes." Among all this background information, Woodward only made one comment that suggests any skepticism towards Watson's credentials as a historian of France. In a passing comment discussing the overall quality of Watson's first history *The Story of France* Woodward wrote: "All things considered—its origin, and the unusual circumstances of its creation —it would seem of more importance to underscore [the book's] virtues."[105] Woodward did not press further into explaining what these "unusual circumstances" were, which provides this chapter with an opportunity to more closely examine Watson's decision to write French history, as well as the circumstances surrounding the publication of these volumes.[106]

The best explanations for Watson's interest in historical writing comes directly from Watson himself, however, Woodward seems to have correctly represented these explanations in *Agrarian Rebel*. Watson outlined his interest in historical writing in an autobiographical essay titled "The Story of My Life," which appeared in his self-published book *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (1908). After describing the "humiliating" loss of the Populists in 1896, Watson professed his newfound interest in history: "With my own party out of business, there was nothing for me to do in the way of political work, and I turned to literature and advocated

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[105] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 332; 335-9. Woodward additionally made note of the book sales and royalties Watson earned with his French histories, judging them as a success.

[106] Although not directly related to Watson's interest in writing history, Woodward also acknowledged that Watson had an extremely depressed emotional state after the collapse of the People's Party, to the point that he could barely describe the intense suffering over a decade later. See Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 332. Woodward implied that writing history served a therapeutic role for Watson. This detail about Watson becomes even more striking when considered alongside the numerous white supremacist and anti-black comments he made throughout his French and American histories. One can speculate that the loss of control Watson experienced in 1896 translated into an attempt to reassert control through historical writing, as he constantly celebrated the efforts of white reformers and southern white males in his histories.

the same eternal principles of human liberty and justice and good government in historical works, such as 'The Story of France,' 'The Life of Napoleon,' 'The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson,' and 'Bethany.'"[107] Watson, therefore, viewed historical writing as a means to promote his political beliefs and enhanced the credibility of the Populist creed. Later on, in another self-published work titled *Prose Miscellanies* (1912), Watson further specified what drew him to French history.

In an essay titled "How I Came to Write a Life of Napoleon," Watson described his interest in the French emperor, seemingly comparing his life experiences to Napoleon's throughout the essay.[108] Watson noted that his grandfather presented him with a copy of John C. Abbot's multi-volume biography of Napoleon, and that this biography sparked a lifelong interest in Napoleon, books, and history in general: "from the days when I first yielded to the spell of the imaginary Napoleon of Abbott, down to the present hour, my craving for books has lead me far and wide, but I have found no subject which has fascinated me so constantly as that of Napoleon." Watson further specified that he admired Napoleon for his humble background, his rise to greatness in spite of many betrayals, and his opposition to "absolutism, divine right, and class-rule."[109] Although he did not make this comparison directly, Watson described his

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[107] Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (Nashville, TN: self-published by the author, 1908), 22.

[108] In *Crucible of Race*, Joel Williamson also noted that the southern radicals, a hyper-conservative anti-black movement that Watson eventually joined sometime after 1896, greatly admired the heavy-handed leadership style of Napoleon. Acknowledging the parallels between Watson's political maneuverings and those of the French statesmen, Williamson believed that "It was no coincidence that Watson took time in a busy life to write a biography of Napoleon." See Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 296.

[109] Thomas E. Watson, *Prose Miscellanies*, 3rd ed. (Thomson, GA: Jeffersonian Publishing Co., 1917), 55-8. The biography of Napoleon Watson received from his grandfather was likely this one: John S. C. Abbott, *The History of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1855).

impoverished childhood and the many disappointments of his political career alongside these references to Napoleon, indicating that Watson not only admired might have identified with the French emperor. [110]

Compared to Watson's relatively clear-cut explanations for his interest in French history, understanding Macmillan's interest in publishing these histories required significantly more digging. In Watson's time and in the present, Macmillan has had a reputation as "one of the most prestigious publishing houses on both sides of the Atlantic."[111] Watson's reputation as a contentious political actor and his lack of formal training in history, however, leads one to question why Macmillan had a vested interest in publishing not one but three volumes of his French histories. A surge in interest in France and Napoleon Bonaparte during the Gilded Age, which Anton Jäger called "a true Bonapartist craze," clarifies why Macmillan wanted to publish histories on French subjects.[112] The popularity of French history alone, however, does not

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[110] Both of Watson's biographers, William Brewton and C. Vann Woodward, acknowledged Watson's small frame and stature. According to Brewton, Watson was five feet five inches tall. The average height of the American male in 1916, according to CNN writer Madison Park, was five feet seven inches, placing Watson slightly below average height. Woodward made no explicit reference to Watson's exact height but emphasized his "boyish figure" on a number of occasions. One can, therefore, draw yet another parallel between Watson and Napoleon, a man famously associated with a short stature. See William W. Brewton, *The Life of Thomas E. Watson* (Atlanta, GA: printed by the author, 1926), 77; Madison Park, "How Humans Have Changed in Height in the Last 100 Years," *CNN* (Tuesday July 26, 2016), https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/26/health/human-height-changes-century/index.html; Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 74.

[111] John David Smith, *Black Judas: William Hannibal Thomas and* The American Negro, paperback ed., with a new preface (2000; repr. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2019), ix. Citations refer to the reprint edition. Smith referred to publishing house in his biography of William Hannibal Thomas because Macmillan published Thomas's infamous book defending black discrimination, *The American Negro*, in 1901. Of mixed-race ancestry, Thomas was a contemporary of Watson who also began a public crusade against blacks just after the turn of the twentieth century. Smith briefly discussed Watson on page 160 of *Black Judas*, drawing parallels between the two men for their public reversal of opinion on black civil rights.

[112] Anton Jäger, "Caesarism and Republicanism in the Political Thought of Thomas E. Watson," *American Political Thought* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2021): 420, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/715054. Any reference to the popularity of the French and French history in the United States during the

explain why Macmillan wanted Watson to be the author of these histories. A closer examination of Macmillan's history in the United States and the corporate restructuring that took place in the early 1890s helps contextualize Macmillan's interest in hiring Tom Watson in 1898.

Started in 1843 by two Scottish Brothers Daniel and Alexander Macmillan, the London-based publishing firm first established a New York office in 1869, under the guidance of George Edward Brett of Kent, England. The firm, however, struggled to maintain friendly relations across the Atlantic, and eventually split into two more independent branches, Macmillan UK and Macmillan US. The newfound independence from Macmillan UK helped Macmillan US thrive at the turn of the twentieth century. Now free to cater to the literary taste of their American readership, Macmillan pursued contracts with authors that had mass-appeal to the American public, an interest Macmillan UK had not previously shared. By 1899 Macmillan had become the leader in US-based book publishing, finding tremendous success in popular historical fiction.[113]

The division of Macmillan into a US and UK branch sparked additional changes in the American branch's approach to their home market. Elizabeth James, editor of *Macmillan: A Publishing Tradition* (2002) identified some of these changes in her chapter "Letters from America: The Bretts and the Macmillan Company of New York." Under the leadership of the Bretts, Macmillan US began to invest heavily into its educational department at the turn of the twentieth century.[114] George Platt Brett reached out to American university professors with

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late nineteenth century seems to necessitate a mention of the Statue of Liberty, which the French people gifted the United States in 1884 to commemorate the end of American slavery and to recognize the history of Franco-American relations.

[113] Macmillan Publishers, *The Macmillan Story: Bringing Authors and Readers Together Since 1843* (London and New York: Macmillan, 2018), 1; 13; 59-61. *Macmillan Story* does not define who the firm considered when targeting the American public, but the white supremacist ideas and derogatory comments about people of color expressed in Watson's French histories suggest that Macmillan primarily focused specifically on appealing to white readers.

[114] In her chapter "Letters from America: The Bretts and the Macmillan Company of New York" in *Macmillan: A Publishing Tradition*, Elizabeth James explained that Macmillan expanded the

contracts to write textbooks by American authors and for American classrooms. Macmillan US's venture into publishing American educational texts saw such tremendous success in the 1890s that by 1901, Brett optimistically predicted that a time would come when all textbooks in American classrooms would have American authors or at least American revised editions.[115]

Macmillan's newfound interest in pursuing educational texts with American authors in the 1890s provides a plausible explanation for why the firm worked with Tom Watson to produce a series of French histories between 1899 and 1902. The Bretts' desire to pursue authors with commercial appeal to a mass audience further contextualize their interest in working with Watson, whose former Party trumpeted the values of the "average" man in contrast to those of the elite.[116] Examining the extensive correspondence exchanged between Tom Watson and George Platt Brett between 1898 and 1912 sheds further light on the matter.[117]

Dated January 4, 1898, the earliest letter from George Platt Brett in the Thomas E. Watson Papers is addressed to a Mr. Barker, whose exact identity remains unclear. Based on the contents of the letter, Barker appears to have worked for Macmillan as an agent responsible for receiving and processing manuscripts, and had been contacted by Watson with a manuscript for *The Story of France*. Brett wrote to Barker, "I have been very much interested indeed in Mr. Watson's volume" but acknowledged that the text would require extensive revisions before

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firm's education department by hiring "additional agents," giving them instructions to seek out American scholars interested in having their work published. These efforts "resulted in a succession of influential texts" from Macmillan, ultimately proving investment a success. Elizabeth James, "Letters from America: The Bretts and the Macmillan Company of New York" in *Macmillan: A Publishing Tradition*, ed. Elizabeth James (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 176-8.

[115] Ibid.

[116] See footnote 4 for clarification on the usage of the term "average man."

[117] The Thomas E. Watson Archives are housed in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and are available online as The Thomas E. Watson Papers Digital Collection. See https://docsouth.unc.edu/watson/.

"being published...at such a house as this." In a postscript at the end of the letter, Brett also noted that he is returning a letter from Watson and his book draft to Mr. Barker.[118] Mr. Barker receiving Watson's draft along with a letter indicates that Watson initially contacted Macmillan with his book idea, rather than Macmillan seeking out Watson. However, this cannot be known with certainty without reviewing the contents of Watson's letter to Mr. Barker, the location of which is unknown. Brett's note about Watson's manuscript not meeting the standards of the publishing house, additionally, seems to indicate that Brett felt skeptical of Watson's credentials for writing a history of France, especially one that a distinguished firm like Macmillan would want to publish.

Letters exchanged between Brett and Watson between 1898 and 1899 indicate a growing business partnership and an intense optimism about the prospect of publishing Watson's books. By August 29, 1898, Brett began writing personal letters to Watson with questions and updates about *The Story of France*'s manuscript. Letters between the author and publisher throughout the remainder of the year mention some issue with the editor assigned to Watson's manuscript, which eventually resulted in the firing of the unnamed editor from Macmillan. In an overwhelmingly apologetic letter from November 8, 1898, Brett lamented that the editor assigned to *The Story of France* revised the document with an objectionable "attitude" and that Macmillan was willing "to spare no expense" addressing the damage that had been done to Watson's manuscript. In a time before digital files that allowed for multiple copies of a manuscript to be created and saved during the publishing process, it seems that any revision to a

[118] George Platt Brett to Barker, 5 January 1898, in The Thomas E. Watson Papers #755, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The date assigned to this letter in the archive, January 5, conflicts with the date Brett typed in the upper righthand corner of the page, January 4. The Watson Papers will hereafter be referred to as Watson Papers.

document would be challenging to reverse once an editor had modified the manuscript. In this context, Brett's extensive apologies appear more understandable. Brett went on to call the unnamed editor's remarks as "flippant and absolutely absurd."[119] The exact nature of the editor's offenses remains unclear, as Brett did not make explicit mention of them. Considering some of the negative reviews *The Story of France* received about Watson's lack of scholarly credentials, one can speculate that these aspects of Watson's manuscript might have also been an issue for the editor.

Despite a messy editing process, Brett professed optimism about Macmillan's partnership with Watson and *The Story of France*'s profitability. In a letter to Watson dated November 11, 1898, Brett disclosed his belief that "the book is destined to be successful" and suggested that it might enjoy several updated editions after its original publication date.[120] In his next message on December 8, Brett expanded his predictions for Watson's French history, highlighting the originality of the writing style: "this is a history of France [that] has never before been put to the public." The contents of this letter, furthermore, shed light on Macmillan's interest in publishing educational materials and their standards for scholarly publications.

Lending credibility to the theory that Macmillan wanted to dominate the market for American-made educational texts, in his December 8th letter to Watson, Brett also suggested that Watson include an index for the convenience of "student" readers. However, seemingly in contrast to the implicit goal of appealing to academia, Brett also advised Watson to resist including "a list of authorities" in *The Story of France* because he believed its inclusion would

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[119] Brett to Watson, 8 November 1898, Watson Papers. For more on Macmillan's apologies to Watson concerning the mishandled editing process, see also Brett to Watson, 11 November 1898, ibid.

[120] Brett to Watson, 11 November 1898, ibid.

distract from the book's originality.[121] The contradictions in Brett's desire to appeal to students while omitting a list of authorities on French subjects indicate a lower standard for historical writing in 1898. During this time, evidence-based historical writing and professional, university-trained historians had only recently arrived on the scene at American universities.

Additional evidence supporting Brett's loose standards for academic writing can be found by skimming through the 1899 edition of *The Story of France*. Watson did not use footnotes, a bibliography, or a reference system that disclosed his sources; occasionally, he made haphazard references to vague sources such as "a speech" or "a letter." Otherwise, Watson's sources and inspiration remain a mystery to the reader. While the index suggested by Brett takes up most of the first volume's final pages, two small advertisements on the final printed pages of *The Story of France* shed an interesting light on Brett's suggestion that Watson withhold a list of authorities from his final draft.

Brett's desire to exclude a list of authorities from *The Story of France* appears related to Macmillan's interest in not promoting historical works by other publishers, as indicated by the advertisements at the back of the book. Immediately after the index, Macmillan included two advertisements for two other French histories, both published by Macmillan. Brett's problem with Watson mentioning historical texts that would distract from his own, it seems, subsided when it came to promoting Macmillan publications. The advertisements, *France* (1898) by John Edward Courtenay Bodley and *The Growth of the French Nation* (1896) by George Burton

[121] Brett to Watson, 8 December 1898, ibid. *The Story of France* was essentially a synthesis of several French histories in Watson's personal library, condensed into two volumes and written in a style that presumably appealed to the public and not academia. Brett, supposedly, did not want readers to look beyond this popular history of France for more scholarly works.

Adams, describe the content, style, price, and critical reviews of each respective work.[122] While the subject matter of these histories and the fact that Macmillan published at least three different French histories in the span of only a few years further proves the firm's interest in swarming the American market with educational texts, the credentials of these authors, Bodley and Adams, seem indicative of Macmillan's publication standards at the turn of the twentieth century and why they decided to pursue Watson as an author.

Although Bodley, Adams, and Watson clearly had enough understanding of French history to write and publish books on the subject, Bodley and Watson had considerably less formal training than George Burton Adams. President of the American Historical Association in 1908 and history professor at Yale University, Adams built a reputation as a distinguished authority on medieval history, producing a modestly-sized bibliography on European history during the scope of his career.[123] John Edward Courtenay Bodley, by contrast, seems to have left less of an impression on academia. Most of the available biographical information available on Bodley comes from Macmillan's advertisement at the end of *The Story of France*, which suggests that Bodley, an Englishman, worked in France for a time as a representative of the British government.[124] Macmillan's willingness to publish historical texts by professors such as

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[122] Thomas E. Watson, *The Story of France: From the Earliest Times to the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte*, vol. 1, *To the End of the Reign of Louis the Fifteenth* (1899; repr. New York: Macmillan, 1909), 713-4. Citations refer to the reprint edition.

[123] More information on Adams can be found in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1908: George Burton Adams, "Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at Richmond, December 29, 1908," *The American Historical Review* 14, no. 2 (January 1909): 221–36.

[124] Bodley's nationality, notably, conflicts with the earlier observation concerning the Brett's desire to publish American textbooks written by American authors. The decision to advertise Bodley's work at the end of Watson's *The Story of France* can be attributed to the Brett's obligation to cooperate with Macmillan UK as owners and partners. Additionally, one can speculate that Macmillan hoped to become the authority on publishing historical texts on any given subject and wanted to promote as many Macmillan French histories as possible.

Adams or civil servants like Bodley contextualizes their interest in pursuing a contract with Watson, whose credentials as trained lawyer and former politician put him at a similar level to Bodley, at the very least.

Despite Brett's expressed optimism about the unique nature and earning potential of *The Story of France*, he lamented that the book sold very few copies in its first few weeks of sales.[125] For his part, Brett appears to have done his due diligence as a publisher, sending advanced copies to reviewers and purchasing advertisements in newspapers to promote Watson's book. Additionally, he strategically delayed publishing the second volume of *The Story of France* so that the first volume would receive proper attention from the press.[126] However, Brett's letters to Watson in the early months of 1899 describe slow book sales and frustration over the lack of reviews. In a letter dated February 7, 1899, Brett confessed: "Here [in New York] we are getting along slowly with the book, selling a few copies every day, not so many as I should like but it has hardly had time to become known yet, and the papers seem to be very shy of noticing it, no really adequate reviews having appeared anywhere yet."[127] The slow start to *The Story of France*, however, did not cause Brett to completely lose faith in his investment, as he continued to promote the book and hoped that sales would increase.

Brett, it appears, felt strongly enough about *The Story of France*'s earning potential and its slow book sales that he signed off on a confrontational advertisement in a New York newspaper. On February 15th, Brett sent Watson a copy of an advertisement Macmillan ran in the *New York Sun*. The advertisement accused New York newspapers of forming "a conspiracy

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[125] Macmillan published the first volume of *The Story of France* on January 18th, 1899. The volume totaled over 700 pages. Watson submitted the manuscript for the second volume, also more than 1,000 pages, within a week of volume one's debut.
[126] Brett to Watson, 9 January 1899, Watson Papers; Telegram from Brett to Clark Howell, 30 January 1899, ibid.
[127] Brett to Watson, 7 February 1899, ibid.

of silence" around *The Story of France*, and alleged that sectionalist prejudice against Watson, a southerner, motivated the cold reception. The ad, additionally, listed a number of positive comments *The Story of France* received in *The Literary Digest*, tempting the *New York Sun*'s readership to purchase a copy and see for themselves.[128]

By 1900, a year after Macmillan published the first volume of *The Story of France*, the book gained some momentum, seeing an increase in sales and attracting more critical reviews. These reviews, however, seem influenced by Watson's reputation as a political pundit, as reviewers formed camps strongly in favor and strongly against Watson's retelling of French history. Notably, none of the reviewers disagree with or even mention Watson's references to race and racial difference, signifying that such topics did not surprise or offend Watson's audience in the early twentieth century.

Favorable reviews of *The Story of France*, as Brett had predicted during the book's manuscript phase, commend Watson on the originality of his writing style and his ability to revitalize interest in French history. The October 1900 issue of *The Independent* declared "a more interesting book had seldom been written."[129] G.B. Rose, writing for literary magazine *The Sewanee Review*, confessed he initially resisted those who recommended *The Story of France*. Having read several histories of France and knowing Watson's reputation, Rose admitted that "it seemed presumptuous in a Georgia populite...to retell a story which had been told so often and so well." After reading it, however, Rose deemed *The Story of France* "a masterpiece" and "the best

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[128] Brett to Watson, 15 February 1899, ibid. I was unable to locate a copy of these positive reviews cited in this advertisement. Woodward, however, also did not cite them in *Agrarian Rebel*. This detail, however, seems to suggest the obscurity of these sources, rather than to indicate that Brett fabricated these positive reviews of *The Story of France*.

[129] "The Story of France," *The Independent: Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* vol. 52, issue 2707 (New York, NY), Oct 18, 1900, ProQuest.

history of the French Revolution...that has appeared." Listing Watson's "unconventional writing style" and "the sanity of his judgement" in weaving together a narrative, Rose declared that Watson's efforts as a historian eclipse those of his professionally trained peers.[130] Notably, however, negative reviewers would also cite Watson's prose and reputation as major weaknesses of his history.

Unfavorable reviews of *The Story of France* weighed in heavily on Watson's writing style and his credentials as an historian. The most merciful negative review came from Merrick Whitcomb, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Demonstrating knowledge of *The Story of France*'s favorable reviews and Watson's reputation as a writer, Whitcomb wrote: "Mr. Watson's style has been variously described as vivid, dramatic, clear, crisp and witty. It is all of these, and more." However, Whitcomb believed that the book could not be taken seriously by professional historians, explaining that "the work gives little evidence of ripe scholarship" and "its presentation is in flagrant disregard of much that modern historical writing seeks to accomplish." At the end of his review, Whitcomb cautioned serious scholars from picking up *The Story of France*, relegating it to the realm of popular histories: "Mr. Watson's work may find a public, for it is readable; but it has serious faults and no instructor who is in sympathy with recent ideals in historical writing is likely to recommend it to his classes."[131] While Whitcomb's review offers what seems like the fairest estimation of Watson's writing skills and the academic

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[130] G. B. Rose, "Watson's 'Story of France," *The Sewanee Review* 8, no. 4 (1900): 497–99. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27528130.

[131] Merrick Whitcomb, "Reviews: *The Story of France, from the Earliest Times to the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte,* by THOMAS E. WATSON. Two vols., pp. xv, 712; x, 1,076. Price, $5.00. New York: The Macmillan Company, I899," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 15, no. 3 (May 1900): 154–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271620001500316.

value of his histories, other critics showed significantly less tolerance for Watson reputation or his credentials as an author.

Unapologetic in their criticism of Watson's capabilities as an author and historian, the most negative review for *The Story of France* appeared in an unsigned article printed in 1902 by *The Academy and Literature*, a London-based literary magazine. Not pulling any punches, the article denounced Watson's history as an embarrassment to the English language and as an offense to historical study, as indicated by the article's title "Clio in Distress." The unnamed reviewer, understandably, seems especially unhappy with Watson's anti-English prejudice and the disparaging references he made about the English in his narrative of the French Revolution, quoting these selections at length and disputing their credibility. Unwilling to make any concessions about Watson's writing style, as other reviewers had done, the reviewer described *The Story of France* as "not history, but pamphleteering." Attacking Watson's capacity as a scholar and citing his lack of academic credentials, the author also called Watson "an impressionist dauber who poses as a historian."[132] The reviewer, notably, made no mention of the fact that *The Story of France* was published by the American branch of a London-based firm; given the unforgiving temperament of this reviewer, one can speculate that this aspect of the book would have only brought on more condemnation of Watson and Macmillan.

Aside from these professional reviews of *The Story of France*, a personal letter to Watson from New York-based bookseller F.E. Grant offers a valuable perspective on how the public viewed Watson's history and his reputation. In his March 19, 1899 letter, Grant explained that he

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[132] "Watson's (Thomas E.) The Story of France (Book Review)," *The Academy and Literature* 63, iss. 1575 (July 12, 1902): 64-5, ProQuest.

loved reading *The Story of France* and that he wished to know Watson on a more personal level so that he could convince his patrons to also read the book. Grant acknowledged that his patrons who knew of Watson's political reputation are unsure about reading his histories, and those who know nothing about him immediately questioned why a southerner would know anything about France. He believed contacting Watson directly and forming a professional connection would greatly benefit his ability to market Watson's book. In a forthcoming manner, Grant explained his motive in writing to Watson, stating "you have made in me a sympathetic friend" and "I want to sell many of your books and I hope my humble efforts will indirectly bring you…much money."[133] As the letter continued, Grant made a number of striking observations concerning Watson's publishers and his future projects.

In contrast to Brett's suggestion that Watson withhold a list of authorities from *The Story of France*, Grant advised Watson to include the list in an effort to protect his own reputation as an author. He also observed that Macmillan had not done a good job promoting *The Story of France* and making its merits known to the public, calling their advertisements "conventional and not calculated to create any demand for the book." Furthermore, Grant encouraged Watson to secure a copyright for the French translation of *The Story of France* so that the book could be sold overseas. Notably, he did not explain why the French would want to read their own history written by Tom Watson other than "its originality and its being American."[134] Watson appears to

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[133] F. E. Grant to Watson, 19 March, 1899, Watson Papers.

[134] Ibid. In his letter to Watson, Grant also made an extremely interesting comment about his philosophy for selling books, claiming that he believed his role as a book seller would ultimately help the cause of the temperance movement by providing people with a wholesome activity that would discourage excessive drinking. None of the other sources related to Watson's literary efforts, including *Agrarian Rebel*, ever mentioned the temperance movement as a motive for writing and publishing books. Watson, additionally, did not make this connection in any of his essays that explained his literary career. Grant's letter, in this sense, seems to provide a valuable context for the time period not previously addressed in the other sources.

have taken Grant's advice on selling this book in France, as his newspaper some years later advertised that booksellers in Paris recommended *The Story of France* as an authoritative history of the French people.[135]

Slow book sales and a handful of unfavorable reviews in the years that followed *The Story of France* did not diminish Macmillan's interest in working with Watson on yet another history of France. As early as January 9, 1899, nine days before *The Story of France* reached the public, Brett mentioned his interest in pursuing another contract with Watson; this time, he wanted Watson to write a history of the United States in the same style as his French history. Referencing the commercial potential of Watson's popular histories, Brett wrote: "not only has [the story of the United States] never been told from your standpoint[,] but it has never been told adequately from the point of view of the ordinary reader."[136] Brett did not make clear if by Watson's "standpoint" he meant his perspective as a southerner or as a Populist. Nevertheless, his eagerness to assist Watson in producing another history before *The Story of France* made any sales testifies to Brett's faith in Watson's commercial value as an author.

Within a month of this letter referencing an American version of *The Story of France*, Brett and Watson abandoned the idea and instead began discussing a biography of Napoleon, at Watson's suggestion. In a letter dated February 4, 1899, Brett recognized the profitability and mass-appeal this biography would have, stating: "the story of Napoleon's life and times has never yet been told as it can be told and as it can be understood by thousands of readers throughout this and other countries." Extremely optimistic about Watson's capabilities and the reception of his work, Brett predicted that such a biography "will find a permanent place in the

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[135] "A Complete List of Books by Thomas E. Watson and Sold by the Jeffersonian Publishing Company," *Jeffersonian*, May 28, 1914, Watson Papers.
[136] Brett to Watson, 9 January, 1899, ibid.

world's literature."[137] For the remainder of 1899, Brett made no mention of the biography or any predictions about its success, focusing primarily on the book sales for *The Story of France*.

Watson and Brett appear to have had some lapse in communication between 1900 and 1901, as no letters from these years appear in the Tom Watson Papers. While it is possible Brett was giving Watson time to work on his biography, his next letter to Watson in 1902 suggests a possible falling out between the two men. Brett began his letter from April 23, 1902 with an apology for a billing issue concerning a reprint edition of Watson's *Story of France*, which he attempted to rectify by sending Watson 150 dollars. Brett also mentioned some mishandling of how Macmillan printed *Napoleon*, and apologized to Watson for the problem: "I am more than sorry too that you do not agree with our handling of your book." From the description Brett provided, it appears as if Macmillan tried to include *Napoleon* in a subscription plan or to market it in a serialized version. Watson, however, objected to this plan and requested that Macmillan sell *Napoleon* in the "regular way." Brett cautioned Watson that "the sale will not be so large and the ground we have gained in making the book known will be lost." He, however, ultimately conceded and agreed to follow Watson's instructions for selling the biography.[138]

Watson's biography of the French emperor, *Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, His Character, and His Struggles* (1903) seems to have made significantly less of an impression than *The Story of France*, which received considerably more reviews. *The New York Times* Saturday Review of Books published an article on Watson's *Napoleon*, reviewing it alongside John Holland Rose's *The Life of Napoleon I*. Notably, Rose's *Life of Napoleon* appeared at almost the exact same time as Watson's, and was also published by Macmillan. The simultaneous publication of two biographies on Napoleon seems to have made both biographies less

[137] Brett to Watson, 4 February, 1899, ibid.
[138] Brett to Watson, 23 April, 1902, ibid.

significant right out of the starting gate, and indicates that Macmillan might have felt significantly less interested in promoting Watson's third installment of French history.

The *New York Times* reviewer, George H. Warner, expressed very little enthusiasm for either biography, beginning the article with an air of resignation: "With what a weary gesture must Clio have announced two new lives of Napoleon, almost on the same day of the year!" Warner appears underwhelmed by the efforts of both writers, considering their studies unexciting editions to a lengthy bibliography that already existed on Napoleon. Finding more issues with Watson's approach than with Rose's, Warner disparaged Watson's claim to write history "for the average man," claiming: "the difficulty with this is there is no average man." Dismantling the heart of Watson's approach to historical study, Warner did compliment Watson on his "remarkable force of style" in his narrative of Napoleon's life. However, he made no recommendation of either book at the close of the review, seemingly exhausted from having to read and write about two biographies on Napoleon at the same time.[139]

Watson's dissatisfaction with Brett's handling of his French histories, and presumably Macmillan's decision to publish another biography of Napoleon at the same time, appears to have affected their working relationship significantly. In the years that followed 1902, the men exchanged fewer letters, and the letters they did exchange appear significantly less friendly than those from previous years. Little to no mention of *Napoleon*'s publication, book sales, or advertisements appeared in Brett's letters to Watson, which only occasionally reference reprint editions or suggest that they reduce the price and page length of *The Story of France* to sell more

[139] George H. Warner, "TWO LIVES OF NAPOLEON.: ONE BY THOMAS E. WATSON OF GEORGIA, THE OTHER ... Reviewed for THE NEW YORK TIMES SATURDAY REVIEW OF BOOKS by GEORGE H. WARNER," *New York Times*, BR1 (Apr 5, 1902), ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

books.[140] In October 1904, Watson did send Brett a copy of his novel *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* as a gift. He, likewise, also shared a copy of his Andrew Jackson manuscript with Brett in 1912, indicating some interest in pursuing another contract with Macmillan.[141] The firm, however, did not ultimately publish *Andrew Jackson*, and Watson's sharing of this manuscript might have just been a professional courtesy or a means of leveraging contracts with other publishers. After publishing three histories with Macmillan, Watson never returned to working with Brett, possibly unable to forgive Macmillan's mismanagement of his manuscripts or his book royalties.[142]

As this chapter has examined Watson's interest in writing French history and Macmillan's interest in publishing these histories, it has supplemented Woodward's analysis in *Agrarian Rebel* and clarified this obscure portion of Watson's literary career for the twenty-first century reader. Watson's explanation for his interest in French history and Macmillan's interest in publishing Watson, given the company's internal objectives to publish educational texts with mass-appeal, seem relatively straightforward. Watson, simply put, liked French history, and Macmillan thought Watson's histories would be a lucrative investment.

Macmillan's enthusiasm for Watson's histories, however, will become all the more striking as this study turns to the following chapter, which examines how Watson discussed race and expressed his white supremacist views in these French histories. The silence on how Watson

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[140] See Brett to Watson, 28 September, 1904, and Brett to Watson, 15 March, 1912, Watson Papers.

[141] See Brett to Watson, 8 October 1904, and Brett to Watson, 6 February 1912, ibid. Watson sharing the *Andrew Jackson* manuscript with Macmillan might have also been a result of D. Appleton & Company passing on the manuscript. Watson would ultimately self-publish this biography.

[142] Watson had a notoriously difficult personality and was known for being vindictive and unforgiving towards those who opposed him. For an example of this behavior, Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 380-3.

dealt with race in his French histories from Woodward, Brett, and all of his reviewers seems to indicate Watson's comments on race were not unusual or noteworthy in the early twentieth century, a detail which speak to the widespread nature of white supremacist views in the white American public during Watson's lifetime and as Woodward wrote *Agrarian Rebel*.

CHAPTER 3: "WHEN THE NEGRO WAS BEING FREED, WHY SHOULD A NATION OF WHITES REMAIN SLAVES?"[143] RACE IN TOM WATSON'S FRENCH HISTORIES, 1899-1902

As this study turns to an examination of race in Watson's French histories, readers may be surprised by the number of times Watson, a professed white supremacist, appears to say something progressive about black people or French abolitionists. Watson, for example, praised Toussaint L'Ouverture, a black leader in the Haitian Revolution, for his effectiveness and bravery in leading the Haitian Revolution.[144] One can speculate that Watson, a dedicated reformer, perhaps admired any reformer who succeeded in overthrowing oppression.[145] However, aside from this single compliment to L'Ouverture, Watson's narrative of the Haitian Revolution unequivocally demonstrates his belief in white supremacy and black inferiority. Similar examples of progressive comments undercut but the surrounding context of Watson's narrative appear throughout his French histories. This characteristic of these histories, notably, also resembles how Watson dealt with race and civil rights during his Populist crusade in the early to mid-1890s, since he habitually made statements supporting the expansion of black rights and then walked back these claims in the presence of a white audience.[146]

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[143] Thomas E. Watson, *The Story of France: From the Earliest Times to the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte*, vol. 2, *From the End of the Reign of Louis the Fifteenth to the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte* (1899; repr. New York: Macmillan, 1900), 577-8. Citations refer to the reprint edition.

[144] Thomas E. Watson, *Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, His Character, and His Struggles* (1902; repr. New York: Macmillan, 1903), 311. Citations refer to the reprint edition.

[145] Watson's notorious opposition to American reformer and educator Booker T. Washington strongly weakens this theory about Watson's generalized admiration for all reformers. See Woodard, *Agrarian Rebel*, 379-80 for an example of Watson's opposition to Washington.

[146] Robert M. Saunders, "The Transformation of Tom Watson, 1894-1895," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 340-5; 347-52. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40579087.

Compared to his American histories which deal more directly with the history of slavery in the United States from the colonial era to the Civil War, Watson discussed race significantly less often in his French histories, especially when considering the enormous page count of Watson's French volumes compared to his American.[147] Although mentions of race occur less frequently in these histories, these occasions still offer valuable perspective on how Watson understood race, how white supremacy shaped his understanding of historical events, and how Watson's racial beliefs might have become more reactionary over time. Additionally, Watson's French histories contain some of his most unexpected and seemingly unnecessary mentions of race; these references, in particular, strengthen the argument that Watson had a near-obsession with race and racial difference.[148]

As this chapter turns to an examination of how Watson discussed race in these French histories, readers should note that neither Woodward nor any of Watson's reviewers noted anything particularly striking about how he discussed race.[149] In Watson's time and in Woodward's, racism permeated American society so extensively that Watson's comments on race did not give any of his contemporaries or his biographer reason to pause. His racial views,

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[147] Watson's French histories all exceed 700 pages. In comparison, *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* and *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson* total under 600 and under 500 pages, respectively. *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* is the shortest of the six histories featured in this study, amounting to just over 400 pages.

[148] Although one can reasonably assume that Watson, as a white southern male that came to adulthood during Reconstruction, always had an interest in race and racial politics, the start of his "obsession" with race can be dated somewhere around 1890, the beginning of his career with the Populists, until his death in 1922. Woodward dealt with this subject in Chapter XIII of *Agrarian Rebel*, and also in his article "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics. See Woodward, "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics," *Journal of Southern History* 4, no. 1 (Feb. 1939): 23, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2191851.

[149] See Chapter 2 for an examination of how Woodward discussed these histories, and how critics reviewed Watson's efforts in writing French history.

in other words, were not uncommon for the time period, and in some cases might be reflective of how the majority of white Americans understood race at the turn of the twentieth century.[150]

3.1 *The Story of France*, Volume 1

Watson's first volume, *The Story of France: From the Earliest Times to the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte*: *To the End of the Reign of Louis the Fifteenth* examined French history from the sixth century B.C. up until 1774, spanning roughly 2400 years. In this 700-page volume, Watson covered the Roman period, the Middle Ages, the reign of the Sun King Louis XIV, and the French Enlightenment. The arc of this history leads up to the social and political conditions responsible for the French Revolution, the topic of his second volume.[151]

Watson organized the chapters in this first volume of *The Story of France* around dynastic history of early France, pausing occasionally to discuss a thematic chapter such as "Chivalry" or "The Reformation." Switching his focus from the French monarchy to the lower classes, Watson also included a chapter on the conditions of the working class titled "General Survey. Social and Economic Conditions." Watson's interest in highlighting living and working conditions of the lower classes supports Woodward's observation that Watson wrote "populist history" that promoted the virtues of the non-elite and the importance of democratic government.[152] Aside from the handful of chapters dealing with thematic subjects, *The Story of*

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[150] This time period, one could argue, produced some of the most notoriously racist literature in American history: Rudyard Kipling's pro-imperialist poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899), William Hannibal Thomas' treatise in defense of anti-back prejudice *The American Negro: What He Was, what He Is, and what He May Become* (1901), and Thomas Dixon Jr.'s historical-fiction novels *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansmen: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905). The Dunning School, a group of Columbia University scholars who published racist histories of Reconstruction, also fit into this group of literature.

[151] Watson, *The Story of France*, vol. 1, 1.

[152] Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel*, 335.

France generally follows a chronological timeline describing the political history of France and the anti-democratic and oppressive nature of the French monarchy.

Watson introduced his interpretation of French history by characterizing it as a cautionary tale for reformers. He understood French history as a story of great triumphs but also great tragedies and praised the resilience that French people have shown in times of hardship.[153] Although one might think that Watson would not have had many opportunities to mention race in the political history of early France, Watson quickly proved this assumption false, turning to a discussion of race on the first page of his introduction.[154]

Outlining his understanding of French history, Watson referenced skin color, connecting it to the concept of civilization. Praising French history and its significance to world history, Watson wrote: "No nation has … illustrate[d] more fully the fact that civilization is but skin-deep, and that the savage lurks within us yet."[155] His observation that civilization is merely "skin-deep" might indicate that skin color alone does not dictate a person's capacity for virtue or goodness. However, Watson's use of the word "savage" in the second part of this quotation

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[153] Watson seems to be referring to the socio-economic hardships of the peasant farmers and impoverished workers, who made up the lowest class Third Estate in Pre-Revolutionary France. It also seems likely, given his references to the violence of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire, that Watson was also acknowledging these events as part of the "hardships" faced by the French people. Watson, *The Story of France*, vol. 1, xiii-xv.

[154] France, like most western European nations prior to globalization, has typically been thought of as majority-white country, in the same way most African countries are typically thought of as majority-black. These characterizations are overgeneralizations of the racial and ethnic makeup of each region and continent. The study of race and racial identity has only been a relatively recent phenomenon in historical research, however, it has yielded extremely valuable results in correcting these overgeneralizations. Several studies on France, in particular, attest to the nation's complicated history with recognizing racial minorities and the realities of racial difference in French society. For further reading on the history of race in France, see Sue Peabody's *"There Are No Slaves in France,"* (New York: Oxford, 1996) and Robin Mitchell's *Vénus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century France* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2020).

[155] Watson, *The Story of France,* vol. 1 xiii-xiv.

seems to negate the possibility of a more progressive interpretation. Since this passage appeared with the larger context of an introduction to French history, it seems more likely that Watson instead meant that the pale complexion of the French did not guarantee civilized behavior at all times, since he proceeded to describe the violence of the French Revolution as a devolution into a state of near-savagery. Watson's use of the word "us" in this selection should, likewise, draw our attention. He was not a Frenchman writing French history. He was a white Georgian from the southern United States writing a history of a Western European nation. While it is possible that "us" broadly referred to all of mankind, it seems more likely that Watson was instead referencing a shared sense of racial identity between France and the United States, since culturally and demographically both nations were western European with a white majority.

Watson immediately followed this statement about savagery and civilization with a seemingly random and derogatory reference to Native Americans. Drawing comparisons between early American history and early French history, Watson wrote:

> In his days of barbarism the Gaul, more brutal than the Indian, cut off the entire head of his victims in war, and hung it on his horse's neck as a trophy, or nailed it to his door for good luck. After some centuries of Christianity, the son of this same Gaul, the savage within him having been let loose again by the Revolution, chopped off the heads of "aristocrats," male and female, and bore them along the streets of Paris….[156]

Watson's decision to use a Native American racial stereotype to illustrate the violent behavior of the Gauls suggests that his audience would be familiar with this characterization of the "brutal" Native American. This implies, one, that Watson's target audience was likely not Native American, and two, that Watson's presumably white audience would have been familiar with this stereotype. Beyond this more-straightforward reference to racial stereotypes about Native Americans, however, lies a more subtle comparison of these people groups.

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[156] Ibid.

In the above selection, Watson indicated that the Gauls, ancestors of the French, had become civilized through centuries of practicing Christianity, even if their civilization later regressed into a state of barbarism during the Revolution.[157] He described Native Americans as *less* brutal than the Gauls, but did not mention whether they also underwent a similar 'civilizing' process through adopting Christianity. Watson's silence on this subject leads one to speculate whether he believed Native Americans could become more civilized by adopting Christianity, and if this conversion would make Native American civilization equal to white civilization. While it seems plausible that Watson simply did not think it important to expand on this idea further in his history of France, his decision to use Native American stereotypes in his historical analysis provided considerable insight on how both he and his presumably white readership viewed Native Americans.

The first volume of *The Story of France* also contains some of the only references Watson made to people of Asian descent in this study.[158] In his chapter "Gaul as a Roman Province," Watson covered the Roman Era in French Territory. A passing reference to a mass migration of groups from central Asia toward the Roman empire seems to representative of how Watson viewed of people of Asian descent:

> What the true causes of these migrations were we shall never know. It is supposed, however, that the wild hordes on the great plains of central Asia gave the first impulse to the onward tide....The people who gave rise to this mighty commotion, this almost universal migratory movement, belonged to the same race as the Tartars, or Mongols.

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[157] Watson provided no timeline for when this civilizing process took place, nor did he explicitly state what qualified a culture as "civilized." Scientific racism and pseudo-anthropological studies had become the norm in the United States and in Europe during Watson's lifetime, and his descriptions of civilization and savagery seem heavily influenced by these ideas. For a prime example of early twentieth century scientific racism and its connection to historical interpretation, see Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race, or The Racial Basis for European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

[158] Watson, notably, made no references to people of Hispanic descent in any of the histories examined in this study.

> They were low in stature, wild in appearance, ugly in visage, and ruthless in conduct. They carried terror wherever they went...[159]

On the page following this selection, Watson seems to suggest that this characterization applied generally to all people of Asian descent, in any time period. Describing the Hun invasion into Roman territory, Watson wrote: "The most dreaded of all these hurrying and shifting nations were the Huns, whose Asiatic origin and appearance I have already described [on the previous page]. Their greatest leader was Attila, a man who inspired such fear that his enemies named him 'the scourge of God.'"[160] Although Watson did not explicitly state that his negative description applied to all Asians, his decision to offer no clarification on this matter leaves this matter open to interpretation. Given what we know about Watson's white supremacist views, it seems extremely likely that Watson also believed this description applied to all Asian people and not just those from the third century.[161]

The close of this chapter on the Roman period in France expanded on these derogatory comments about Asian culture while also confirming Watson's belief in the cultural supremacy of white, westernized nations.[162] In his description of the 451 AD Battle of Châlons, during which the Roman forces defeated the Huns and sent them in a retreat back towards the east, Watson wrote:

> The battle of Chalons is called one of the decisive battles of the world, because it put a stop to the tide of Asiatic conquest. It was a struggle of the Western peoples, their laws, religion, and civilization, against the savage onslaught of the Mongolian hordes. When the sun set on that fearful day, the issue was decided. The Eastern tide rolled back. The

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[159] Ibid., 25.
[160] Ibid., 26-7.
[161] Prejudice and discrimination against people of Asian descent had been existed in the United States ever since the mid-nineteenth century, when Chinese laborers migrated to the United States for opportunities in mining and in railroad construction. Watson's derogatory comments about the Asians in the third century seem representative of these anti-Asian stereotypes.
[162] Watson never specified which nations could claim superior status, but his references to France, England, and especially the United States in these histories seem to indicate that he viewed these predominantly white western countries as "superior" to all others.

> West, with its Roman laws, Roman culture, its German ideas of individual freedom, and its religion of Jesus Christ, was left to work its way, onward and upward, to civilization.[163]

At the close of this passage, Watson made a clear and unequivocal reference to the supremacy of western civilization, citing its laws, customs, and Christianity as some of the major hallmarks of western supremacy. Although Watson made no direct reference to race in this selection, his declaration of western cultural supremacy seems to align with his belief in white supremacy. Watson's reference to the "Mongolian hordes" as a "savage onslaught" in this selection also clarified his references to savagery in the introduction to this volume. Although many modern scholars still describe the brutality and notoriety of the Mongol empire and other nomadic Asian tribes active between the fifth and fourteenth centuries, Watson's application of the term "savage" in this case seems to go beyond rude manners and into the racial makeup and religious practices of a particular group.

Derogatory racial stereotypes and references to savage behavior appear once again in the latter half of this volume. Criticizing the Catholic Church's influence on eighteenth-century French society, Watson described how the Church tortured and executed a young boy from Abbeville, France for his suspected irreverence: "There was no evidence that the boy had broken the crucifix; he was not even convicted of having done so. He was found guilty of singing profane songs and of making jeering remarks about the worship of the cross."[164] After describing

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[163] Ibid., 27-8.

[164] Ibid., 665-6. Watson was a very outspoken anti-Catholic after 1904, writing extensively about his anti-Catholic views in his newspapers, magazines, and books. Woodward dealt with this subject extensively in Chapter 22 of *Agrarian Rebel*, which he titled "The Shadow of the Pope." Although Watson's anti-Catholicism is typically associated with his post-1904 career, Robert M. Saunders acknowledged that Watson had always harbored some prejudice against Catholics but had kept his views more private in an effort to win the votes of Augusta, Georgia's sizeable Irish Catholic population. By 1895, however, it had become evident that Watson and the Populists could not secure the Catholic vote. In response, Watson began to openly express his anti-Catholic attiudes, including his public support of the anti-Catholic American Protective

the child's execution, Watson observed that the people of Abbeville viewed the child's trial and execution with cold indifference: "And the [French] populace, steeped in the infamies of superstitions which would degrade the savages of darkest Africa, dispersed contentedly to their dinners, their small-talk, and their prayers."[165] This selection, it seems, pulls double-duty in outlining both Watson's anti-Catholic and anti-black prejudices.

In this comparison of French and African religious practices, Watson unapologetically criticized both groups. "The savages of darkest Africa," according to Watson, held the "infamies of superstition." However, Watson considered this particular French community even more deprived than these "savages" because their Catholic beliefs encouraged indifference towards the execution of a child. While he clearly designed this passage to shame the French for practicing Catholicism and for blindly obeying the decrees of the Church hierarchy, Watson also seized this opportunity to ridicule African religious "superstitions." Citing a stereotype about African superstition indicated that Watson's literary audience would have been familiar with this derogatory characterization about African belief systems. Watson, additionally, paired his criticism of African religious beliefs with an emphasis on their skin color: "the savages of *darkest* Africa." The use of the word "savage" in this selection further clarifies Watson's earlier statement "that civilization is but skin-deep, and that the savage lurks within us yet."[166] Through this relatively short criticism of French Catholicism, the reader learns that Watson defined "savage" as the dark-skinned, pagan African, which expands his earlier references to Native Americans and Asians as savages. Coupled with his emphasis on the Africans' skin color, it

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Association. See Robert M. Saunders, "The Transformation of Tom Watson, 1894-1895," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 347-50. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40579087.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid., xiii-xiv.

follows that Watson's earlier statement of the "savage lurk[ing] within us" likely referred to western European countries with white and Christian majorities, and not a blanket statement about all of mankind.

3.2 The Story of France, Volume 2

The second volume of *The Story of France: From the End of the Reign of Louis the Fifteenth to the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte* spans—as the subtitle suggests—from the death of Louis the Fifteenth in 1774 and to the consolidation of Napoleon's power in 1804. Roughly speaking, this book covers the entirety of the French Revolution. In comparison with the 700-some pages in his first volume which covered 2,400 years of French history, Watson spent 1,100 pages in his second installment narrating only thirty years of French history. Watson, in other words, had a great deal more to say about the French Revolution and the people that participated in these events.

Unlike the first volume of this history, which followed political and dynastic changes in French history with some interspersed thematic chapters, Watson's second book adopted a more chronological timeline, focusing on the major events prior to and during the French Revolution. While many of the major events in the Revolution involved the monarchy, the actions of the average man during this time period in French history appear to be of particular interest to Watson, the populist historian. In this volume, Watson included numerous descriptions of different political leaders and revolutionaries involved in the French Revolution. As one might expect in a 1,100-page volume that only covered thirty years, Watson's narrative moves much slower than the pace of his previous volume, as he seems keen on listing every wrongdoing of the monarchy, every merit and virtue of the "average" Frenchman, and the tireless struggle of the reformer.

Because this volume deals with the history of the French Revolution, mentions of race and racial difference generally concerns the abolition of slavery in the French sugar colonies and the Haitian Revolution.[167] France abolished slavery within its territories in 1794 in accordance with its newfound belief that all men had a right to freedom and equality, regardless of social status or skin color. The earliest reference to abolition appeared in Watson's description of how the National Assembly created the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789. In the following selection, Watson described the proposed additions to the new French Constitution and the Assembly's response to these suggestions:

> The Marquis of Beauharnais proposed that hereafter all citizens should submit to the same penalties and punishments, and that employments of every kind should be open to all. Voted, amid shouts of approval. Another deputy proposes that the State help the peasant to buy off the feudal privileges. Voted, amid applause…Freedom is demanded by the Duke of Rochefoucauld for the negro slaves in the French colonies. Voted, unanimously.[168]

The order of these proposals and Watson's overall tone to narrate this account seems to warrant a closer examination, especially since he appeared to have no reaction to the abolition of slavery in France. Because Watson did not include footnotes in this volume, it is unclear if this narrative reflects the actual order of proposed reforms or if Watson fabricated this list with the intention of showing his audience that the welfare of white Frenchmen took precedence over black.[169] However, it seems plausible that the National Assembly would address matters concerning continental France before turning their attention to the more distant French colonies.

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[167] Watson intertwined the course of the French and Haitian Revolutions in *The Story of France*. However, these Revolutions are typically viewed separately by most modern scholars, with the French Revolution usually only cited as a source of inspiration for the Haitian Revolution.
[168] Watson, *The Story of France*, vol. 2, 292.
[169] The last history examined in this study, *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson*, uses footnotes a handful of times. However, in all of his other histories, Watson never or very rarely provides a footnote or any type of source citation.

Watson's word choice in this account of how the French abolished slavery indicated that either he or the National Assembly felt less enthusiasm about the proposal to abolish slavery, especially compared to how the Assembly responded to the proposals for equal punishments or the end of feudal privileges. For example: the proposition to improve the lives of "all citizens" was "voted, amid shouts of approval;" assisting the peasants and ending "feudal privileges" was "voted, amid applause." The emancipation of slaves, however, was "voted, unanimously." It is unclear whether a diminished enthusiasm for this proposed law actually occurred in the Assembly, or if Watson simply inserted this detail himself. Watson's decision to neither praise nor condemn the decisions of the Assembly also seem noteworthy in this selection, since one might expect a white southerner who grew up in a slaveholding family to have a strong opinion on this matter. Perhaps attempting to convey a sense of scholarly objectivity, Watson opted for a simple chronology of the Assembly events, rather than a treatise on the morality of emancipation.

Watson's account of abolition in the French colonies epitomized the seemingly contradictory nature of his racial views. The chapter dealing with this subject began with the following statement, acknowledging that France attempted to render justice and Revolutionary values to both white and black: "While the Assembly was doing so much for the white man it did not forget the black. Slavery was abolished in the colonies, as well as in the mother country."[170] In this selection, like the earlier passage about the proposal to abolish slavery, Watson did not explicitly praise or condemn black emancipation. His phrasing and tone on this occasion, however, suggest that he actually supported abolition in France.[171]

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[170] Ibid., 576.

[171] Watson provided further no explanation for why he appeared to support France abolishing slavery in this selection.

As Watson continued his narrative on French abolition of slavery in, he once again adopted a more objective writing style that relied heavily on providing a strict chronology of events, similar to his description of the new French Constitution. Watson explained that once the Assembly abolished slavery, French planters and merchants protested so frantically that the Assembly reversed its decision, deciding to let each colony individually determine whether they wanted to abolish slavery. This decision proved ineffective, as news of emancipation had already spread throughout the colonies, sparking a series of slave revolts, most notably the ones that became the Haitian Revolution. In the selection that follows, Watson described these revolts:

> It was too late to retreat. The mulattoes of San Domingo spread the news among the blacks that they were free, and they rose in revolt — 50,000 strong – and began to pillage, burn, and murder. A reign of terror commenced, and the fertile province was soon a smoking ruin. Only in the towns was there safety for the whites; and even there it required the aid of the fleets of all nations to check the work of destruction. In the other islands the same disorders occurred. Civil war between the factions raged in Martinique; in Guadeloupe, Saint Lucia, and Tobago slave revolts occurred, accompanied by great loss of life and property.[172]

The events described above became one of the chief arguments in the antebellum South for why slavery could not be abolished. In his 1904 historical fiction novel *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*, Watson cited the Haitian Revolution as one of the major reasons white southerners feared the abolition of slavery in the United States.[173] Thus, Watson's narrative of these events seems to warrant a careful examination.

Watson's perspective as a white southerner that came from a slaveholding family seems to have influenced his description of the slave uprisings in the Caribbean French colonies

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[172] Ibid., 577.

[173] In *Bethany: A Story of the Old South,* Watson fabricated a discussion between two white politicians from the antebellum South. These men express the shared anxieties of white southerners that the North will emancipate their slaves and spark a violent race war, citing what occurred in the post-emancipation French colonies as the source of their anxiety. See Thomas E. Watson, *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* (1904; repr. New York: D. Appleton, 1905), 81. Citations refer to reprint edition.

following abolition. In the previous selection, Watson suggested that the violence following abolition was inevitable: "It was too late to retreat." He made no attempt to describe the violent and inhumane living and working conditions experienced by slaves, or what might have caused the revolt other than a black conspiracy against whites. Watson described the uprising as an alliance between the "mulattos" living in San Domingo and the rest of the enslaved black population. His decision to characterize every person with a mixed-race background as a conspirator and instigator in a slave uprising further indicated Watson's own anxiety about mixed-race people and the possibility of a race war.[174]

A closer examination of how Watson narrated the Haitian Revolution provided further evidence of his anxiety about race wars. Notably, he described the violence that followed the uprising in terms of property damage and white fear, rather than black resistance to enslavement and oppressive from whites. Watson wrote: "A reign of terror [brought on by the black population] commenced, and the fertile province was soon a smoking ruin. Only in the towns was there safety for the whites."[175] Watson also described the whites living in the French colonies as helpless, no longer able to survive without the help of other countries. Black

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[174] Watson's description of the Haitian Revolution seems heavily influenced by his own anxiety of a race war happening in the South. Southern radicals in the 1890s frequently alleged that such a war would take place if serious actions were not taken to oppress the black population. It is, therefore, not surprising that Watson would narrate the events of the Haitian Revolution with an emphasis on white fear and the destructive actions of blacks. In contrast to Watson's observations of a black conspiracy, severe social stratification in the colony prior to the Revolution's start in 1791 often left free blacks, enslaved blacks, poor whites, rich whites, and people of mixed race ancestry with competing goals, which generally hindered the development of the conspiratorial alliances that Watson alleged. His history of the Haitian Revolution seems to say more about how southern whites viewed a black rebellion than the actual events of the Revolution. For an updated history of the Haitian Revolution, see Jeremy D. Popkin's *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

[175] Watson did not specify why the whites would find safety in the towns. Presumably, this could have been where they had stockpiled weapons and other resources, gathering with one another for protection. Watson seems to imply that whites on the island no longer could feel safe on their farms and plantations because of the threat the black population posed.

independence, in other words, dramatically diminished white freedoms and independence, and posed a threat to the physical safety and economic prosperity of whites. Watson's description of the post-abolition French colonies sharply contrasts with his approving tone at the beginning of this chapter: "While the Assembly was doing so much for the white man it did not forget the black." This perplexing analysis of abolition in the French colonies continued over the next several pages of this chapter.

One of Watson's most striking comments on race in this entire study appears in his description of French abolitionist Jacques Pierre Brissot. Watson wrote, "In connection with the abolition of slavery Brissot should be named. As president of the 'Society for the Emancipation of the Blacks,' he rendered the cause of the slave services which merit perpetual honour and remembrance."[176] Brissot's abolitionism, as described by Watson, was not only a good thing, but something worthy of "perpetual honor and remembrance." His admiration for the French abolitionist sharply contrasts with his extremely negative description of the slave revolts or his observation that the French government should not interfere with colonial self-rule in their colonies. As the chapter continues, Watson's stance on the abolition of slavery becomes even more contradictory.

Another extremely puzzling reference to race and slavery appears in Watson's discussion of Corsica, which immediately followed his dismal account of the Haitian Revolution and his praise for abolitionist Jacques Brissot. Watson began his section on Corsica with the following: "Amid all these turmoils, what was more natural than that Corsica should strain at her fetters? When the negro was being freed, why should a nation of whites remain slaves?"[177] For context,

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[176] Ibid., 577. Watson did not elaborate further on what Brissot's abolitionist views were, or what he had done for the cause of abolition. His seems to make this reference to Brissot solely to introduce his discussion on Corsican independence and their resistance to French rule.
[177] Ibid., 577-8.

Corsica, a Mediterranean island off the Southwest coast of France, had been a French province since 1769. Although native Corsicans had a long history of being denied independence, as summarized in the footnote below, Corsicans were not enslaved by the French.[178] However, Watson's use of the word "fetters," or shackles, to describe the Corsicans would suggest otherwise. By asking "When the negro was being freed, why should a nation of whites remain slaves?," Watson was, in other words, asking: "why should blacks fare better than whites?" As Watson switched from this observation about racial justice and inequality, his white supremacist beliefs, and specifically his approval of white independence and resistance movements, becomes even more evident.

Watson's account of Corsica during the French Revolution sharply contrasts with his description of the slave revolts in the French colonies. In the following selection, Watson explained how the Corsicans waited for leadership from exiled Pasquale Paoli and independence to overthrow French dictatorship:

> Paoli was still living—an exile. Corsican patriots yearned towards their old leader, longed for his return, and dreamt of a free Corsican republic which should blaze like a gem in the

[178] The first chapter of Watson's final French history, *Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, His Character, and His Struggles* (1902) is dedicated to summarizing the history of Corsica. However, because the island is discussed in this volume of *The Story of France* without much context, I will provide this background information here. In the centuries preceding French control of Corsica, various European powers as well as the native Corsican population struggled for control of the island. In 1077, papal decree awarded the Italian city-state of Pisa control of Corsica. Small-scale conflicts between the native population and the Italian dictatorship occurred until the fifteenth century when the Italian city-state of Genoa assumed control of the island. In 1755, native Corsicans led by Pasquale Paoli secured control over most of the island and established an independent Corsican state. However, some Genoese still remained on the island. In 1768, these Genoese sold their land holdings to the French, who subsequently occupied the area in overwhelming numbers and exiled Paoli. Corsica became a province of France in 1769, the same year as Napoleon's birth. Thus, the Corsicans had been denied independence and self-rule for centuries. They were, however, *not* enslaved by the French to any degree that resembled African slavery in the French colonies. For a more detailed discussion of Corsican history, see L. H. Caird's *The History of Corsica* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899). For a more recent text that discusses the history of the island, see David Bell's *Napoleon: A Concise Biography* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

> Mediterranean Sea. The royal authorities sternly repressed the popular movement, closed the patriotic clubs, dismissed and disarmed the civic guard of the patriots…All factions among the Corsicans agreed in wanting local self-government, and they all resisted these high-handed measures of the [French] king's representatives.[179]

In this selection, Watson described the Corsicans, "a nation of whites," as patriotic for desiring freedom and self-rule from the oppressive French. Importantly, Watson never described the blacks that rebelled against oppression in the French colonies as patriots; instead, he suggested a conspiracy between those with mixed-race ancestry and enslaved blacks that resulted in terror, property destruction, and the endangerment of all whites living in the French colonies. Watson, additionally, never addressed the oppression or the aspirations of the black population in the French colonies. For the Corsicans, however, he painted a romantic picture of patriotic reform: "Corsicans patriots…dreamt of a free Corsican republic which should blaze like a gem in the Mediterranean Sea." Watson's pronounced sympathy for the white Corsicans, and disapproval of the blacks living in the French colonies, would continue in his third and final volume on French history.

3.3 *Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, His Character, and His Struggles*

Watson's final French history, *Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, His Character, and His Struggles* (1902), served as an unofficial third volume in *The Story of France*, expanding his analysis of the French Revolution with a focus on the French emperor. In the preface to this history, Watson described this work as synthetic, drawing from of other biographies of Napoleon and not based on original research:

> In this volume the author has made the effort to portray Napoleon as he appears to an average man. Archives have not been rummaged, new sources of information have not been discovered; the author merely claims to have used such authorities, old and new, as

[179] Watson, *The Story of France,* vol. 2, 578.

> are accessible to any diligent student. No attempt has been made to give a full and detailed account of Napoleon's life or work.[180]

Although Watson did not clarify who he considered "an average man," given his populist roots, it seems likely that he meant a non-elite member of the working class. Additionally, this passage reinforced the fact that Watson was not a professional historian but rather a former politician working with the resources in his personal library.

Napoleon provided chronological examination of the French emperor's life, organizing its chapters around the various stages of Napoleon's lifetime. For example, Watson titled the second chapter "Boyhood," and used Napoleon's geographic location to title the names of subsequent chapters, such as "At Marseilles" and "Milan." An exception to this storyline occurred in the first chapter of this biography, which examined the history of Napoleon's birthplace, Corsica. In terms of style and structure, this text very closely resembled the narrative style of *The Story of France*.

In *Napoleon*, Watson once again returned to a description of the Haitian Revolution. Curiously, this account of Revolution slightly differed from the one he included in *The Story of France* two years earlier. Watson continued to discuss the events of the Revolution in extremely negative terms, using more dramatic language to emphasize the destructive nature of this uprising. He wrote, "In St. Domingo, the Revolution in France had borne bitter fruit [among St. Domingo's population]. The blacks rose against the whites, and a war of extermination ensued."[181] Although this passage does not mention a conspiracy between the black slaves and

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[180] Thomas E. Watson, *Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, His Character, and His Struggles* (1902; repr. New York: Macmillan, 1903; Reprint New York: The Macmillan Company, 1903), vii. Citations refer to the reprint edition. Presumably, Watson did not attempt to give a full account of Napoleon's life because he meant for this study to synthesize the contents of other biographies and produce a popular history of the French emperor.

[181] Ibid., 310.

the free blacks on the island, as his description in *The Story of France* did, it offers a new, more radical epithet for the Haitian Revolution: "a war of extermination" between the whites and blacks that occupied the island. The biggest difference between Watson's description of this Revolution in *Napoleon* and his description in *The Story of France* lies in his references to one of the Haitian Revolution's primary leaders, Toussaint L'Overture.

Immediately following his reference to a "war of extermination" in St. Domingo, Watson wrote: "The negroes, immensely superior in numbers, overcame the whites, and established their independence. Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the blacks, and a great man, became president of the black republic, which he patterned somewhat after Napoleon's consulate."[182] Watson did not specify why he believed Toussaint L'Ouverture was "a great man." One can speculate that Watson possessed some admiration for any reformer, an idea supported by Watson's aforementioned praise for the French abolitionist Jacques Pierre Brissot.[183] L'Ouverture's decision to mirror his government after Napoleon's, a man that Watson admired greatly, might have been the source of Watson's admiration for L'Ouverture. However, this uncharacteristic praise for the L'Ouverture becomes even more confusing when examining the rest of Watson's narrative about the Haitian.

After Watson paid this brief compliment to L'Ouverture, he resumed making derogatory comments about black people. In the following selection, Watson explained how the black Haitian rebels met French General Charles Leclerc in battle and ultimately succeeded in securing their independence:

> The negroes gave way before Leclerc's overwhelming numbers; and, by treachery, Toussaint [L'Ouverture] was captured and sent to France to die in a dungeon; but the yellow fever soon came to the rescue of the blacks, and [Leclerc's] expedition, after causing great loss of life, ended in shameful failure. Leclerc died, the remnants of the

[182] Ibid., 311.
[183] Watson, *The Story of France,* vol. 2, 577.

> French army were brought back to Europe in English ships, and the negroes established their semi-barbarous Republic of Hayti (1804).[184]

In this selection, it is unclear why Watson defined Haiti "semi-barbarous," invoking the stereotype of black savagery that he used elsewhere in these French histories. Possibly, Watson chose this phrase because the former slaves that established Haiti had previously lived under white rule. In his American histories, Watson frequently described slavery as beneficial to blacks because the instruction and guidance of their "civilized" white masters helped them progress from a state of savagery to a more advanced and Christian race—although still inferior to whites.[185] Watson, therefore, might have believed that these formerly-enslaved blacks were partially civilized, making their independent nation only "semi-barbarous." His admiration for L'Ouverture and his role in the success of the Haitian Revolution might have also caused Watson to temper his criticism of the free and independent black state.

Although this chapter could not review every mention of race in Watson's French histories, it provides an important baseline for understanding how Watson's racial views might have changed in his subsequent American histories, published between 1903 and 1912. Declarations of white supremacy and derogatory references to people of color appear throughout all three of Watson's French histories, further supporting the conclusion of post-1970 scholars who observed that Watson held white supremacist views prior to his 1904 campaign against black voting rights. Apart from this revelation, however, the main contribution of this chapter

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[184] Ibid., 311.

[185] Watson's defense of slavery and his references to how the institution "benefitted" blacks comes up frequently in his American histories. This aspect of Watson's racial views is discussed frequently in Chapters 5 and 6. For a typical example of Watson defending slavery as a benefit to blacks, see Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 94-5.

lies in its ability to track how Watson's racial views might have changed between 1899 and 1902.

While it seemed likely that Watson's racial views in his French histories would become increasingly more reactionary as their publication dates neared 1904, the year Watson publicly reversed his support of black voting rights, there is little evidence to support this assumption.[186] On the contrary, Watson's most progressive comments about race, such as his praise for French abolitionist Jacques Brissot and black revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture, appear in his second volume of *The Story of France* (1899) and in his biography of *Napoleon* (1902). Although Watson undermined the progressive sentiment of these examples by making extremely derogatory remarks about savagery and black inferiority elsewhere in these volumes, their existence seems to counter any expectation of a discernible and reactionary shift in Watson's racial views between 1899 and 1902.

Watson's seemingly contradictory comments on race in his French histories, such as his subtle praise for the abolition of slavery and his extremely derogatory account the black people participating in the Haitian Revolution, seems representative of the contradictory nature of his own racial views.[187] During his Populist campaigns, Watson promoted black political equality

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[186] This is not an explicit belief of any specific Watson scholar. Most post-1970 scholars have only examined Watson's Populist days to disprove Woodward's positive interpretation of Watson's racial beliefs during his time with the People's Party. As a result of this more narrow focus on Watson's early political career, Woodward's interpretation of Watson's career after 1896 remains the authority on this time period in Watson's life. In the historiography, there seems to be an assumption of Watson after 1896, and especially after 1904, which suggests that Watson became increasingly more reactionary and racist from 1904 until the end of his life in 1922.

[187] Woodward himself could not explain the contradictions in Watson's racial views. For example, when discussing Watson's support for black disenfranchisement in 1904, Woodward wrote: "How Watson managed to reconcile his radical democratic doctrine with a proposal to disenfranchise a million citizens of his native state is not quite clear." Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 371.

while simultaneously denying them social equality with whites. Likewise, he frequently made statements in support of black political rights that he later walked back in the presence of a white audience. Watson mentioned that he was considering supporting black disenfranchisement as early as 1902, the same year he called Toussaint L'Ouverture "a great man" in *Napoleon*. However, two years would pass before Watson came public with this news. Apart from Watson's unwavering allegiance his belief in white supremacy, one of his most consistent character traits appears to be his indecision concerning how inferior people of color were to white people.

As this study now turns to an examination of Watson's American histories, the circumstances of their creation, their public reception, and how their author discussed race in these volumes, several of the themes highlighted in these French histories will reappear. In almost all of his mentions of race in these histories, Watson portrayed people of color as inferior to whites, dealing once again with the negative stereotypes of savagery and its connection to skin color and civilization. However, Watson's American histories, to a significantly higher degree than his French, reflect a more reactionary attitude towards people of color while also implicitly reinforcing the superiority of white males.

CHAPTER 4: "SOMETHING VIRILE AND CHARMING:"[188] THE MAKING OF TOM WATSON'S AMERICAN HISTORIES

Tom Watson turning his attention to American history after 1902 seems to warrant less of an explanation than his earlier ventures in French history. Watson was, after all, an American with a law degree and relatively extensive political experience. At this time, when "historian" had only recently become a professional graduate degree in the United States, Watson could still pass as a legitimate source of historical interpretation.[189] In *Agrarian Rebel*, Woodward provided slightly more context for this switch to writing American histories, examining Watson's increased focus on rehabilitating the reputation of the Confederacy around 1900 and his stormy return to politics after 1904. Woodward, however, did not reference any correspondence between Watson and his publisher, D. Appleton and Company, and only cited one review of Watson's American histories. The absence of this information in *Agrarian Rebel* once again provides this study with an opportunity to supplement and expand on Woodward's analysis of Watson's literary ventures, and to frame this information within the context of Watson's white supremacist views.

As this chapter will show, Watson's publishers felt extremely enthusiastic about publishing his first two American history volumes: *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*. Notably, these books contain some of Watson's most

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[188] Letter from Francis W. Halsey to Thomas E. Watson, 21 March 1904, in The Thomas E. Watson Papers #755, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In this chapter The Thomas E. Watson Papers will hereafter be referred to as the Watson Papers.

[189] Graduate history programs, doctoral degrees in history, and professional organizations for historians did not emerge in the United States until the mid-1880s and 1890s. See John David Smith, "Introduction," in John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 4.

reactionary and racist ideas, which will be examined in detail in the following chapters. Appleton's enthusiasm for Watson's American histories, much like Macmillan's support of his French volumes, once again illustrated white supremacy's position as a mainstream idea at the beginning of the twentieth century. Anyone vaguely familiar with America's history of marginalizing people of color and other Civil Rights abuses will likely not be surprised by such a revelation. However, since neither Woodward nor any scholar since has referenced Watson's private letters concerning the publication of his American histories, a brief survey of this correspondence seems warranted.

As with any study involving Tom Watson, the starting place for understanding Watson's American histories must examine how C. Vann Woodward dealt with this portion of Tom Watson's life and career. In *Agrarian Rebel*, Woodward acknowledged Watson's improved reputation after the success of his French histories, writing: "After his retirement from public life, 'respectable' opinion in the South gradually mellowed, then warmed to Watson. His literary successes commanded considerable awe in a community where a man of letters was a rarity." Woodward further explained that Watson's reputation as a distinguished author had earned him the illustrious nickname "the Sage of Hickory Hill." Sometime around 1903, Watson had even become a highly sought-after public lecturer in Georgia.[190] Many of these lectures, according to Woodward, closely resembled Watson's stump speeches of the 1890s, addressing the health of America's democracy and the danger wealth and elitism posed to democratic values. Watson's most popular lectures, however, dealt with southern history. In these lectures, Woodward noted

[190] C. Vann. Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (London: Macmillan, 1938; reprint New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 346-7. Citations refer to the reprint edition. Copies of these lectures are available in the online Watson Papers collection. For examples, see "Is the Black Man Superior to the White?" and "Is the South Glad it Lost?" in Watson Papers.

"an important shift [Watson's] ideology," explaining that Watson had become obsessed with confronting the injustices the North had inflicted on the South since the nation's colonial days.[191]

Woodward observed that Watson began to see all of American history as "a conspiracy" to make the white southerners feel inferior to white northerners. Histories of the Civil War written by northerners, in particular, offended Watson, as he believed they mischaracterized the beliefs of white southerners and wrongly blamed them for starting the conflict.[192] Not limiting himself to attacking the perceived self-righteousness of northerners, Watson also began to rehabilitate Lost Cause ideology and to viciously denounce any white southerners that collaborated with northern capitalists after the Civil War.[193] Woodward described Watson as consumed with southern apologetics, observing that his publications brimmed with nonsensical rants about the malicious North and the tragically maligned South. Woodward, consequently, gave Watson's American histories exceptionally bad reviews.[194]

In one of his more vivid criticisms of Watson's American histories, Woodward described Watson physically overcome with Confederate zeal as he began writing his biography of Thomas Jefferson. Woodward observed that Watson must have "enter[ed] the task with clenched fists," alleging that Watson's rage against Jefferson's previous biographers, such as William E. Curtis

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[191] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 347.
[192] Ibid., 348-50.
[193] The Lost Cause ideology is the pro-southern belief that the Confederate cause during the Civil War was a righteous one, that secession was legal and justified, and that the South seceded because of states' rights and not slavery. For one of the earliest examples of the Lost Cause ideology, see Edward Alfred Pollard*, The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1867).
[194] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 350-1. Complimentary to Woodward's conclusions about Watson's fervent interest in reforming the public image of the South after he retired from writing French histories, a letter written to Watson in 1903 indicates that he donated a significant amount of money to the Daughters of the Confederacy Georgia Division that year. The letter, written on Daughters of the Confederacy Georgia Division stationary, can be found in the Watson Papers. See Letter from Lulu Murray Farmer to Thomas E. Watson, September 3, 1903, Watson Papers.

and Woodrow Wilson, marred the biography with lengthy and unrelated rants. Turning his attention to *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson*, Woodward found similar stylistic and organizational errors, stating that the book "is cluttered with the same reckless dogmatism and partisanship" as *Thomas Jefferson*. Unapologetically hostile to Watson's scholarly efforts in *Thomas Jefferson* and *Andrew Jackson*, Woodward's final thoughts reveal how he viewed the overall quality of Watson's writing career: "Neither of these biographies approaches the standard achieved in the books on French history."[195] After reviewing Watson's American biographies, he turned his attention to discussing Watson's historical-fiction novel, *Bethany*.

Although *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* chronologically came before *Andrew Jackson*, Woodward combined his reviews for *Thomas Jefferson* and *Andrew Jackson* presumably because both books were biographies and both remarkably bad in his eyes. Reviewing Watson's one and only novel, Woodward's negative tone did not change. If anything, Woodward found a new gear for literary criticism: "*Bethany: A Story of the Old South* is really a hodge-podge of historical and political essays intermixed with a sentimental love story and some autobiography…. It is beside the point to enumerate its failures in construction, its blunders and banalities as a novel, for if it is of significance, it is not as a novel." Although Woodward did not explicitly state where else *Bethany* might be of value, his comments further down the page offer some clarity. Discussing Watson's overall approach to *Bethany*, Woodward classified Watson "as the confessed apologist for [the Confederate] cause and for a discredited way of life."[196] *Bethany*'s value, in other words, might be that it exemplified how white southerners like Tom

[195] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 351-2.
[196] Ibid., 353.

Watson strained to revive and rehabilitate the Lost Cause and the ideological underpinnings of the Confederacy at the turn of the twentieth century.[197]

Apart from his own reviews, Woodward provided very few contemporary reviews of Watson's American histories. This, however, might be related to the fact that very few reviews of these books seem to have existed. Woodward only cited one critical review for any of Watson's American historians in his discussion of *Bethany*. Clearly straining to find a positive thing to say about the book, Woodward wrote: "[Watson] is surprisingly successful in his struggle for intellectual honesty, and scarcely a review fails to pay tribute to his victory over his feelings." Woodward followed this claim with a quote from the *Nation*, a northern-based magazine established by former abolitionists in 1865. This review acknowledged that *Bethany,* at the very least, served as a primer to understanding the slave-holding psyche of white southerners.[198] Aside from his mention of the *Nation*, Woodward cited no other reviews for any of Watson's American histories. However, it seems we cannot fault the biographer too much on this occasion, since an extensive search for reviews of Watson's American histories also uncovered very little, even with the modern advantage of keyword searches and digitized databases.[199]

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[197] Publishing *Bethany* in 1904, Watson found himself in the company of other enormously popular pro-Confederate southern authors such as Thomas Dixon Jr. and Thomas Nelson page. Joel Williamson provided an in-depth examination of Dixon in his 1894 book *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation.* Williamson acknowledged the popularity of Dixon's writings at the beginning of the twentieth century, noting that "Dixon was so very effective because his work said in a total way what his [white] audience had been thinking in fragments…. In Dixon's work they saw their own genius ratified, and further, glorified." See Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 141.

[198] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 353. The citation Woodward provided at bottom of page 353 for this *Nation* review of *Bethany* appears to have been incorrect: the citation reads "*Nation*, Vol. LXXIX, p. 506." However, tracking down this volume and page in the *Nation* does not yield a review of Watson's *Bethany*.

[199] This detail further confirms that these books were duds in terms of popularity and sales.

After an exhaustive search, only one review of *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* and one additional review of *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* could be located. *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson* seems to have made almost no impression in literary or historical reviews, indicating that this book failed in terms of its popularity and sales. However, the absence of reviews of *Andrew Jackson* might be explained by Watson's decision to self-publish this biography instead of using a larger firm with a more-established reputation at the national level.

The only available review of *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* offers a surprisingly balanced analysis of the book's merits and weaknesses, especially when compared to Woodward's overwhelmingly negative response to the book. Watson's reviewer, interestingly enough, was none other than David Yancey Thomas. Southern-born and Columbia University-trained, Thomas ranks among the many members of the infamous Dunning "school." Although these scholars have largely been discredited for their racist interpretations of the South during Reconstruction, in Watson's day, this group of historians represented the cutting edge of historical research in the United States. The Dunning school, for all its grievous faults in perpetuating anti-black prejudice in academia and beyond, also helped make southern history its own subfield of American history, asserting the importance of this region's unique character and history.[200]

Perhaps because of his own southern heritage or his professional interest in advancing the study of southern history, Thomas wrote his review of *Thomas Jefferson* with a noticeable degree of sympathy for Watson's efforts. Praising Watson's contempt for northern historians

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[200] For more on Thomas, see Mary Elizabeth Massey, "David Yancey Thomas: Historian," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1948): 221–26, https://doi.org/10.2307/40037856. For more on the Dunning "school," see Smith and Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School*.

who cheapened the contributions of Thomas Jefferson and the South, Thomas called the biography "highly entertaining." He, additionally, highlighted Watson's contributions to advancing the study of southern history: "But not all of the book is given up to criticism of other writers. The author has performed a real service to history in giving due emphasis to the part played by the South in bringing on the Revolution by her brave stand against the obnoxious members of British Parliament, a stand taken before the 'Boston street row' ever occurred." Although Thomas continued to heap praise on Watson's attempt to retell American history through a pro-southern lens, he also identified Watson's lack of academic credentials as one of the book's major weaknesses:

> Perhaps the chief value of the book, and it has some, lies in its destructive work. Sometimes such work is very necessary, but it is unfortunate that this particular task did not fall into more scholarly hands. After reading his book, the reader can easily understand Mr. Watson's contempt for scholarship. Much has been said about the lack of historical writers in the South, but the writing of history by men who do not at least possess the scholarly instinct is a service of doubtful value.[201]

This selection acknowledged the same problem Woodward identified in *Agrarian Rebel*, namely, Watson's lack of professional training and struggle with objectivity. Thomas' observation about *Thomas Jefferson*'s dubious value as a biography, likewise, resembled Woodward's criticism of *Bethany*'s value as a novel. At least two of Watson's well-credentialed reviewers, it appears, believed that his American histories did not meet the standards for their literary genre, whether it be biography or historical fiction.

In spite of the commonalities between Thomas' and Woodward's unfavorable reviews, Thomas, writing in 1903, praised Watson for combating sectional bias in American history by retelling this story from a southern perspective. Woodward, however, made no such concession

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[201] David Yancy Thomas, review of Thomas E. Watson's *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1903), *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 23, no. 3 (May 1904): 132.

for Watson's pro-southern approach to Thomas Jefferson. Writing as a progressively-minded student-activist-turned-historian in the late 1930s, Woodward perhaps recognized that at this point in time, a pro-southern approach to American history also implied a pro-white and anti-black perspective. Although most readers today would likely fall more in line with Woodward's reviews of Watson's American histories, Thomas' favorable review of *Jefferson* and his welcome of Watson's unapologetically southern perspective helps contextualize Watson's motives when it came to writing explicitly southern interpretations of American histories: clearly, this had become one of the major scholarly trends at the turn of the twentieth century.

Sectional bias and historical interpretation appeared to have been a trending topic in the early 1900s, as the subject made yet another appearance in a review of Watson's novel, *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*.[202] The review appeared in the Chicago-based literary magazine *The Dial*. In his February 1905 article titled "Recent Fiction," reviewer William Morton Payne gave the novel extremely low marks, briefly mentioning the book in a survey of twelve other recently published novels.[203]

Payne described *Bethany* as a "rambling" novel that, at the very least, "presents the Confederate review with much plausibility." Commenting on the originality of Watson's approach and his efforts to revise American history, Payne conceded: "The fire eating southerner has not often been exhibited, in either history or fiction, more truthfully and more vividly than in this present work." In the final part of his review, however, Payne challenged the entire premise

[202] If critical reviews are any indication of a book's reach, *Bethany* seems to have been Watson's most significant American history, as it has two available reviews compared to the one for *Thomas Jefferson* and the zero for *Andrew Jackson*.
[203] William Morton Payne, "Recent Fiction," *The Dial; a Semi-monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information,* vol. 38, Iss. 448 (Feb 16, 1905): 124-7.

of *Bethany*, quoting its preface—in which Watson self-identified as a southern apologist—at length. Disputing Watson's assertion that the South seceded legally, the reviewer wrote:

> We are willing to grant that the argument for secession was a strong one, and that secession itself was carried out with strict regard for legality, but what possible defense can be offered by the author or anyone else for the conduct of those leaders who had taken a solemn oath to support the Constitution, and who in 1860-1 deliberately violated that oath? We are not overfond of using the words 'rebel' or 'traitor,' but that application to the leaders in question seems strictly legitimate, and in the case of these men, whatever we may think of others, the excuse of a divided allegiance is the merest sophistry. We fear Mr. Watson is sadly in need of reconstruction.[204]

Payne's review, much like Thomas' *Jefferson* review, provided valuable insight concerning the state of sectionalism in 1905. Payne's article acknowledged the ongoing dispute about who had the authority to write southern history, and how this region's history fits into the larger narrative of American history. Judging by the success of the Dunning school in the first several decades of the twentieth century, the South appears to have won this sectional debate, since its white scholars attended graduate programs at northern ivy-league institutions and ultimately rewrote American history tilting the balance in favor of white southerners.

Although an extensive search for reviews of *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson* yielded no results, information about this publication—along with Watson's other books—can be gleaned from the book advertisements that appeared in Watson's self-published newspaper, *Watson's Weekly Jeffersonian*. An advertisement for *Andrew Jackson*, presumably written by Watson himself, appeared in the May 28, 1914, edition of *Weekly Jeffersonian*. The description for the biography reads: "One of the most thorough and finished of Mr. Watson's historical series. Handsomely bound, filled with valuable data and all the romance of Old Hickory's career."[205] That Watson would advertise *Andrew Jackson* as his most polished history should

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[204] Ibid., 127.
[205] "A Complete List of Books by Thomas E. Watson and Sold by the Jeffersonian Publishing Company," *Jeffersonian*, May 28, 1914, Watson Papers.

come as a surprise to anyone who has attempted to read it. As Woodward suggested in his review of *Andrew Jackson*, typographical errors and misspellings marr the pages of this book, not to mention the fact that Watson accidentally labelled two chapters "Chapter XVI." Clearly, Watson's publishing company had significantly lower standards for editing than the houses that published his earlier works.

Advertisements for Watson's histories indicate how he understood his publications, their value, and why they appealed to his audience. Watson dedicated relatively large portions of a given page in his newspapers or magazines to publicize his books, indicating that self-promoting these works held some significance for him. Often, his book advertisements categorized the sale list, organizing his books by topics such as "Historical" or "Political." More detailed advertisements, like the previously quoted one for *Andrew Jackson*, often included a brief summary of the books and its merits.[206] The description for *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson,* listed alongside his advertisement for *Andrew Jackson*, followed a fairly similar style: "Contains much historical data not found in other books from the period. Illustrated. Board covers."[207] These book descriptions, taken together, suggest that Watson might have felt more strongly about his efforts in *Andrew Jackson*, as his advertisement for this biography seems to carry more enthusiasm for this work than for his first American biography.

Although longer, more descriptive advertisements made an occasional appearance in Watson's newspapers, he seems to have preferred a smaller advertisement for his biographical works, often describing them as "Illustrated" or "Bound" and then listing the price. Presumably, he might have felt that the contents of a biography warranted less explanation than his other histories, and that he could save some time and ink by listing only the book's prices. However,

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[206] Untitled book advertisement, *Jeffersonian*, May 9, 1907, ibid.
[207] "A Complete List of Books by Thomas E. Watson."

Watson's advertisements for *Bethany* do not conform to this shortened style, almost always including a description, even when his other books were only listed with their prices. While this decision indicates that *Bethany* held some level of significance over Watson's other publications, the descriptions Watson penned for *Bethany* reveal even more about the novel's significance to its author.

Advertisements for *Bethany* suggest that Watson had some indecision about the nature of his novel, as his descriptions and emphasis changed over time. In a 1907 book advertisement, which notably only included brief descriptions of his other histories, Watson described *Bethany* as "A true and thrilling story of the Old South and Civil War." By 1911, his description of *Bethany* had changed: "Love story of a Confederate Volunteer; also a true-to-life description of life on the plantation. It also gives the historic reasons for secession."[208] By 1914, Watson ran an even more detailed ad for *Bethany*: "A true story of the Old South; love, tragedy, and portraits of many of the famous men who figured in the South of the '60's. Illustrated from photographs. Board Covers." While these advertisements from 1907, 1911, and 1914 prompt one to question what the marked difference between a history and a 'true story' is, for the purpose of this study, the significance of these advertisements lies in Watson's promoting his historical-fiction novel as an accurate representation of the antebellum South. Watson's egregiously anti-black comments in this novel made his insistence that this story portrayed the "truth" of the South all the more interesting, as this detail underscored how white supremacy influenced southern historical interpretation both before and after the Civil War. Varying *Bethany* descriptions confirm Woodward's negative review of the novel being "a hodge-podge of historical and political essays

[208] "Watson Books," *Jeffersonian*, December 21, 1911, ibid.

intermixed with a sentimental love story and some autobiography." Neither Woodward nor Watson, it appears, could determine the exact nature and value of the book.[209]

More context and perspective concerning the creation of his American histories, much like his French histories, presented itself in Watson's private correspondence with his publishers. In the case of his first two American histories, *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*, Watson worked with the New York-based publishing firm D. Appleton and Company. Founded in 1825 by Daniel Appleton and his son William, Appleton had a reputation as a prestigious American publishing house, known for its work in publishing medical textbooks, spelling books, and the first American edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.[210] Watson's primary contact at Appleton, New York native Francis Whiting Halsey, had made a formidable career for himself as an editor and writer for a number of distinguished media outlets such as the *New York Tribune* and the *New York Times*, where he worked from 1880 until his death in 1919. Halsey's career at these newspapers overlapped with his work publishing Watson's *Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany*, a detail which reasonably allowed one to assume that Halsey possessed special insight concerning the public's taste in books and likely also had influence in shaping literary trends. Halsey, additionally, actively participated in a number of professional organizations that indicate his interest in high academic standards in

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[209] It seems very likely that Watson, and by extension, Appleton, hoped to cash-in on the growing popularity of plantation novels and other pro-South redemptive fiction, such as Dixon's *The Clansmen*. This subject is examined in greater detail in Chapter 5. See, Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Clansmen: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, illustrated by Arthur L. Keller (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905).

[210] "CENTURY TO MERGE WITH APPLETON & CO.: Two of the Oldest Publishing Houses in Nation Being United by Stockholders. HILTMAN TO BE CHAIRMAN W.M. Shuster Will Be President of New Company -- Project Long Under Consideration," *New York Times* (Mar 18, 1933): 15. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

literature, such as the American Historical Association, the New York State Library Association, and the Cornell University Club.[211]

Halsey apparently had a vested interest in the writing and publishing of educational texts, as he wrote and edited several during the course of his career. Working with nationally recognized politicians such as William Jennings Bryan and Henry Cabot Lodge, Halsey created and edited anthologies such as *The World's Famous Orations* (1906) and *The Best of the World's Classics* (1909). In 1902, Halsey even wrote his own book voicing his concerns over the state of book publishing titled *Our Literary Deluge and Some of its Deeper Waters*. While this book touched on a number of subjects related to publishing, Halsey's primary concern appears to have been the falling standards of English-speaking book publishers and its effect on the public's willingness to buy and read books.[212] His interest in maintaining book publication standards might explain Halsey's role in creating the *Times Review of Books* in 1896. Halsey, additionally, accepted a position from Appleton to serve as their editor while still working at the *New York Times*.[213] This information about Halsey becomes all the more ironic as one reflects on Woodward's extremely unfavorable reviews of *Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany*, since Woodward specifically complained about Watson's extremely poor scholarship in these histories.

While the arc of Halsey's professional career in writing and editing provided reasonable context for how he came to work at D. Appleton and Company, why the publishing firm desired to sign a contract with Tom Watson for not one but two American histories remains less clear. A competitor of Macmillan, one can reasonably speculate that D. Appleton also wanted to remain a

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[211] "Biographical Note," Halsey Family Papers, 1870-1975, Collection Number: 2966, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMM02966.html#info_for_users.
[212] See Francis W. Halsey, *Our Literary Deluge and Some of its Deeper Waters* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1902).
[213] "BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE."

leader in the market for American-made educational texts, as it had been doing since the mid-nineteenth century.[214] Comparatively, Halsey's position as editor at Appleton seems inferior to that of George Platt Brett's at Macmillan, who had the advantage of being the company's president and the grandson of George Edward Brett, the founder of Macmillan US. However, Halsey's personal correspondence with Watson and his ability to convey Appleton's interests as the editor does not come across as any less authoritative than Brett's messages to Watson some years earlier.

Watson's decision to pursue a contract with a new publishing house might be related to how Macmillan mishandled Watson's *Napoleon* and the distribution of his book royalties. Although an American version of *The Story of France* had been discussed by Watson and Brett as early as 1899, Watson would not turn his attention from French histories to American histories until December 1902, and even then, he did not attempt a comprehensive study of the United States.[215] Instead, Watson focused on writing a celebratory biography of Thomas Jefferson.

The first letter from Francis W. Halsey in the Tom Watson Papers concerns Watson's proposal to write a Thomas Jefferson biography.[216] Presumably, Watson contacted Appleton with the idea for his next biography sometime in late 1902. His message to Appleton would have come on the heels of his 700-plus page Napoleon biography, indicative of Watson's insatiable appetite when it came to historical writing. Dated December 30, 1902, Halsey's letter highlighted Watson's reputation as author and Appleton's eagerness to publish his work. Written in a spirit of friendliness and professional admiration, the letter began with the following: "My dear Mr. Watson, We are much interested in the suggestion you have made in regard to a book on Thomas

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[214] "CENTURY TO MERGE WITH APPLETON & CO."
[215] Brett to Watson, 9 January 1899, Watson Papers.
[216] Letter from Francis W. Halsey to Thomas E. Watson, 30 December 1902, ibid.

Jefferson. We should have [sic] very special pleasure in publishing such a work from your hands." Further acknowledging Watson's reputation as a writer, Halsey predicted that a Jefferson biography by Watson would become "a permanent contribution to American biographical literature" and that the book "would meet an existing need" for excellent biographies. Halsey's praise for Watson, at the very least, indicated that the negative reviews he received for his French histories did not ruin his book sales or his growing national presence as an author and historian.[217]

Reminiscent of his correspondence with George Platt Brett, Watson seems to have developed a friendly professional relationship with Halsey in the years that followed *Thomas Jefferson*. Halsey's letters to Watson abound with references to gifts and social visits with one another.[218] The editor even sent his congratulations to Watson for the speech he delivered in October 1904 at the Grand Central Palace in New York City, which Halsey attended along with Appleton and Company's vice president.[219] Watson and Halsey's friendship seems to have developed significantly between 1903 and 1904, as more than half of the letters Halsey sent to Watson were sent in 1904, the year they published *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*.

The first mention of *Bethany* appears in Halsey's January 22, 1904, letter to Watson. The contents of the letter suggest that Watson had previously written to Halsey about his book idea and passion for the subject. Halsey enthusiastically responded to Watson's suggestion, writing excitedly about the prospect of Watson's manuscript. Halsey, additionally, expressed Appleton's

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[217] Ibid.

[218] For Halsey's thank you note to Watson for his visit to the Watson home in Georgia, see Halsey to Watson, 3 December 1903, ibid. For Halsey's handwritten thank you note to Watson for presenting him with a rare edition of a book, see Halsey to Watson, 5 April 1904, ibid.

[219] Halsey to Watson, 31 October, 1904, ibid. A handwritten copy of Watson's October 1904 speech in New York is available in the Watson Papers. Watson's printed version of the speech is available in his self-published book of speeches. See Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (Nashville, TN: self-published by the author, 1908), 275-285.

desire to publish the novel, implicitly acknowledging that other publishing houses would also want to have the manuscript: "If the book could come our way it would please me, and I shall await with interest some further word from you….we should, of course, be very glad....to do anything for you that we could."[220] By March 15th, 1904, Watson had accepted Halsey's offer and agreed to publish *Bethany* with Appleton. In a letter reminiscent of George Platt Brett's enthusiasm for *The Story of France*, Halsey wrote extensively about his predictions for the novel and its impact on the American public.[221]

Halsey's excitement for *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* hinged on the unique perspective Watson offered as a southerner and on the book's potential to reach across sectional lines. Pledging Appleton's due diligence as the publisher, Halsey wrote: "We shall make every effort to push the book and believe a gratifying sale can be secured for it." After this, Halsey waxed poetic about the book's merits, explaining why he believed it would appeal to such a large audience:

> It is not alone the love story that will appeal to readers, this, as you know, being the subordinate matter, but rather the voice you have given to the sentiments of your own people, which is something virile and charming. What is best about it, to my mind, is the absence of anything like real bitterness. It is the straight from the heart utterances of a man who knows his own mind and his own people. A voice thus speaking will always find interested listeners and should leave no resentment behind.

Echoing his claim that the novel "is something virile and charming," Halsey made a second reference to Watson's masculinity as the letter continued.

Discussing his plans to send a copy of *Bethany* to Philadelphia's *The Saturday Evening Post*, Halsey assured Watson that the Pennsylvania-based newspaper would not have a problem reviewing the book favorably, writing: "I do not see how your story could arouse any other

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[220] Halsey to Watson, 22 January 1904, Watson Papers,
[221] Halsey to Watson, 21 March 1904, ibid.

feeling than one of respect and liking for a man who has said his say in this manly and charming fashion."[222] While Halsey's brief references to masculinity may seem inconsequential, the contents of his letter actually touch on one of the major themes of this chapter: the intersection of race, masculinity, and political rights.

Although this study had, from the beginning, set out to focus on how Watson discussed race in the six histories C. Vann Woodward highlighted in his eighteenth chapter of *Agrarian Rebel*, Watson's frequent mentions of race in connection with gender in his American histories makes ignoring how Watson understood gender irresponsible—if not impossible. Readers asking why this subject did not come up in the previous chapter on Watson's French histories will, hopefully, be satisfied with a simple explanation: Watson did not discuss gender as often and in the same capacity in his French histories than in his American histories.

A keyword search for words typically used to describe gender supports this claim. For example, 'manly' was one of Watson's favorite words for masculinity in his American histories. With the modern advantage of digitized, public-domain books, one can easily search for the word in all six of these histories. In the first 740-page volume of *The Story of France*, 'manly' appeared only three times. In the second volume, roughly 1,100 pages, 'manly' appeared ten times. In the 770-page Napoleon biography, 'manly' comes up five times. Compare this frequency to Watson's American histories: in the 596 pages of the Jefferson biography, there were nine 'manly' citations. *Bethany* used the word 'manly' 14 times within its 420 pages, while Andrew Jackson referenced the word ten times in 456 pages. For those interested in how these numbers play out, Watson used the word 'manly' on 0.6 percent of the pages in his French histories; in comparison, his American histories include the word on 2.2 percent of their pages.

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[222] Ibid.

Even allowing for some variation in the page lengths for different editions of these books, Watson's use of the word increased significantly in his final three books on American histories. This example, additionally, does not even account for the other words Watson frequently used to describe gender—and specifically, masculinity—in American histories.

Why did Watson have an increased focus on gender in his American histories, and how does this knowledge contribute to our understanding of Watson's disenfranchisement campaign against black males after 1904? Unpacking the answer to these questions requires an understanding of the complicated intersection between race, gender, and political rights at the turn of the nineteenth century. Fortunately, for the sake of this study, scholars have produced excellent research on how these forces collided in Tom Watson's lifetime.

A power struggle between North and South, black and white lay at the heart of the social and political conflict that ensued in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. This phenomenon has been well-documented in studies such as David Blight's 2001 monograph *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* or in the authoritative history of the Dunning school edited by John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (2013). These studies, although different in their subjects and methodologies, examined how sectionalism that erupted into civil war in the 1860s did not immediately disappear after Appomattox. Neither, for that matter, did the anti-black prejudice that made chattel slavery a viable and profitable economic system for both sections of the country since the nation's colonial days. Anyone familiar with the general shape of U.S. history during the course of the twentieth century can correctly guess how this conflict between section and skin color eventually ended: sometime in the early 1900s, whites in the North and South reconciled their sectional differences, no longer blaming one another for the war but

shifting their focus to another scapegoat: black people.[223] The rise of the Dunning school contributed to this reunification, as their studies of the South during Reconstruction sympathized with the hardships of white southerners while also lending scholarly credibility to blaming blacks for all of the problems surrounding the war's outbreak and the failure of post-war Reconstruction.[224]

In violently racist terms, leading scholars and writers described blacks as incompetent, bestial, child-like, and unable to achieve even the basic levels of civilization without the guidance and example of white people.[225] Their predilection for enslavement contributed to the causes of the war, and their incapacity to prosper as a race made the North's attempt to rehabilitate southern society a wasted effort. The Dunning school scholars, at the cutting edge of American academia, believed that whites suffered the most during the war and Reconstruction, and that blacks were the root cause of all this suffering. As the conclusions of the Dunning school permeated American society as the authoritative history of the war and its aftermath, whites in both areas of the country gradually began introducing anti-black legislation known collectively as Jim Crow laws, passed under the auspice of Progressivism and the necessity of protecting white progress from black interference. In his biography of C. Vann Woodward, John Herbert Roper described this phenomenon of white reconciliation at the expense of black people as "the moral and intellectual quid pro quo in which black civil rights were exchanged for white

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[223] The collective decision to make black people the scapegoat for the Civil War and Reconstruction was the culmination of a trend that had been in place since the end of the Civil War.

[224] For an authoritative history on the Dunning School, see Smith and Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School*.

[225] For Tom Watson's take on this subject, written in a similar vein, see his 1905 speech titled "Is the black man superior to the white?," Watson Papers.

political unity." A brief survey of studies conducted by historians such as Joel Williamson and Gail Bederman further confirm Roper's observation.[226]

In his 1984 book *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, historian Joel Williamson described the role gender played in the development of the political and racial status quo in the turn of the century South. Williamson characterized the 1890s, the peak of Watson's Populist activities, as "the critical phase in race relations for twentieth-century America." This decade saw a dramatic increase in lynching and other racially based violence, influenced in part by an ongoing economic depression in the 1880s and 1890s. Williamson noted that racially based violence was further aggravated by the depression, as white men unable to provide for their families viewed black men as a scapegoat for their economic hardships and a sexual threat to white women. Young black males, born after Emancipation and never experiencing the 'civilizing' influence of enslavement under a white master, became popular targets for the suspicion and violence of their white neighbors, especially as they wandered between towns in search of work. As this generation of black men came of age in the 1880s and 1890s, an explosion of racial violence and lynching followed.[227]

Hyper-conservative southern radicals further aggravated the anti-black social and political climate in the South, advocating in newspapers and in public speeches for as many lynching as necessary to protect white women from black men. Black disenfranchisement became a key component of the white radical campaign against blacks. Southern radical and suffragette Rebecca Felton, for example, passionately reprimanded her white male peers for allowing black men to enter the polls. According to Felton, the ongoing threat black males posed

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[226] John Herbert Roper, *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 68.
[227] Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, ix, 113-29.

to white females "necessitated keeping all Negroes away from the polls because white men equalizing themselves with black men in voting persuaded black men to presume that they could claim equality in other places—most dangerously with white women."[228] Felton, notably, had a close relationship with Tom Watson and his wife, Georgia Durham Watson, and was the person Watson privately told that he considered supporting black disenfranchisement in the 1902 letter.

Although he did not delve into the scope of Tom Watson's career at length, post-1904 Watson fit neatly into Williamson's profile for the southern radicals and what they envisioned for the future of race relations. Williamson noted that the radicals idealized the political ideology of Thomas Jefferson, sparking a revival in interest in the life and career of the late president. Williamson wrote: "It was no mere chance that Tom Watson published a well-received biography of the great Virginian and in 1906 chose to rename his magazine Watson's Jeffersonian Weekly."[229] Similar to Williamson's analysis of how race relations dramatically developed during Watson's lifetime, Gail Bederman's study of gender and race at the turn of the twentieth century also sheds light on Tom Watson's newfound interest in connecting gender and race in his American histories.

In her book *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (1995), historian Gail Bederman examined the connection between the insecurity of white males brought on by the economic and social changes of the late nineteenth century and subsequent the racial and political discrimination rendered to blacks during the Jim Crow era. Bederman summarized her conclusions concerning the connection between white supremacy and male supremacy in the following terms:

> ...between 1890 and 1917, as white middle-class men actively worked to reinforce male power, their race became a factor which was crucial to their gender. In ways which have

[228] Ibid., 124-30.
[229] Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 286.

> not been well understood, whiteness was both a palpable fact and a manly ideal for these men. During these years, a variety of social and cultural factors encourage white middle-class men to develop new explanations of why they, as men, ought to wield power and authority.[230]

Bederman went so far as to describe middle-class males as "obsessed with manhood at the turn of the century."[231] While this observation helps explain why Halsey felt motivated to characterize *Bethany*'s narrative as "virile" and "manly," Halsey's passing connection between masculinity and interpretations of the Civil War points to one of the most striking characteristics of Watson's American histories: his frequent references to race in connection with gender.

Watson explored the relationship between race and gender in *Bethany* more so than in his other two American histories. This focus on gender in his Civil War novel might be attributed to the state of Civil War historiography when Watson wrote *Bethany*. When Tom Watson published *Bethany* in 1904, he entered into a decades-old dispute concerning the history of the Civil War and who had the authority to write it. As one might expect, these histories typically split across sectional lines, as southerners defended the Confederacy's role in the war and northerners defended the Union.[232] Even as professional histories in the late nineteenth century began displacing the more amateur or experienced-based histories of the conflict, sectional bias and the impulse to render blame still reigned supreme.

Historian and political scientist John W. Burgess offered a prime example of this characteristic, as a book in his Civil War history series called *The Middle Period, 1817-1858* posed a direct challenge to the masculinity of southern white men who would not accept blame

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[230] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 4-5.
[231] Ibid., 11.
[232] For an example of a typically northern interpretation of the Civil War, see Henry Wilson's *History of the Rise and Fall of Slave Power in America*, 3 vols. (Boston: J.R. Osgood, 1872, 1877). For a typically southern interpretation, see Edward Alfred Pollard's *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1867).

for causing the war. Although the connection between Burgess' Civil War history and Watson's *Bethany* should not be overstated, examining Burgess' challenge to southern masculinity in a book published eight years before Watson's novel lends credibility to Bederman's claim that middle-class white males were "obsessed" with gender and contextualizes why Watson paid so much attention to gender in his historical fiction of the Civil War.

John W. Burgess has the distinction of being the father of American political science and mentor to Dunning School's namesake, William Archibald Dunning. Although he was a Tennessean by birth, Burgess served in the Union army, later obtaining a doctoral degree in political science and establishing the first of such programs in the United States.[233] Although his credentials indicate his ability to produce objective, evidence-based histories of the Civil War, his biases aligned with those of most northern-born historians. Burgess, somewhat ironically given his southern roots, believed that only a northerner could produce a balanced and authoritative history of the Civil War because the North was in the right when it came to the conflict: "this history must be written by an American a Northerner, and from the Northern point of view…because the victorious party can be and will be more liberal, generous, and sympathetic to the vanquished; and because the Northern view is, in the main, the correct view."[234] While he did pledge fairness to the South, Burgess made no apologies for his belief that the South illegally seceded should accept blame for their part in starting the conflict. From this standpoint, Burgess

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[233] For more on Dunning's biography, see Shepherd W. McKinley's chapter "John W. Burgess, Godfather of the Dunning School," in Smith and Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School,* 49-76.
[234] John W. Burgess, preface to *The Middle Period, 1817-1858* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), x. In Shepherd W. McKinley's chapter "John W. Burgess, Godfather of the Dunning School," he called Burgess' Civil War trilogy "a strong but not unique statement for national reconciliation." Burgess' ideas, in other words, were representative of the "northern" point of view. Shepherd W. McKinley, "John W. Burgess, Godfather of the Dunning School," in Smith and Lowry, eds., *The Dunning School,* 59.

challenged the masculinity of southern males, confirming Bederman's observation that middle-class males were "obsessed" with masculinity at the turn-of-the-century.[235]

In his preface to *The Middle Period, 1817-1858*, Burgess threatened southern males with emasculation if they did not accept blame for causing the war. Outlining his self-described objectivity to the history of the Civil War, Burgess added: "The time has come when the men of the South should acknowledge that they were error in their attempt to destroy the Union, and it is unmanly of them not to do so." He expanded on this idea further, writing:

> The South must acknowledge its error as well as its defeat in regard to these things...not with lip service, but from the brain and the heart and the manly will, before any real concord in thought and feeling, any real national brotherhood, can be established….Any interpretation of this period of American history which does not demonstrate to the South its error will be worthless, simply because it will not be true; and unless we are men enough to hear and accept and stand upon the truth, it is useless to endeavor to find the real bond of union between us.[236]

Certainly, Burgess' preface indicated that a cultural reunification had yet to take place in 1897, and that men were the definitive force in determining whether the sections would once again reunify. Although no explicit connection exists tying Burgess' challenge to southern masculinity in *The Middle Period* and the preface to Watson's *Bethany*, which also references northern men and sectional reunification, Burgess' decision to encourage sectional reconciliation by threatening the masculinity of southern males further contextualized Watson's approach to *Bethany* and Halsey's references to Watson's masculinity in his March 1904 letter. Additionally, Burgess' several references to masculinity, manliness, and brotherhood further confirm Bederman's observation that late nineteenth-century males were "obsessed" with redefining and defending masculinity.

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[235] Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 11.
[236] Burgess, preface to *The Middle Period*, xi-x.

In October 1904, some seven months after Haley's March 1904 letter to Tom Watson, Appleton published *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*. In August 1904, Watson had made his notorious proclamation to support the disenfranchisement of black men in Georgia.[237] The following month, Halsey enthusiastically wrote to Watson about the novel's performance, stating: "The book seems to be liked everywhere." Notably, Halsey followed this report with an additional detail: "Yesterday a man of the 'black republican' kind was in and spoke of having read it with much personal interest."[238] Halsey's mention of this hearkened back to the manuscript stages of the novel, where he had optimistically predicted that the book had the potential to demolish sectional barriers between the North and South.[239]

By December 1904, Watson and Halsey seemed to have switched their focus from *Bethany* to a biography on Andrew Jackson. Although Halsey did request some updates to the *Bethany* manuscript in his November 9th letter to Watson, presumably for a reprint of the book, by his next letter on December 15th, he asked about Watson's progress on his next history.[240] Halsey wrote: "Are you deep in Jackson? I believe this is the time of year when the spirit begins to move you."[241] References to a potential biography of Andrew Jackson also appeared in Halsey's letters as early as December 1903, when Halsey randomly referred to an Andrew Jackson manuscript collection, indicating that this archive might have been of some interest to

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[237] Woodward, notably, examined Watson's return to politics in 1904 in a chapter entirely separate from his examination of Watson's histories, even though these events happened in conjunction with one another. See Chapter 18 "Of Revolution and Revolutionists and 21 "Reform and Reaction" in *Agrarian Rebel*.
[238] Halsey to Watson, 3 November 1904, Watson Papers.
[239] The race of this "black republican" is unclear, since the term was frequently used to describe republicans of both races.
[240] Halsey to Watson, 9 November 1904, Watson Papers.
[241] Halsey to Watson, 15 December 1904, ibid.

Watson.[242] The biography, however, would not see publication until almost eight years later, and by this time Watson elected to use his own printing presses for the circulation of his writings.

The long eight years that passed between Appleton publishing *Bethany* in 1904 and Watson's self-publication of *Andrew Jackson* in 1912 can be attributed to Watson's return to the political arena and his newfound obligations to his namesake periodical, *Tom Watson's Magazine*. Although Watson had made a few public appearances delivering lectures during his eight-year hiatus from politics, by 1902, he began to dip his toes in the water once more. In 1902, Watson addressed the Georgia state legislature, speaking in support of a bill outlawing child labor.[243] In March 1904, the same month Halsey wrote to him with celebratory anticipation of his manly Civil War novel, Watson reluctantly released a statement in an Atlanta newspaper endorsing a presidential candidate for the upcoming 1904 election. Repulsed by the under-the-table political maneuverings he was witnessing in both national parties, Watson publicly pledged his support for the Democratic presidential nomination to newspaperman William Randolph Hearst.[244]

Political manipulation and party realignment in 1904 seems to have been enough to revive even the dwindling remnant of the People's Party. Watson received the presidential nomination for the Populist ticket over Fourth of July weekend, almost single-handedly reanimating the party machinery back to life in the months that followed. Setting out on a national campaign, Watson's reputation as a published author and historian preceded him, as crowds enthusiastically gathered to hear his stump speeches. The 1904 campaign would prove

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[242] Halsey to Watson, 3 December 1903, ibid.
[243] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 373. For a copy of Watson's speech supporting the passage of the child labor law, see Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (Nashville, TN: self-published by the author, 1908), 232-9.
[244] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 355.

fruitless for both the Populists and the Democrats, as Republican Theodore Roosevelt would return to the White House once again. Campaigning throughout the summer and into the fall of 1904, however, seems to have reignited Watson the politician.[245]

In his 1904 summer and fall campaigns across the South, Watson once again encountered white voters hesitant to support the third party movement for fear of blacks becoming their social and political equals. As described by Woodward, this campaign had once again been plagued by a suspicion that Populist reforms would inevitably cause black advancement into historically white spheres, a fear identical to those expressed during the 1892 and 1896 campaigns.[246] Although Watson had previously sneered at politicians who supported black disenfranchisement, claiming that a "real" white supremacist would be secure in the knowledge that blacks could never actually surpass whites, he reversed this position in 1904. On August 1st, two months before the first release of *Bethany*, Watson pledged his support to any politician, Populist or Democrat, who would promise to enact a white primary in the Georgia state constitution. As Woodward so concisely put it, "Watson's offer did not go long begging," and the candidate who accepted his proposal, Hoke Smith, won the 1906 gubernatorial campaign. Watson, having eliminated the distraction of black equality from the minds of his white constituents, now loomed larger in Georgia politics than ever before, aided in part by his position as a rising media mogul.[247]

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[245] Ibid., 350-5. In late November 1904, Theodore Roosevelt invited Watson to dine with him at the White House, citing his admiration of Watson's spirit and incorruptibility. Watson ultimately declined the offer. However, Roosevelt's admiration for Watson's character and his interest in developing more of an acquaintance with him seems to say enough about Watson's reputation and his growing popularity during the 1904 campaign.

[246] Ibid., 370.

[247] Ibid., 370-80. This election also contributed to the outbreak of the 1906 Atlanta race riot, in which more than two dozen African Americans were killed at the hands of white mobs. For more on the Atlanta Riot, see Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).

On a 1905 visit to New York, the result of the 1904 presidential election having already been determined, Watson continued to make appearances and deliver political speeches to enthusiastic reformers, caught up in the "ferment" of the Progressive movement. While on this visit, Watson received an extremely generous offer to establish his own magazine from newspaperman W. D. Mann. The first issue of *Tom Watson's Magazine* appeared in March 1905. Widely considered a muckraking publication with a distinctly populist flavor, Watson, as editor, dominated the pages of the periodical with his self-righteous attacks on topics ranging from the Catholic church to immigration to capitalists. Within the first six months, over 10,000 people had subscribed to the magazine, a testament to Watson's popularity and reach of his ideas.[248]

By the summer of 1905, Watson began to lose some of his audience. Progressively-minded readers, initially attracted to Watson's publications because of their populist spirit, began to find his writings distasteful and reactionary. According to Woodward, Watson's editorials denouncing black civil rights and distinguished black reformers such as Booker T. Washington disgusted readers in both the North and South. This loss in readership contributed to the rising tensions between the Georgia-based editor, Watson, and the New York-based magazine owner, Mann. Disputes over the magazine's contents, Watson's salary, and his general lack of cooperation with the New York office eventually led Watson to resign from his position as editor in October 1906.[249]

Within the month, he began his own newspaper as an outlet for his political musings, the *Weekly Jeffersonian*.[250] By the following January, Watson had established a new self-named periodical, *Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine*, which victoriously ran the New York-based *Tom*

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[248] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 365-9. Woodward did an excellent job describing the nature of Watson's magazine and its contents on these pages.
[249] Ibid., 386.
[250] Ibid., 381.

Watson's Magazine out of business. Watson's publications, now based exclusively in Georgia, turned their gaze from national issues and began to focus more heavily on the South. Equipped with the means to influence both his readership and the political sphere, Watson used his powers to target his wrath on friends and enemies alike in the years that followed.[251]

Securely at the helm of his own publishing firm, Watson resumed writing and publishing new books, almost always focused on political themes: *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (1908), *Waterloo* (1908, published by the Neale Publishing Company), *Socialists and Socialism* (1910), and *Foreign Missions Exposed* (1910).[252] In July 1910, he officially returned to the Democratic Party, announcing that he planned to lead the party and purge its ranks of any dead weight or non-believers; Woodward described this homecoming as a "symbolic" gesture, as Watson had already publicly declared he had no interest in pursuing political office and had already been working with non-machine party Democrats for several years.[253] This return to the Democrats helps contextualize Watson's interest in finally publishing his *Andrew Jackson* biography in 1912, as Jackson symbolized strong Democratic leadership and so much of the ideology Watson clung to throughout his political career. Other more embarrassing events in

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[251] Ibid., 380-403. Woodward also described Watson's investment into his publishing equipment and his set up at Hickory Hill. See ibid, 416-8.

[252] Woodward paid very little attention to these publications in *Agrarian Rebel*, and since the sheer volume of Watson's speeches, editorials, and publications seems to be one of the major factors prohibiting the creation of an updated and comprehensive biography of Tom Watson, this study has decided to limit its focus to the six major Tom Watson histories Woodward reviewed in *Agrarian Rebel*. Additionally, very little information about the Neale Publishing company is available. It appears to have been a small and short-lived publishing house active during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Neale's publications primarily focus on race and southern history, making it unsurprising that they would seek out a contract with Watson. A few letters exchanged between Watson and the Neale company are available in the Watson Papers. See, for example, Letter from Walter Neale to Watson, 1 February 1908, Watson Papers.

[253] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 408-9.

1910, however, might also explain why Watson decided to print a new history that would hopefully rehabilitate his image as an academic and a political thinker.[254]

Although almost every year of Watson's life offers a certain level of surprise and disgust for anyone studying his notorious career, 1910 offered a special dose of cringe when it came to the unhinged nature of Watson's actions.[255] A personal and very public vendetta against his one-time friend and mentee, congressman Thomas Hardwick, dealt a serious blow to Watson's credibility and reputation during the summer of 1910. However, most of this damage appeared to have been Watson's own fault, as he had publicly likened Hardwick's reelection to a personal attack on his honor and leadership. Unmoved by Watson's words, the tenth district reelected Hardwick. A public lecture, advertised in September under the auspices of political reconciliation and the common good, ended with Watson storming off the stage screaming death threats against hecklers and political adversaries in attendance.[256]

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[254] The sudden appearance of personalized stationery in the Tom Watson Papers during these years provides another indicator of his relative success as a publisher. Watson seems to have ordered or created his own business stationery sometime around 1907, now conducting his business operations on paper with a letterhead "Thos. E. Watson, Editor and Proprietor." For an example of this stationary, see Watson to J. Lawrence, 18 September, 1907, and Watson to Postmaster, 24 October 1907, Watson Papers.

[255] Scholars like Bertram Wyatt-Brown have acknowledged Watson's struggle with mental health and mental illness throughout his life, and particularly after 1904. According to Wyatt-Brown, in between the lines of *Agrarian Rebel* lay a subtext of intense mental anguish that Woodward was not necessarily equipped to diagnose or acknowledge when writing in the late 1930s. In his analysis of Watson's mental health, Wyatt-Brown acknowledged that 1908-1915 marked a period of intense "mental distress" and "paranoid delusions" for Watson. Although Wyatt-Brown's diagnosis of Watson cannot be overstated, given his limited access to a distant historical figure and his lack of medical-grade psychiatric training, his conclusions about Watson's mental health during this time period seem extremely relevant to this examination of Watson's American histories and the context of their creation. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Tom Watson Revisited," *Journal of Southern History*, 68, no. 1 (Feb. 2002): 8-19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3069689.

[256] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 408-12.

In the weeks that followed this disastrous lecture, Watson considered ways to make good on his threats and made arrangements to have his death avenged should his political opponents order his assassination. Additionally, he began a targeted smear campaign against Hoke Smith, a gubernatorial candidate who Watson believed had hired men to disrupt his lecture. By late September, Watson directly sent Smith telegrams threatening to publish a ruinous story that he claimed to receive from anonymous sources. Smith ignored Watson's threats, winning the governor's seat the following month.[257]

Undeterred by Smith's victory, Watson printed newspaper editorials demanding his resignation. F. L. Seely, an Atlanta-based newspaperman, investigated Watson's charges against Smith and found his evidence overwhelmingly "flimsy" that he decided to make Watson the object of a very public and deeply embarrassing hoax. Seely fed Watson a false story, which Watson enthusiastically printed in *The Jeffersonian*. Before Watson's paper could circulate, however, Seely printed his own news story exposing the trick he played and the deplorably low standards of Watson's journalism. As Woodward described it, "the state rocked with laughter. It was the lowest ebb for the Sage of Hickory Hill." Following this embarrassment, Watson seems to have slipped into a new level of mental disillusionment, pouring himself into his publications as a means of assuring everyone—including himself—of his success and sanity.[258]

In the years between *Bethany* and *Andrew Jackson*, friendly relations between Watson and Halsey at Appleton appear to have cooled, not unlike Watson's relationship with Brett at Macmillan. Watson's focus on his periodical publications and his return to active politics likely

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[257] Ibid., 411-15. Smith had accepted Watson's endorsement during the 1906 gubernatorial election, and was the candidate who promised to disenfranchise Georgia's black voters after Watson suggested disenfranchisement in 1904. Smith's 1906 election to Georgia's governor is generally considered the catalyst for the 1906 Atlanta Riot. For more on Watson's history with Smith, see Ibid., 472-9; 382-3.

[258] Ibid., 411-8.

distracted his focus away from any manuscripts for some time, which explains the sharp decrease in letters from Halsey after 1904. In a letter to Watson dated July 12, 1906, Halsey declined Watson's offer to pay him a visit and wished him success in his new magazine venture, sending his warm regards to both Watson and his wife Georgia at the close of the letter.[259] By October of 1907, Watson had contacted Halsey once again with an invitation to visit him in Georgia, also inquiring after Appleton's interest in his Andrew Jackson biography. Halsey politely declined Watson's request to visit for the second time, citing that business obligations rendered him unavailable. His letter, additionally, indicated some reluctance to enter into a third contract with Watson.

In letter from November 4, 1907, Halsey implied that Watson's renewed ventures in the political arena might have endangered any future contracts with Appleton, as certain executives at the firm hesitated to pursue further contracts with Watson based on his increasingly notorious reputation. Halsey wrote:

> The matter of publishing your 'Andrew Jackson' volume came up to-day before the conference, and the general opinion was still favorable to its publication. We should like, however, to know if you could not send us as many pages as have already been printed. Some members of the Conference seem to be more familiar with your speeches than with your writings, and would like to have an opportunity of reading what you have thus far published in this book.[260]

In his remaining letters to Watson, Halsey never mentions the Andrew Jackson biography again, indicating that Appleton decided to pass on the opportunity to publish another Watson biography. Halsey's final two letters in the Watson Papers only discuss Watson's idea for publishing a book of speeches. In his responses to Watson, Halsey seems only politely interested in this book suggestion, entertaining Watson's seemingly desperate suggestion that he would pay

[259] Halsey to Watson, 6 July 1906, Watson Papers.
[260] Halsey to Watson, 4 November 1906, ibid.

a portion of the printing fee should Appleton agree to publish his work.[261] Presumably, Appleton had no interest in pursuing this book idea either, as Watson would self-publish this book of speeches later on in 1908.[262]

As this chapter has surveyed the relatively unexplained circumstances surrounding the publication of Watson's three American histories, it has examined their publication in combination with the context of Watson's professional and political career during the first decade of the twentieth century. In *Agrarian Rebel*, Woodward only briefly described the context of Watson's American histories, and in a chapter entirely separate from his return to politics or his post-1904 literary and political career. However, since the overarching goal of this study is to determine whether Watson's histories provide any indication of his shifting racial views between 1899 and 1912, it seemed critical to analyze Watson's political and literary career in combination with one another.

Examining Watson's publishing career between 1904 and 1912 has revealed his sustained popularity between the publication of his French histories and his first two American volumes. Watson's celebrity status between 1903 and 1905 attracted Appleton, one of the nation's premier publishing houses, as well as the attention of newspaper editor W.D. Mann, who awarded Watson with his own self-named magazine. By 1906, however, Watson's political opinions had left him increasingly isolated from his publishers and part of his readership. Public humiliations in 1910 further isolated Watson, deepened his mental distress, and left him scrambling to reassert his success to himself and his critics.[263]

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[261] See Halsey to Watson 3 December 1907 and Halsey to Watson, 25 February 1908, ibid.
[262] See Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (Nashville, TN: self-published by the author, 1908).
[263] Woodward, *Rebel*, 416; Wyatt-Brown, "Tom Watson Revisited," 8-19.

Watson's correspondence with his Halsey demonstrated their enthusiasm for his first two American histories, and testify to Watson's reputation as a respected and sought-after author at the turn of the century.[264] Watson's activities in politics or in print media somewhere between 1905 and 1907, however, seem to have diminished Appleton's interest in pursuing any further contracts with Watson. Their disinterest in Watson's histories, notably, occurred prior to his public embarrassments of 1910 or his notoriously anti-Semitic involvement in the 1913 Leo Frank Murder Trial, which many readers today would point to as some of his most noteworthy and objectionable activities after 1904.[265]

Although this range of dates might indicate that Appleton objected to Watson's involvement in the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot, their willingness to publish his first two American histories in 1903 and 1904, which arguably present his most racist portrayals of people of color, make this possibility seem unlikely. Watson made his call for black disenfranchisement in Georgia two months before Appleton published *Bethany*. Perhaps as a matter of politeness, Halsey seems to have left Appleton's objections to Watson intentionally vague, stating that the contents of Watson's political speeches made certain executives worry about pursuing any future contracts. Watson's reputation as an abrasive political actor and willingness to go against the grain of established political or economic powers, rather than his racial views, are likely what discouraged Appleton from publishing his future works.

Aside from their disinterest in publishing *Andrew Jackson*, Appleton's enthusiasm for Watson's first two American histories, *Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany* will become all the more

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[264] Appleton's admiration of Watson, additionally, further confirmed the success of the French histories.

[265] Anti-Semitism was extremely prevalent in the United States in the early and mid-twentieth century. Consequently, it is possible that the publishers at Appleton, had they been working with Watson during this time period, would not have objected to the anti-Semitism that fueled the Leo Frank case or Watson's involvement in the trial and its aftermath.

striking in the following chapters, which examine how Watson discussed race in his American histories and how his writing perpetuated white supremacist ideas. Examined through Halsey's letters to Watson, D. Appleton appears to have had no issues with publishing and profiting from Watson's writings and the white supremacist ideas they contained. None of Watson's publishers or his reviewers explicitly objected to Watson's histories on the basis of how he mentioned race, a detail which seems to testify to the racial sensibilities of white Americans during this time period and the widespread acceptance of or indifference to white supremacist ideas.[266]

Appleton's disinterest in Watson and the public embarrassment he suffered in 1910 provides an interesting context for his 1912 American history, *Andrew Jackson*. Watson ultimately decided to publish this book himself, without the influence of an outside firm or editor. One would assume that the racial sentiment in these histories would continue in a reactionary direction and that the wounds of Watson's public embarrassments and his deteriorating mental state would drive him to lash out at people of color as a means to assert his own authority as a white man. The opposite, however, seems to have occurred. This history, while still perpetuating the biases of a white supremacist male, offered some of Watson's most racially progressive ideas, such as his praise for an independent black community in Spanish Florida or his admiration of select Native American men. Unraveling these examples, and comparing them to how Watson discussed race in his first two American histories and his French volumes, will be the primary objective of the next two chapters.

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[266] The ideas expressed by Watson's publishers or his reviewers cannot accurately be described as representative of the "American public" since the sources cited in this study presumably only represent the perspectives of a handful of influential and educated white Americans. It seems reasonable to suggest that a black reviewer, for example, would have objected to many of the white supremacist ideas Watson expressed in these histories. However, this cannot be said with certainty without locating source materials that reflect this perspective.

CHAPTER 5: "THE TRUTH IS THAT SLAVERY IS A CURSE TO EVERYONE EXCEPT THE NEGRO:"[267] RACE IN TOM WATSON'S AMERICAN HISTORIES, 1903-1912

As this study turns to an examination of Thomas E. Watson's American histories, the context of Watson's turbulent political and professional career after 1904 cannot be ignored. Watson's increasingly reactionary racial views, embodied by his public campaign to disenfranchise Georgia's black males, readily reveal themselves in his American histories. While both his French and American histories perpetuate negative racial stereotypes about people of color, further confirming Watson's unwavering allegiance to white supremacy, Watson discussed race more often in his American histories and with a significantly higher degree of intolerance. The novel published the same year Watson launched his disenfranchisement campaign, unsurprisingly, contains some of his most bigoted musings about race, and contains almost no examples of the progressive racial ideas that appeared in his French histories. Watson's American biographies, by comparison, contain less racial intolerance, but by no means are devoid of racist ideas or white supremacist beliefs.

The main distinction between Watson's American biographies and his novel lies in the biographies' occasional references to relatively progressive racial ideas (see footnote), or at least the noticeable absence of his typical comments about savagery and racial inferiority, which were introduced in his French histories.[268] Watson's last American history, *Andrew Jackson*, contained

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[267] Thomas E. Watson, *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* (1904; repr. New York: D. Appleton, 1905), 235.

[268] This study will use the common noun definition of the word "progressive," meaning someone in favor of liberal social reforms. Describing Thomas E. Watson, a professed white supremacist, or any of his ideas as "progressive," therefore, definitely requires a caveat explaining Watson's racial beliefs and further explanation for why any of his references to race could be labeled "progressive." Ideas described as "progressive" in this study are comparing Watson's "progressive" statements to his more reactionary statements about racial inferiority, such as his references to savagery, his belief that slavery benefitted blacks, and his suggestion that racial violence was necessary to protect white civilization and ensure that blacks remained inferior to

some of his most progressive references to race. While this study of Andrew Jackson still defended slavery and attempted to rehabilitate the public image of slave traders, Watson refrained from including the same degree of anti-black prejudice that appeared in his 1903 biography *Thomas Jefferson* and peaked in his 1904 novel *Bethany*. In *Andrew Jackson*, he even made some token concessions acknowledging black achievement.[269]

Watson's descriptions of Native Americans in *Andrew Jackson*, additionally, demonstrated an uncharacteristic level of racial tolerance, as he frequently expressed admiration for Native American leaders and sympathy for the sufferings they endured at the hands of whites. Watson gives little explanation for why he suddenly felt obligated to highlight Native American injustices or condemn white Americans for taking Native American lands through force and manipulation.[270] According to Native American historian Philip Deloria, the closing of the American frontier in 1890 dramatically changed how Native Americans existed in the "white historical consciousness." Deloria explained how the frontier closing and the Wounded Knee Massacre, also in 1890, caused white Americans to view Native Americans with a peculiar sense of nostalgia and regret.[271] Although these developments do not directly explain why Watson favored Native Americans in his 1912 biography of Andrew Jackson, especially since these

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whites. Instances where Watson mentions people of color and does not make these derogatory comments are considered "progressive" within the context of this study.

[269] Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson* (Thomson, GA: Jeffersonian Publishing, 1912), 232-47.

[270] For an example of Watson condemning white settlers for manipulating Native Americans in an effort to take their land, see ibid., 231, 234.

[271] Philip J. Deloria, "Historiography," in *A Companion to American Indian History*, eds. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 13-4. Deloria also noted that Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) argued that white settlers had acted barbarically toward Native Americans, providing an extremely sympathetic view of Native Americans. Watson's description of Native Americans in *Andrew Jackson* is reminiscent of this view.

developments predated the publication of all of his histories, this information contextualized Watson's favorable view of Native Americans within a larger cultural trend.

While the use of racial stereotypes and flirtations with progressive racial ideas in these histories closely resembles his French histories, Watson's self-declared role as a southern apologist and his interest in connecting race and gender in his American histories distinguished these histories from his volumes on France. The way Watson discussed race in connection with gender offers such a striking feature of these histories that it warrants its own chapter, and will be examined separately in the next chapter. An examination of how Watson discussed race, and specifically his efforts in south apologetics, will remain the focus of this chapter, and will serve as a primer for studying how Watson connected race and gender in the chapter that follows.

Watson's focus on southern apologetics in all three of his American histories should come as no surprise, since Woodward explicitly stated that Watson developed a near obsession with defending the South in his speeches and writings.[272] Watson's particular brand of southern apologetics typically focused on the following ideas: how slavery actually benefitted blacks, how southerners did not invent slavery, how other regions aided and abetted the development of slavery in the South, the constitutional right to secession, and that the South only went to war over states' rights. Watson did not invent these ideas, as they had a longstanding history in Confederate lore since the pre-war days. He did, however, perpetuate them in these histories, lending his reputation to the legitimacy of these ideas.[273] Watson, additionally, wrote these histories with a northern audience in mind, explicitly stating that he hoped his books would

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[272] C. Vann. Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (London: Macmillan, 1938; reprint New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 346-51. Citations refer to the reprint edition.

[273] These ideas about white supremacy, black inferiority, and the nature of the Civil War and slavery were not unique to Watson and could be considered representative of how most whites in the South viewed race.

soothe sectional discord and allow northerners to better understand the unique character of the South and its contributions to the nation's celebrated history.

5.1 ***The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson***

Published in 1903, only a year after *Napoleon*, Watson presented his Thomas Jefferson biography in a similar manner, stating that nearly all of Jefferson's other biographers failed to produce an unbiased history of their subject. Although Woodward alleged that Watson wrote this biography in a state of near mania, literally stating that Watson "entered the task with clenched fists in his Preface," the contents of this preface do not support this claim.[274] Contrary to Woodward's interpretation, the preface to *Thomas Jefferson* does not appear significantly different from other histories of this time period that vowed to correct sectional biases in American history.[275]

The chapters in *Thomas Jefferson* generally follow a chronological timeline, detailing the course of Jefferson's life.[276] Similar to Watson's French histories, Watson also included several thematic chapters in *Thomas Jefferson*. Many of these chapters specifically focus on southern history, covering "Revolt in North Carolina," "War in the South," or "Democracy in Virginia." While this study disagrees with Woodward's observation that Watson wrote *Thomas Jefferson* in a state of near-dysfunctional rage, his complaints about Watson's lack of organization and inability to focus the narrative seems justified.[277]

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[274] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 351.
[275] John Burgess' *The Middle Period*, discussed in the previous chapter, contained a similar level of sectional bias, academic posturing, and methodological discussion to Watson's *Jefferson*.
[276] Although it is true that Watson's narrative generally follows a chronology of Jefferson's life, the first chapter of *Thomas Jefferson* covers his family history, birth, and death in just 26 pages. While this might be a stylistic choice on Watson's part, to today's reader it might appear more like bad organization and storytelling since Jefferson's death is also discussed again at the end of the biography.
[277] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 351-2.

Although mentions of race in *Thomas Jefferson* primarily concern Watson's defense of the black slavery and how it actually benefitted blacks, his references to Native Americans and celebration of whiteness warrant attention before moving on to an examination of how he discussed black people. References to Native Americans appear very early on in the biography, as Watson discussed Thomas Jefferson's ancestors and their American frontier existence during the colonial era. Describing the manual labor and hardships Jefferson's pioneering father endured, Watson wrote: "Peter Jefferson lived on the very borders of civilization. He had gone West and patented a thousand acres of land in the wilderness on the Rivanna, at a time when the Indian trails were still warm in the woods, and when the adjoining country was thronged with savages."[278] Even in the remote wilderness, as explained by Watson, Peter Jefferson's skin color distinguished him from the Native Americans that lived nearby, and he had more claim to "civilization" than the tribes that inhabited the area. Watson's reference to Native Americans as "savages" mirrored how he described this group in any of his French histories.[279] In his Andrew Jackson biography, Watson would step away from these negative stereotypes about Native Americans and write with a surprising amount of sympathy towards this group, acknowledging that they had suffered at the hands of greedy white settlers. However, in this volume, he interchangeably referred to Native Americans as "red men" and "savages," indicating very little change in his prejudices.

Consistent with his white supremacist views, which reflected the views of the majority of whites in the South and the North, white people in this biography generally received Watson's

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[278] Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 5.

[279] This derogatory reference to Native Americans was not unique to Watson, who seems to be utilizing well-established racial stereotypes to better communicate his interpretations and analysis with his presumably white audience who was already aware of these stereotypes.

highest praise and admiration. Although he conceded that lower class whites in the eighteenth century United States "were poor, shiftless, ignorant, and...vicious," resembling "the human brute that thrives in twentieth century New York and Boston," Watson discussed whites with more admiration than any other group.[280] Referencing a speech Patrick Henry delivered during the American Revolution, he indulged in a romantic description of the speech, celebrating Patrick Henry's whiteness and the superiority of the English language: "...the voice full, rounded, powerful, perfect in every note... the words, simple, pure, massive, English—the best language on earth for human thought or passion—the golden key of all true orators who would unlock the Holy of Holies of the Anglo-Saxon heart."[281]Although Watson only made this comment in passing, this observation expanded on his references to white supremacy in his French histories. Watson clearly believed that white supremacy was directly connected to Anglo-Saxon heritage, Christianity, and the English language.[282]

Another noteworthy example of Watson's favorable depictions of white people appeared in his chapter on the North Carolina Regulators. The Regulators were a group of white farmers in western North Carolina who organized an armed rebellion against the exorbitant taxes approved by the colony's British Royal governor William Tyron. Their rebellion took place between 1768 and 1771. Reminiscent of his discussion of the Corsican independence movement, Watson wrote with intense sympathy for these North Carolinians, writing: "theirs was the divine indignation

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[280] Ibid., 16-17.
[281] Ibid., 42.
[282] This aspect of Watson's racial beliefs, once again, are not unique to Watson, as scientific racism was widely popular in the United States and elsewhere in the early twentieth century. Pseudo-scientific anthropologists frequently argued in favor of white, and especially Anglo-Saxon supremacy, building their case on the physiological and intellectual supremacy of the Anglo-Saxons throughout European and American history. For a typical example of this racial ideology, see Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race, or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

which drives men to resist oppression" and "it was the struggle of the ages, the effort of the weak and downtrodden to throw off the yoke and break the chain." Watson subtly attributed the justice of their cause to their race. After describing the tyranny of Governor Tryon, Watson wrote: "No wonder the hot blood of these Anglo-Saxons boiled within them; no wonder that their rash reply was 'Fire and be damned!'"[283] Watson's characterization of the Regulators notably contrasted with how he referenced black resistance movements in any of his French histories, which were always portrayed as senseless and destructive.

Watson's celebratory description of Thomas Jefferson likewise embodied his extremely favorable attitude towards white people. Throughout *Thomas Jefferson*, Watson acknowledged Jefferson's talents, intelligence, and keen insight when it came to politics. However, Watson romanticized Jefferson as a benevolent slave owner a detail which warrants special attention given Watson's interest in defending the South and slavery. Summarizing Jefferson's life and legacy, Watson declared that Jefferson, a slave owner, "had never willfully harmed a human being." Expanding on this portrait of Jefferson's benevolence, Watson wrote a romanticized account of Jefferson's return to Monticello after an extended trip to France. Describing a frenzied state scene of child-like excitement as Jefferson's slaves welcomed him home, Watson explained that the slaves felt so eager to greet their master that they picked up his carriage and carried it to the house themselves.[284] In this biography and in his subsequent American histories, Watson portrayed plantations as idealized places where race relations were properly ordered: slaves on the plantations always had humane care and complacent dispositions. White slave masters were benevolent leaders who adequately cared for their slaves, providing them with

[283] Ibid., 78.
[284] Ibid., 275.

work, protection, food, and clothing. Watson's biographies, in other words, say more about Watson's own time than the era of his subjects.

For all his praise of Jefferson as a man and a slaveowner, Watson found it difficult to understand Jefferson's views on slavery, listing this as one of the major contradictions in his life and legacy.[285] Ironically, Watson's analysis of Jefferson's abolitionist activities are also one of the most striking contradictions in any of his histories. Watson called Jefferson "the original abolitionist" and praised his efforts to abolish slavery, citing his wisdom in correctly predicting that slavery would become a bigger and more difficult problem to solve in the future.[286] Watson, additionally, applauded Jefferson's decision to free his slaves at the end of his life, noting that other southern slaveholders such as George Washington and James Madison had done the same thing.[287] However, this analysis contradicted Watson's belief that black people needed slavery in order to make any progress as a race, which he addressed numerous times throughout *Thomas Jefferson* and in his next book, *Bethany*.

Watson's belief that slavery benefitted blacks, unsurprisingly, often appeared alongside his other arguments defending the South and slavery. Reminding readers that other regions experimented with slavery or benefitted from the economic system became one of Watson's go-to arguments. Amidst his praise for Jefferson's proposal to abolish slavery, Watson, for example, also reminded readers that the South did not invent slavery: "To judge a slave owner of the South, you must put yourself in his place. He had not originated slavery. He had not embarked

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[285] Ibid., 501.
[286] Ibid., 181. Watson praised Jefferson for predicting that slavery would become increasingly dangerous to abolish, and that it would threaten the future of the United States if left unchecked. Writing in 1903, nearly four decades after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, Watson had first-hand experience with how destructive abolition would be for the United States. For another example of Watson praising Jefferson as an abolitionist, see his description of Jefferson's efforts to reform state religion, taxes, education, and slavery. Ibid., 338.
[287] Ibid., 68-70.

on the slave trade…. Virginia was the first civilized country to denounce it...but the whole world was committed to the system, and Virginia was powerless to stem such a tide."[288] Watson's efforts to deflect blame away from white southerners remained a key characteristic of these American histories. Consequently, Watson almost never discussed how slavery benefitted white southerners. Instead, he focused on the tragedy the institution eventually brought to the South. Bleak predictions of what the region's future would look like without slavery, likewise, make numerous appearances in these histories.

Although Watson admired Jefferson's foresight concerning the problems slavery would cause in the future, he undercut this praise with a lengthy series of rhetorical questions concerning the ruinous consequences of Emancipation. Watson's first-hand experience during the Civil War and Reconstruction influenced his predictions about the future of race relations in the South, although many eighteenth century southerners shared these concerns as well. In his signature style of dramatic, racially intolerant fear-baiting, Watson wrote:

> How would the entire industrial system be affected by so great a shock? What would be the results of immediate, unconditional freedom on the negro himself? Would he become the industrious, law-abiding laborer; or would he prove a curse to himself and his old masters by sinking into idleness, vice, crime, vagaboundage? Should the free negro be allowed to vote? If so, upon what terms? Should the ignorant, semi-savage from the coast of Africa, where voodooism and cannibalism were rife, be given the same political rights as George Washington? Should a jabbering barbarian who had just been laboriously taught to hoe tobacco and who profoundly believes in the power of the conjure bag be permitted to go to the polls and kill the ballot of James Madison? Supposed such privileges were granted to the free negroes, how would the civilization of the white race be affected—that civilization which was the result of a thousand years of intelligent effort?[289]

Aside from revisiting these negative and extremely racist stereotypes about black people, this passage warrants careful attention because of Watson's reference to black voting rights.

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[288] Ibid., 68.
[289] Ibid., 66-7.

Although he had at one time claimed that any "real" white supremacist would not fear black dominance because whites were superior, Watson's fortitude appears to have slipped, as he now begins to question the legitimacy of black votes and their threat to white society. Although we know Watson privately confessed his doubts about black suffrage as early as 1902, this passage appears to be the first time Watson questioned black suffrage in a publicly available print resource.

Expanding on his defense of the South and slavery, Watson followed this series of rhetorical questions with the reminder that northerners had, at one time, also enslaved blacks and Native Americans, only abandoning the experiment after realizing it would not be a profitable system.[290] Watson alleged that only after realizing that slavery could not work in their region did northerners begin to express sympathy for the enslaved: "It was not till her failure had become... evident...that the bowels of the Puritan began to compassionate the unfortunate African—who, in literal fact, was vastly better off in Virginia than he had ever been in heathen, slavery-cursed, man-eating Africa."[291] Watson's insistence that black people were "better off" enslaved certainly stands out in this passage, as it dramatically enforced his belief in black inferiority. This selection, additionally, also contained Watson's first reference to slavery as a "curse." Although he does not expand on this characterization until his next book, this reference to a curse appears to be the only negative thing Watson would say about slavery in any of his histories. On all other occasions, Watson defended the institution and insisted that it benefited blacks far more than it ever benefited whites.

Watson's insistence that slavery benefitted blacks made another appearance in his discussion of the Navigation Acts and their effect on the American colonies. Although he

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[290] Ibid., 68.
[291] Ibid.

typically disliked New Englanders for their self-righteous attitudes towards the South, his description of the Navigation Acts highlighted the injustices suffered by northern merchants. Curiously, Watson also used this opportunity to write a glowing defense of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the New Englanders who participated in it:

> In God's own mysterious way, these Yankee smugglers were doing great work…[T]hey were lifting the savage black from his environment of slavery, voodooism, and cannibalism, to put him in a state of bondage tempered by humanity—putting him where he might some day step within the radiant gates of civilization bearing within him the new heart of a Christian. Let no passionate lover of the black race revile with reckless vehemence those smugglers, who...swapped molasses for negroes. The profits of the white traders were but small and perishable; the benefits to the uncouth, jabbering, and primitively savage negro were as large as the opportunities of civilization, and as permanent as the Christian's reward in time and eternity.[292]

In this selection, reminiscent of his French histories, Watson connected white supremacy to Christianity and contrasted this characterization with savagery and religious inferiority of black people. Rather than blame England or the North for their contributions to establishing slavery in the American colonies, he, curiously, defended New England's role in transporting slaves to the Americas. According to Watson, because the slave trade exposed black people to the allegedly "civilizing" effects of Christianity, these traders should be praised for their evangelization efforts, instead of condemned for wealth they accumulated on trading slaves. A similar defense of the slave trade will be taken up again in *Andrew Jackson*. Watson, additionally, wrote both of his subsequent histories within the same spirit of southern apologetics. However, in terms of racial intolerance and especially anti-black prejudice, Watson's next book, *Bethany*, contained some of his most bitterly racist writings. Although they do not eclipse the intolerance expressed in *Thomas Jefferson*, Watson fully unleashed his bigotry in his 1904 novel about the experience of white southerners during the Civil War.

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[292] Ibid., 94-5.

5.2 *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*

In 1904, one year after *Thomas Jefferson*, Watson made his first and only attempt at novel writing. Watson's *Bethany* presented a fictionalized version of the antebellum South rather than a 'scholarly' history of the region.[293] Given Watson's professed mission to rehabilitate the South's reputation and end sectional prejudices, he likely made this stylistic choice to better capture the emotional effects of the war, explaining why white southerners feared the possibility of abolition and how white southerners grieved over the death of Confederate soldiers. By focusing on the tragic experience of white southerners, Watson likely aimed to make white northerners more sympathetic towards their southern counterparts, helping them understand that the South also suffered during the war and felt their cause was justified. Characters and conflicts in this novel, as Woodward identified, also had an autobiographical component to them, as Watson essentially turned his relatives into the characters of this fictionalized story of the Civil War.[294]

Apart from the emotional and autobiographical components that influenced Watson's decision to write a novel instead of a history, plantation tradition novels in the United States had also enjoyed enormous popular success at the turn of the century, which might have contributed to Watson's interest. Jennifer Rae Greeson noted this phenomenon in her study of the South in American literature, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (2010). Discussing American literature published between 1898 and 1905, Greeson explained that

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[293] Social histories, which is likely the methodological approach Watson would have used for this type of scholarly history, would not come into fashion as a methodology until around the 1950s. This detail, to some extent, makes Watson's decision to write a novel to capture the experience of white southerners during the Civil War more justifiable, since this approach to history was next to non-existent at this time.

[294] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 353.

southerners "were refighting the Civil War on a cultural front" through the medium of popular novels sympathetic to wartime hardships experienced by white southerners and romanticizing the tranquility of plantation life. Greeson's explanation for why the plantation genre boomed at the turn of the twentieth century seems especially relevant to this examination of *Bethany* within the context of Tom Watson's political career:

> Retelling the Reconstruction South in this form, a generation after the end of Reconstruction itself, became a way of gauging, explaining, and historicizing the dominant national stance on race that had emerged at the end of the century—the increasingly hegemonic belief that the United States was, explicitly, a 'white man's nation.'[295]

Greeson's belief that the plantation novel attracted southern apologists who desired sectional reconciliation and the return of white supremacy in the South contextualized Watson's interest in novel writing. Additionally, Watson's approach to race in this novel, his portrayals of white supremacy and black inferiority, combined with the fact that he publicly supported black disenfranchisement two months before *Bethany*'s publication all seem to further confirm the validity of Greeson's analysis.

Structurally, Watson divided his novel into two parts. Part one, "Before the Clash of Arms," focused on the years 1856 to 1861 and spanned five chapters. This portion of the novel introduces the novel's setting and main characters while also outlining the sectional discourse leading up to the Civil War. The story took place in a small town in Georgia called Bethany, and primarily focused on the lives of the Horton family, modestly wealthy white slaveholders whose plantation was located just outside of town. The novel's narrator was the Horton family's young son, who remains unnamed throughout the story. Watson seemed to identify strongly with his

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[295] Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 277; 273.

narrator, as he also grew up on a plantation and experienced the Civil War and its aftermath during his childhood. Similarly, other characters in the novel, such as Grandfather Horton or the narrator's Uncle Ralph, were based on Watson's own grandfather and uncles. Fictionalized version of real southern politicians, such as Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens, also appear in this novel, often serving as a mouthpiece to Watson's own ideas about the South, the Civil War, and slavery.[296]

In part two, "A Cherokee Rose," Watson stepped away from the antebellum South's history to present a romance story set against the Civil War's destruction in the South. The romance involved the narrator's Uncle Ralph and Nellie, a beautiful young white woman from Bethany. This part of the story, in particular, provided an in-depth examination of how Watson understood race and gender, which will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Six. This chapter remains focused on how Watson discussed race in his American histories.

In the dedication and preface to *Bethany*, Watson introduced the novel as an unapologetic defense of the South, explaining that he wrote the novel to end sectional prejudice and show northerners that the southerners also suffered during the Civil War. Denouncing how white southerners had been maligned by northerners in Civil War histories, Watson further explained that the lack of understanding between the two sections would hinder the nation's future success, although he did not define what this success looked like. [297] Although this claim should not be

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[296] Watson's own feelings about the Civil War are presented through *Bethany*'s characters, who he often depicted as distinguished, educated, and likeable people. Watson, in other words, distances himself from his own ideas by putting his words in the mouths of these fictional characters.

[297] Watson did not specify whether he meant to defend white southerners and their role in the Civil War, however, he appeared to target this demographic, since the novel specifically defended the actions and accounted for the sufferings of white southerners. Any time Watson used the terms "the South" and "southerner," the context of these terms imply that he meant "the white South" or "white southerner."

overstated, the preface appeared to invoke historians such as John W. Burgess, who insisted that the South accept blame for causing the war in his preface to *The Middle Period*. Watson wrote:

> When it shall have gradually dawned upon all Northern writers that the Southern States in 1860 did no more than exercise a right which had been almost universally conceded from the founding of the Government…then, perhaps, we shall have historical literature which does not stigmatize us as rebels or our leaders as traitors. Not till that time comes will there be a complete reconciliation which should be the supreme desire of all patriots.[298]

With all his talk about revising history and revealing the truth to his northern readership, Watson also made a few very strange stylistic choices in *Bethany*'s preface. Significantly less academically oriented than the preface for *Thomas Jefferson*, Watson began the novel by admitting that he invented all the dialogue for the historical figures in *Bethany*, which undermined the legitimacy of the ideas presented in his narrative. Watson, additionally, followed this confession with a number of confusing, seemingly unrelated paragraphs that might have been more appropriate as footnotes. Thus, Woodward's complaints about the novel being a poorly constructed "hodge-podge" of history, politics, and fictitious romance do not seem unwarranted.

Because the narrative centered around the Horton family and their plantation, Watson spent several pages romanticizing slave labor and the plantation. In this novel, and elsewhere in his histories, Watson described the plantation as utopian for both whites and blacks. Speaking through the medium of the narrator, who was supposedly an adult male reflecting on his plantation childhood, Watson allowed his own childhood experience color his description of the plantation and slave labor. In a highly romantic and nostalgic description of plantation life, Watson wrote:

> As I look back to it now, it seems to me that my grandfather's farm must have belonged to another world, so complete have been the changes wrought by two generations…

[298] Watson, *Bethany*, xi.

> Everything was regular, everything was systematic. A man of settled, thrifty habits, my grandfather had drilled his slaves to his orderly methods, and thus the old routine went on from year to year. The same slaves alloted to the same tasks, working the same fields with the same tools, raising the same crops in the same way, with never a material change from year to year, naturally gave the plantation the character of a vast machine, well oiled, well managed, and doing its work without noise or friction—unhastening yet unresting, like some steady law of nature.[299]

Watson's description of the Horton family's slaves likened them to farm animals and non-sentient machine parts, implying servitude and slavery was a natural state for blacks.

Further romanticizing slave labor, Watson wrote: "That old Southern homestead was a little kingdom, a complete social and industrial organism, almost wholly sufficient until itself, asking less of the outer world than it gave. How sound, sane, healthy it appears, even now, when compared to certain phases of certain other systems!"[300] Consistent with Watson's other characterizations of blacks in idyllic slavery, the narrator reminisced about the family's slaves, explaining that his family took excellent care of their slaves and that helped raised him as a child.[301] The narrator, fondly recalling his family's slaves, remembered: "Among our negroes there were, so far as I can recall, none who were devils and none who were seraphs. They were just plain niggers, wonderfully and fearfully made, out of materials partly good and bad."[302] Although this information countered the previously-used metaphor likening slaves to parts in a machine, both references underscored the utopian divisions where blacks were subordinate to their superior white masters.

Watson penned yet another series of rhetorical questions about the benefits of slavery, reminiscent of those that appeared in *Thomas Jefferson*. The sheer length of these passages, and

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[299] Ibid., 10-11.
[300] Ibid., 12. Implicitly, Watson compared the southern plantation system to the northern industrial system, implying that the South's economic system was superior to the North's.
[301] Ibid., 12-3.
[302] Ibid., 14-5.

the fact Watson dedicated so much space in his publications to ask such questions, points to an intense preoccupation with black status in the South's racial hierarchy:

> What laborer suffered hunger or cold? What slave was neglected when sick, and turned out to perish in old age? Each cabin had its garden and its poultry; and the orchard and the melon-patch were shared by everyone on the place….How many negroes fare better now? They wore home-made cotton clothes in summer, and all-wool jeans in winter, with wool hats and thick-soled leather shoes. How many of them dress more comfortably now? The children —were they ever put to work when they were mere infants, as is done with so many white children to-day in the great cities of our Christian land?[303]

Among these many defenses of slavery, Watson cited the material wealth of slaves in comparison to the white poverty and child abuse in the industrial North. Notably, Watson never conceded, in any of his histories, that blacks might have desired more than simply material possessions, or that they even deserved to have more than their physical needs met.

While the majority of his slavery references allowed Watson to defend southern slavery, he also described slavery as a 'curse' to white southerners. He presented this idea in a conversation between a Nellie, a young woman and the romantic interest in the novel, and a likable, young preacher named Ruel Wade. As Nellie and Ruel entertain one another in private after-dinner conversation in her family's home, the subject turns to slavery, and Ruel explained to Nellie that he believed slavery had cursed white southerners and only actually benefitted black people:

> After a silence in which [Ruel] seemed to be considering whether he should speak his inward thoughts, he said, 'The truth is that slavery is a curse to everybody except the negro.''Except the negro?' 'Yes, except the negro. We Southern people took a naked black cannibal and made a human being out of him; but in the process, in the contact, we ourselves have become morally and mentally lowered. Even our educated men talk a mixed nigger dialect; and our children are mentally corrupted by their nigger nurses and nigger playmates.'[304]

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[303] Ibid., 12-3.
[304] Ibid., 234-5.

Although Watson distanced himself from these ideas using Ruel as a mouthpiece, the belief that black had cursed white southerners seems very likely to represent Watson's actual beliefs, especially since once publicly accused blacks of ruining his political career.[305]

Discussing slavery through distinguished characters in this novel seems to have been a popular choice for Watson, as many of his references to slavery appeared in a fictitious conversation between politicians Alexander Stephens and Robert Toombs. According to Watson, Stephens and Toombs explored the 'real' cause of the Civil War, insisting that the South did not secede because of slavery.[306] In a conversation between Toombs and the Horton family's dinner guest, Colonel Nat Crawley, a white southerner, Watson explained why the South went to war:

> 'And there is something worse even than civil war,' exclaimed Toombs hotly, 'and that is loss of honor, loss of liberty, loss of self-respect, loss of sacred rights....''Can we afford to go to war to keep the niggers in slavery?' asked Colonel Crawley. Toombs whirled on him like a flash...as he replied: 'Fight for the niggers? Who the hell would fight for the [damned] niggers? Southern men did not invent slavery; Southern men did not darken the ocean with slave-ships as Rhode Island and Massachusetts did; Southern men have led every movement which looked toward some plan of emancipation which would be safe for the whites and best for the blacks….'[307]

The North's culpability with establishing slavery resembled Watson's mentions of northern culpability in *Thomas Jefferson*. In this discussion, however, Watson chose not to praise New England slave traders for their role in enslaving blacks. He did, however, suggest once again that

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[305] Watson described blacks as the "'nemesis'" of his political career. See Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 220.

[306] Most northern historians in the first three decades after the Civil War described the South's interest in protecting slavery as the main reason they seceded from the Union. For a typical example of how northern historians interpreted the Civil War, see Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, 3 vols. **(**Boston: J.R. Osgood, 1872-1877) and John Stevens Cabot Abbot, *The History of the Civil War in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Henry Bill, 1862- 1867).

[307] Watson, *Bethany*, 45-6.

black people benefitted from slavery, and that most white laborers had a more difficult existence than slaves.[308]

Reminiscent of the rhetorical questions denouncing emancipation in *Thomas Jefferson*, white characters in *Bethany* frequently made ominous predictions about the future state of race relations should the South lose the war. Once again, these predictions seem informed by Watson's own anxieties about blacks in 1904. In a lengthy and fabricated speech Watson wrote for his Robert Toombs character, Watson made one of his most interesting comments about racial equality. Toombs, gathered at a political picnic held by Bethany's townspeople, spoke to the cheering crowd about the South's right to protect itself from northern interference. However, when Toombs began predicting the South's future should the North have its way, the crowd fell silent.[309]

Amidst these ominous predictions about future race relations, Toombs, notably, denounced anyone who believed elevating blacks to political equality, but not social equality, which Watson had done during his populist campaigns over a decade earlier:

> 'If the fanatics of New England can emancipate the negro, what else will they do for him?...Will they give him the ballot? Will they try to legislate him into equality with you? Will they try to force you to open your dwellings to him, your public offices to him, your schools and your jury-boxes to him? Even now Judge William Jay, of New York, a son of the famous John Jay…has published a statement that the purpose of the abolition movement is not only to free the nigger, but to elevate him to civil and political equality with the whites. And where is the idiot who doesn't know that if you give the nigger civil and political equality you can not deny social equality? Do you want social equality in the South?' This time there were no hand-claps, no yells—only a silence of intense feeling. Like a clarion, the voice of Toombs rang out in the stillness: 'Social equality? Yes, and there's a deeper hell than even that into which these madmen would plunge us! It is miscegenation!'[310]

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[308] Watson suggested that white laborers had a harder existence than slaves because the master provided their slaves with food, shelter, and protection, unlike a white laborer, who employer provided them with a wage and nothing else. Watson, *Bethany*, 45-7.
[309] Ibid., 73.
[310] Ibid., 72-3.

Watson's version of Robert Toombs was a person worthy of respect and admiration, whose pro-secession orations have been maligned by northerners and southerners alike.[311] Thus, Watson using this character to denounce these critics of black equality indicates some level of self-criticism and a retreat from Watson's racial integration efforts during the populist campaigns of the early to mid-1890s. Watson more or less issued an ultimatum denouncing anyone who believed whites and blacks could peacefully coexist with any semblance of equality.

Ominous predictions about the future of southern race relations appeared with some frequency throughout the remainder of the novel. Almost always, these predictions described a free black population as a plague on white southerners. Robert Toombs, in the same speech denouncing black equality, likened black suffrage to an armed attack on white civilization. Predicting that the North would attempt to abolish slavery, Toombs stated: "The black passions which drive [the North]...will hurry them on to arm three million savages with the power of the ballot."[312] Elsewhere, in another lengthy series of rhetorical questions denouncing the North's interference in the southern economy, Watson equated the end of black slavery to the end of white freedom. Questioning the motives of abolitionists, Watson stated: "in their blind methods of striking the shackles off the slave [did abolitionists realize that] they would rivet the chains upon unborn millions of the white race [?]"[313] Although these quotes certainly expressed a high degree of racial intolerance, other selections in *Bethany* openly advocated for white racial

[311] For an example of Watson's defense of Toombs and his character, see ibid., 51-3.
[312] Ibid., 74.
[313] Ibid., 106.

violence against blacks as the appropriate response to a South where slavery no longer ensured white freedom by keeping the black population in a constant state of oppression.[314]

The most notable predictions of inevitable racial violence after the end of slavery took place in a conversation between the novel's hero, Uncle Ralph, and his Colonel in the Confederate army. In a fireside conversation at the Confederate barracks, Ralph predicted the outcome of the South losing the war: "'The negroes would be unbearable. When the old set dies off, and the new generations come on, the South would never know another day of safety or peace. Rather than submit to Northern tyranny and negro equality, I believe I would choose to die, musket in hand.'"[315] In the same conversation, Ralph's Colonel, often a voice of maturity and reason, echoed and expanded on Ralph's prediction, suggesting that only racial violence would maintain order and protect white southerners. Touching on Watson's earlier references to black slavery cursing white civilization, the Colonel stated:

> '...I wish I could see things differently, but I can't. Hell might have jubilated on the day when that Dutch vessel unloaded the first cargo of niggers at Jamestown. They have cursed the South: they will yet curse the North. It will take all the sustaining, coercive and propelling power of the white race to keep the blacks of this country from going back, as they have done in Hayti, to barbarism, to serpent worship, to human sacrifice, to cannibalism—under the despotic sway of the Voodoo drum!'

Ralph and the Colonel's concerns about an inevitable race war and the need for racial violence should the South lose closely resembled the core ideas of the southern Radicals, who Watson unofficially joined after 1904. In the same manner, he used Robert Toombs and Ruel Wade, Watson used Uncle Ralph and the Colonel, men with respected reputations and personal experience with the war, as a vessel for his own political ideas and prejudices.

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[314] This was a common view among Southern whites in the postwar South. Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman*, for example, also promoted racial violence against blacks as a means to protect southern whites. See *Thomas Dixon Jr.*, *The Clansmen: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, illustrated by Arthur L. Keller (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905).
[315] Ibid., 290.

Compared to *Thomas Jefferson*, published only a year before *Bethany*, references to race in *Bethany* point to an increase in Watson's intolerance somewhere between 1903 and 1904.[316] Given Watson's public support for black disenfranchisement the same year as *Bethany*, this detail should not come as a surprise. Comments on race in *Bethany* likewise suggest that in 1904, Watson felt intense anxiety about blacks and their social and political status in the South, as Watson frequently romanticized antebellum race relations and made ominous predictions about race relations and white freedom without slavery. *Bethany*, to some extent, served as a manifesto for Watson's newfound affiliation with the violently anti-black Radicals such as Thomas Hardwick and Hoke Smith, as he frequently expressed their ideas and supported them through his choice of characters and storytelling.

5.3 *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson*

While many readers familiar with the scope of Tom Watson's career might assume that his intolerance would only increase in his next American history, surprisingly, this is not the case. *Andrew Jackson*, one could argue, offered more progressive racial ideas than any of Watson's earlier histories.[317] Although he still utilized many stereotypically negative stereotypes about black people and Native Americans, Watson mentioned slavery and black inferiority

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[316] These racial tensions would continue to increase after 1904, embodied by Hoke Smith's election as Georgia's Governor and the 1906 Atlanta riot. A deadly race riot and a coup d'etat led by white supremacists in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898 also point to an increased racial tension in the turn of the century South.

[317] Another biography of Jackson, published the year before Watson's *Andrew Jackson*, provided important context Watson's comments on Native Americans in his Andrew Jackson biography. History professor John Spencer Bassett published a multi-volume biography of Jackson titled *The Life of Andrew Jackson* in 1911. Bassett was a North Carolinian who, in 1903, famously condemned the racism of white southerners and publicly named Booker T. Washington as one of the greatest southerners of all time. In spite of his reputation for relatively progressive racial ideas, Bassett's references to Native Americans in his biography of Jackson appeared significantly more derogatory than Watson's comments on Native Americans. See John Spencer Bassett's *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1911).

significantly less in *Andrew Jackson* compared to his first two American histories. By 1912, Georgia's black population had been disenfranchised for six years. Watson was, perhaps, satisfied that blacks no longer posed a major threat to southern whites or their elections, and no longer felt the need to include frequent derogatory comments about black people.

Watson's primary focus when it came to race and race relations in *Andrew Jackson* concerned how Native Americans and white Americans interacted during Andrew Jackson's lifetime. While still utilizing negative stereotypes about Native Americans, Watson also made a number of surprisingly progressive comments about Native Americans in this biography. The very public embarrassments of 1910 might have pressured Watson to reassert himself as a respectable and progressive scholar, one who could write about the injustices Native Americans had suffered at the hands of their white neighbors during Andrew Jackson's lifetime.[318]

As Woodward observed in *Agrarian Rebel*, Watson's *Andrew Jackson* closely resembled his Thomas Jefferson biography. In both books, Watson failed to provide good scholarship and writing. Although he conceded that Watson analyzed Jackson with "surprising candor," unsparingly outlining Jackson's faults and failings, Woodward ultimately gave *Andrew Jackson* extremely poor marks. In the case of *Andrew Jackson* as well as Watson's other American histories, Woodward's criticisms of the book's overall quality was very accurate.[319]

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[318] Andrew Jackson lived between 1767-1845. The public humiliation Watson suffered in 1896 with the loss of the Populist campaign and his more progressive comments about black reformers and French abolitionists in *The Story of France* and *Napoleon* in some ways parallel the events of 1910 and the racial ideas presented in *Andrew Jackson*. However, this parallel should not be overstated, as it introduces the difficult question of why Watson's histories in 1903 and 1904 had so little room for racial tolerance.

[319] There is some discrepancy between the year Woodward claimed that Tom Watson published *Andrew Jackson* and the year it appears to have actually been published. Woodward noted that Watson had circulated *Jackson* in serial form in his newspapers as early as 1906, eventually publishing the biography in 1911. However, the copyright in the frontmatter of this biography states 1912 as the publication year, as does the date Watson listed on the book's preface, August 12, 1912. See Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 352.

In the same revisionist spirit used in *Napoleon* and *Thomas Jefferson*, Watson began his *Andrew Jackson* stating that all previous biographies of Jackson had been unfair. Watson wrote: "It had always been my impression that the biographies of Andrew Jackson are either too eulogistic or too defamatory."[320] As suggested by Woodward, *Andrew Jackson* closely resembles *Thomas Jefferson* in terms of its content and its style. Watson's narrative once again followed a chronological timeline that he occasionally interrupted with a thematic chapter. *Andrew Jackson appears* slightly more sophisticated than his Jefferson biography, as Watson more frequently cited his sources, either in text or at the bottom of the page. However, spelling errors and chapter-long quotations from other sources dramatically undercut any sense of academic refinement Watson might have otherwise achieved in this biography.

Although *Andrew Jackson* contained some of his most progressive ideas about blacks and Native Americans, Watson's first reference to race in this biography suggests intolerance towards immigrant groups. On the first page of the first chapter, Watson discussed the nationality of Jackson's parent, stating: "His parents were immigrants from the northern part of Ireland...where there is an intermixture of Scotch blood; but there seems no positive proof that the Jacksons belonged to the over-worked family of Scotch-Irish."[321] Why Watson cast doubt on Jackson's Scotch-Irish heritage remains unclear, however, this negative characterization of the Scotch-Irish as "over-worked" suggests that Watson harbored some prejudice against this immigrant group, in spite of their lighter skin and western European origin.[322] Anti-Irish

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[320] Watson, *Andrew Jackson*, n.p.

[321] Ibid., 9. This negative reference to the Scots-Irish in *Andrew Jackson* seems representative of Watson's implied belief in scientific racism, and in the connection between skin color as well as the economic and religious distinctions that distinguished a group as "advanced."

[322] Scholars of Jackson have confirmed his Scots-Irish heritage, and many view it as a vital component of his personality and behavior. See, for example, H.W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006). Watson's opposition to the Scotch-Irish might be related to his anti-Catholic as well as his anti-Immigrant views.

prejudice and nativism in the United States had existed since the mid-nineteenth century when a large number of Irish came to the United States during the potato famines in the 1840s. That Watson also harbored a similar prejudice towards the Scots-Irish seems plausible, since later on in *Andrew Jackson* Watson explicitly stated his hatred of immigrants: "We have become the world's melting pot. The scum of creation has been dumped upon us."[323] Although Watson could not completely disassociate Jackson from his immigrant parents, it seems that he at least tried to shield his hero from any affiliation with an "over-worked" and inferior group of whites.

In a similar vein to these nativist prejudices, Watson returned to his stereotypically negative comments about blacks and to his defense of slavery in *Andrew Jackson*. In this study, however, Watson's anti-black prejudices and defenses of slavery appear more subtle, woven into the narrative instead of presented in a lengthy series of dramatic rhetorical questions, as he had done in *Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany*. Watson, for example, focused heavily on discussing Jackson's career as a slave trader, heartily defending the legitimacy of this occupation and denouncing other biographers for attempting to downplay or ignore this aspect of Jackson's life.[324] His description of Jackson's slave-trading activities, additionally, indicate that Watson felt pride in revising this part of Jackson's history and in rehabilitating the public image of slave trading:[325]

> In political campaigns it was natural that, in the North, the partisans of Old Hickory should vehemently deny that he had ever been a negro trader; but in the days of Andrew Jackson the business men of the South thought no more of buying and selling negroes

[323] Watson, *Andrew Jackson*, 346.
[324] Ibid., 62.
[325] Abolitionists in the antebellum United States frequently depicted the brutality of the slave trade, and denounced slave traders for inhumane treatment of their human cargo and for profitting off of human suffering. Here, Watson countered this negative reputation of slave traders, explaining that many respected southern white men like George Washington participated in the slave trade. For more on the history of the slave trade and on slavery in the United States, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Bress, Harvard University Press, 1998).

> than they did of buying and selling any other merchantable commodity. The business instinct was strong in Andrew Jackson, as it was in George Washington...[326]

Notably, Watson made no mention of the "benefits" slavery had for black people in this selection, or any of his other typical comments denouncing black people. Rather, he appeared more interested in defending Jackson's reputation as a slave trader and explaining that respectable white southerners often dealt in slave trading and speculation. Watson's silence on the benefits of slavery and his decision not to pepper in anti-black propaganda indicated that he felt less anxiety about blacks or their status in southern society when he published *Andrew Jackson* in 1912.[327] Presumably, because Georgia's black population had been disenfranchised since 1906, Watson no longer viewed blacks as a threat to white safety or political freedom, which caused Watson to focus less on black inferiority in this Andrew Jackson biography.

Further evidence of Watson's decreased anxiety about blacks appeared in his description of a free black population (see footnote) living in Spanish Florida.[328] Watson, interestingly, discussed this free black community with an uncharacteristic amount of respect, observing that this black population thrived without white interference or oversight, and denouncing the white

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[326] Ibid., 46.

[327] It is possible that what is being perceived as Watson's harboring less anxiety over the status of black might also be a reflection of the rise in racial segregation, which likely reassured Watson that blacks were inferior to whites and were barred from interfering in the progress of "white civilization."

[328] This free black population in Spanish controlled Florida, sometimes referred to as Black Seminoles or Maroons, had lived in this territory throughout the eighteenth century up until the late 1850s, when the United States relocated the Maroons and many of the Seminole to the Oklahoma territory. Watson incorrectly described this population as "black" when they are more correctly described as a biracial black and Seminole population. Between 1817 and 1858, a series of three wars, known as the Seminole Wars, took place between the Florida Seminoles and the United States. In this account, Watson is describing Andrew Jackson's involvement in the First Seminole War (1817-1818). For more on the Maroons, see Nubia Kai, "Black Seminoles: The Maroons of Florida," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 8:2, 146-157, DOI: 10.1080/17528631.2015.1027331.

Americans who attacked these free blacks.[329] According to Watson, this free black population, also called "Maroons," successfully farmed the land stretching along the Apalachicola River in Spanish-controlled Florida territory. The material success this population achieved through farming, however, made it a popular target for the jealous white Georgians that lived nearby.[330] These white farmers wanted the fertile lands the Maroons occupied, and also suspected that this free black community had become safe haven for escaped slaves. Andrew Jackson, likewise, viewed the lands and the fort maintained by free blacks as an inevitable hotspot of criminal activity, eventually ordering his forces to attack the fort. In 1818, Jackson and his men would kill nearly three hundred of the free blacks that occupied the fort.[331]

Although Watson's description of the black Maroons and their defeat in 1818 does not suggest extremely high levels of sympathy, especially compared to how he described Native Americans elsewhere in this biography, he readily questioned the morality of Jackson's attack: "The Negro fort was on Spanish territory, sixty miles from the Georgia line,—what right did the Americans have to attack it?"[332] Unlike almost every other account of free blacks in any of his histories, Watson acknowledged the material success of this free black population and

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[329] Elsewhere in his first two American histories, *Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany*, Watson frequently alleged that free blacks living without slavery or white oversight would regress into a state of "savagery." Here, he made no such allegation, recognizing that this black population saw material success farming and living completely independent of whites.

[330] Watson noted that a band of these white farmers from Georgia, who he denounced as "white marauders," attacked a Seminole settlement in 1812. Watson, *Andrew Jackson*, 232.

[331] Ibid., 234-5. Watson explained that this fort, occupied by the Maroons and the Seminoles, was built by the British in 1814. Watson also acknowledged that Andrew Jackson wrote a letter to American General Edmund Gaines in 1816, explaining his suspicions of the fort and its ability to harbor fugitive slaves. In 1817, Gaines sent additional American troops to aid Jackson's attack on the "negro fort." For more on Watson's account of the Maroons and the First Seminole War, see Watson, *Andrew Jackson*, 232-47.

[332] Ibid., 234. Watson, notably, was also an outspoken anti-imperialist. His opposition to Americans attacking the Maroons and the Seminoles during the Seminole Wars, therefore, might be reflective of his anti-imperialist views. See Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 335 for more of Watson's opposition to imperialism.

denounced the whites that attacked them for their petty jealousy. Watson's sympathy for the Maroons perhaps stemmed from the fact that they did not live in American territory and had fully segregated themselves from any white neighbors. Notably, in his description of the Maroons, Watson also made no references to black savagery or cultural inferiority, as he had done in almost every other description of free blacks. This selection, at the very least, indicated that Watson's view of free blacks had changed, as he now acknowledged that a segregated black population who did not interfere with "white civilization" could also succeed and even thrive on its own away from whites.

Watson's more tolerant attitude towards black people in this biography pales in comparison to how he discussed Native Americans. While some derogatory references to Native Americans appeared in this biography, such as Watson's allegation that Native Americans were lazy, most of his references to this group read as sympathetic and even celebratory.[333] As he examined Andrew Jackson's involvement in the Indian War against the Creeks, which took place between 1813 and 1814, Watson gave a strikingly compassionate description of the Creeks and their food insecurity during this conflict:

> Poor creatures! What chance did they have to win the fight and keep their homes? None at all. Few of them had guns; even these were inferior; their supply of powder and balls was scant; they had no commissary; they were divided among themselves; three armies of the whites were about to take the field against them; each of these three [white] armies was larger than any force which they could bring together; their own plans were being betrayed by their own brethren; and when they marched to battle they were met in the death-struggle by half their own tribe and by heavy contingents from the Choctaws and Cherokees. It was pitiful.[334]

Watson continued this sympathetic analysis on the pages that followed this selection, readily admitting that white people wrongly started this conflict: "As we were the invaders, and are now

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[333] Ibid., 131.
[334] Ibid., 153.

in peaceable possession [of Creek lands], we might afford to be honest enough to admit that we ourselves provoked the Indian wars." Following this observation, however, Watson implied the whites settlers were more deserving of this land, stating: "Whether the end justified the means is another question."[335] Although this observation undercuts Watson's comments on the injustice the Creeks suffered at the hands of whites, Watson's sympathy for the Creeks' suffering is a marked difference from how he referenced Native Americans elsewhere in his histories.

In Watson's assessment of the Creeks during the Indian Wars, he described them as very similar to the white settlers that lived nearby. Watson observed that many of the Creeks owned slaves and ran prosperous farms, a detail which might explain some of his respect for this particular Native American tribe. After going into great detail about Creek's crops and houses, Watson carefully described the Creek's adoption of many 'white' commercial activities, including enslaving blacks:

> In farming and in the simpler forms of manufacturing, the red people had shown a readiness to learn. In a general way, it may be stated that the Creek Nation which Jackson invaded and destroyed, was not a nest of sanguinary savages, but was a settled community, well ordered in many respects, governed by fixed customs which revealed fairly correct ideals of public and private morality,—sustaining itself in a legitimate manner by agricultural pursuits and by hunting on its own land. Many of the Creeks lived in good houses, owned superb farms, and had negro slaves.[336]

Following this celebratory account of the Creeks, Watson explained that Jackson's attacking forces outnumbered them two to one, and "mowed down the Indians with sickening thoroughness."[337] Although these examples do not suggest that Watson had elevated these Native Americans to the same level as whites, these descriptions appear markedly different from any of his previous references to Native Americans, or any non-white race, in his earlier histories.

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[335] Ibid., 154.
[336] Ibid., 164.
[337] Ibid., 165.

This examination of how Tom Watson discussed race in his American histories has uncovered and analyzed many of his most racially-intolerant comments, which likely does not come as a surprise to any reader familiar with his career after 1904. In the preface to his first two American histories, Watson explicitly stated that he would defend and rehabilitate the South's reputation. Watson's defense of the South frequently incorporated derogatory comments about blacks, racial violence, and unapologetic celebration of the South and its white population. These views, however, were typical for white southerners from Watson's lifetime, and anyone familiar with the racial ideology of the former Confederacy should not be surprised by Watson's defense of white southerners or his anti-black comments.[338] Much of the racial sentiment in these histories, in other words, read as par for the course; one expects a white supremacist to make derogatory comments about people of color.

What does come as a surprise in these histories, however, are the numerous occasions that Tom Watson made seemingly progressive comments about race. Although these more progressive statements do not lead one to question Watson's white supremacy, as Watson could and did make positive comments about non-whites and still maintain an unwavering belief in his own racial supremacy, the frequent appearance of racially progressive ideas in *Andrew Jackson* adds more nuance to the timeline of how Watson's racial views and intolerance changed after 1904. Claims of racial progressivism in *Andrew Jackson* should, additionally, not be overstated based on the evidence provided in this chapter, as many of these examples highlight the absence

[338] For more on the racial ideology of the Confederacy, see Alexander Stephens' Cornerstone speech. Stephens, a white politician from Georgia, served as the Vice President of the Confederate States of America from 1861 to 1865. The Cornerstone Speech, which he delivered in March 1861, declared that white supremacy and black inferiority were the ideological foundations of the Confederacy. See "Alexander Stephens, Cornerstone Speech, March 21, 1861," in *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Stanley Harrold (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 59-64.

of racist commentary more so than his explicit praise for these groups. However, as the next chapter will show, the way Watson connected race and gender adds an even more striking component to a study of how Tom Watson discussed race in his histories between 1899 and 1912.

CHAPTER 6: "A MANLY MAN:"[339] RACE AND GENDER IN TOM WATSON'S AMERICAN HISTORIES, 1903-1912

In the preliminary stages of this project, an entire chapter examining how Tom Watson discussed race in connection with gender did not seem like a necessity. However, references to race and masculinity in Watson's American histories proved so striking that it became impossible to ignore this evidence, or to only refer to it in passing in the previous two chapters. Likewise, peculiar references to masculinity in literature related to Tom Watson's histories, such as Francis Halsey's March 1904 letter or in John Burgess' preface to *The Middle Period*, deepened the mystery of how race and gender interacted at the turn of the twentieth century. These unusual and recurrent references to manliness and masculinity in literary work penned by three different white American men could not be seen as a mere coincidence; clearly, something significant was going on with race and gender during Tom Watson's lifetime.

Fortunately for the sake of this study, this mysterious connection between masculinity and race at the turn of the century has already been examined by scholars such as Joel Williamson and Gail Bederman.[340] Explaining the unique connection of race and gender during Watson's lifetime, these studies further confirmed that the connection between race and gender in Tom Watson's American histories warranted a closer examination.[341] Although this chapter cannot pretend to fully vet or define the relationship between these two ideas, Watson's references to race in connection with gender provides a small but extremely interesting case

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[339] Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson* (Thomson, GA: Jeffersonian Publishing, 1912), 191.

[340] For further reading on race in connection with gender in the American South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see also Grace Elizabeth Hale's *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1995) and Glenda Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[341] An explanation for why I do not also have a chapter examining race and gender in Watson's French histories appears in Chapter 4 of this study.

study concerning how one white man in Georgia in the early 1900s understood these constructs and allowed them to inform his interpretations of America's past and present.

In hindsight, it now seems obvious that Tom Watson's American histories would so frequently make references to race in connection with gender. Specifically, because Watson's 1904 disenfranchisement campaign against black suffrage—often just described as "black disenfranchisement"—specifically targeted black males. Joel Williamson's profile of southern Radical Rebecca Felton in *The Crucible of Race* helped inform this realization, as he acknowledged the surprising connection between race, gender, and voting rights in turn of the century Georgia. Felton, notably, alleged that racial equality at the polls would convince black men that racial equality applied elsewhere, implicitly permitting black men to pursue sexual relationships with white women. In these terms, Felton tirelessly lobbied for her white male counterparts to protect white women by disenfranchising and lynching black men.[342]

Given this knowledge of why Felton supported disenfranchisement and her friendship with Tom Watson, it is plausible to assume that Watson shared some of Felton's opinions concerning race, gender, and voting rights. Although he presumably supported black disenfranchisement because he no longer wanted fear of black equality to prevent white voters from supporting reforms, Watson's friendship with Rebecca Felton and how he discussed race in connection with gender in these histories indicated that her gendered allegations about black voting might have also motivated his decision to support disenfranchisement.[343]

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[342] Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 124-30. For more on Felton and the feminist movement in the South, see Crystal N. Feimster's *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[343] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 370-2. Aside from her support of lynching and black disenfranchisement, Felton is also remembered for her campaigns to legalize suffrage for white women. It is unclear where Tom Watson landed on this issue, as it is strangely not addressed in *Agrarian Rebel* or in any of his other biographical studies. The Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in the Senate seven months prior to Watson assuming his Senatorial office, so he did not

A relic of the early twentieth-century United States, most of the characters in Watson's American histories were white men. Consequently, and true to Gail Bederman's observation that white middle-class men were obsessed with masculinity, the most striking references to gender in Watson's American histories concern men and masculinity. In all three of his American histories, Watson, a white southern male, had an intense focus on the manliness of the men he admired: specifically, white males from the South. More so than any other demographic in these histories, Watson took special pains to artfully describe the masculinity of southern white males: their speech, their appearance, their mannerisms, and their physique. His descriptions of northern white males, by contrast, almost never highlighted the masculinity of this demographic, and implicitly characterized them as effeminate compared to southern white men.

Although one might expect that all men of color in these histories received extremely poor treatment at the hands of a professed white supremacist, this generalization proves only partly true. Unsurprisingly, since they became the target of his 1904 disenfranchisement campaign, black men received very little praise or recognition in any of his histories—with the single exception of Watson calling black reformer Toussaint L'Ouverture "a great man" in *Napoleon*.[344] In Watson's American histories, more intimately related to Watson's contemporary political situation, his very few mentions of black males almost always specified that black men were inferior to white men. Additionally, Watson's references to black males alleged that black males posed a sexual threat to white women. Implicitly, it seems as if Watson could not

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participate in this vote. Logic points to the belief that Watson certainly had an opinion on legalizing the vote for white women, and probably wrote it down somewhere; however, it seems to have made little impression on his biographers. His references in support of women remaining in the domestic sphere, as examined in the chapter, indicated that he probably was against granting suffrage to white women.

[344] Watson, *Napoleon*, 311.

acknowledge black males' masculinity because this would endanger his belief that only men deserved to have and access positions of power in the United States.

By contrast, however, Native American men received mostly favorable treatment in the two American biographies written by Watson. On more than one occasion, Watson singled out Native American men for their leadership, physique, and masculinity. At the very least, these celebratory descriptions of Native American men served as evidence that Watson could be racially tolerant at times, or at least appear to be. However, this favorable view of Native American men might also indicate that stereotypes of these men did not mark them as a sexual threat to white women, in contrast to how black men were typically considered by whites.

Although Watson mentioned women significantly less frequently than men in his histories, his racial views seem to directly translate to how he viewed women. White women received the best treatment in these histories. Women of color, if mentioned at all, received very little commendation. Watson's understanding of women and femininity seems heavily influenced by a combination of white supremacy and Victorian era gender roles: men, specifically white men, reigned supreme in the public sphere and were seen as providers and protectors. White women, according to Watson's construction, belonged in the domestic sphere, where their more delicate natures were best protected from the corruption of the outside world. Watson, for the most part, measured white women by their ability to meet these standards. He offered one-dimensional profiles of this demographic in these histories, often not mentioning them beyond their relationships with their husbands and their ability to have children. Although he made a few exceptions for women serving as nurses and caregivers during wartime, Watson had a very narrow comprehension about what opportunities white women should have.

References to women of color presented another curiosity in Watson's American histories, as Watson's descriptions do not perfectly align with how he characterized men of color. Watson, for example, made almost no references to Native American women in his histories. This absence strikes one as odd, especially compared to how extensively he praised Native American men and their masculinity. Black women, by contrast, receive slightly more attention from Watson. In *Bethany*, for example, Watson praised one of the Horton family's female slaves named Mandy for her reputation as a virtuous woman.[345] However, this reference to Mandy's unique character also implied that all other black women were less virtuous, an observation that significantly undercuts any sense of progressivism in his praise for Mandy's character.

Watson's descriptions of interracial relationships, like his characterizations of racial and sexual demographics, similarly conformed to a patriarchal white supremacist understanding of American society.[346] Any mention of sexual relationships between white men and black women diminished the significance or even denied the existence of these relationships. By contrast, the mere suggestion of a sexual relationship between a black man and a white woman sent Watson's white characters into a seething uproar. Sexual and racial double standards, in other words, presented themselves throughout Watson's American histories.

While this chapter in many ways aligns with the conclusions of the previous chapter, Watson's characterizations of white, black, and Native American men bring an even more nuanced understanding of how his perspective on race changed during the first decade of the twentieth century. Compared to the other five histories examined in this study, *Bethany*, more so than any of his other histories, emphasizes the supremacy of white southern men, and the

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[345] Watson, *Bethany*, 14-15.
[346] This was a very common view held by men across the United States during this time.

inferiority of all other demographics. In *Thomas Jefferson* and *Andrew Jackson*, however, Watson seems more willing to make relatively progressive concessions about men of color; this observation holds especially true in *Andrew Jackson*, which he published six years after Georgia disenfranchised black males. References to women and descriptions of femininity seem significantly less important to Watson in all of these histories and, consequently, appeared less frequently. However, given Bederman's observation about an obsession with masculinity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it does not come as a surprise that Watson fixated on men in these histories.

6.1 *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson*

Watson's focus on men and masculinity in his early twentieth-century American histories appeared on the opening pages of his first biography, *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson*. In the preface, he described the dilemma of (white) southern males trying to learn about American history from books written by (white) men from the North: "Some northern histories are so offensive to the south that no southern man can read them."[347] Watson, in fact, explained that most of American history was a struggle between white northern men and white southern men to define that history, conceding that the men in the North had been significantly more successful in this respect.[348] Although Watson made no direct references to the skin color of these northern and southern men in the preface, it seems very reasonable to assume that Watson only referred to white males.

Watson's focus on white males in *Thomas Jefferson* appeared throughout the biography, and particularly in the first chapter. His history of the Jefferson family line almost exclusively

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[347] Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), ix.
[348] Ibid., vii.

focused on Thomas Jefferson's paternal ancestry. Watson made very few references to Jefferson's mother, Jane Randolph, other than noting that she came from a respected family and that she had been successful in bearing children for her husband. Curiously, Watson's discussion of young Thomas Jefferson's education focused almost solely on his father's contributions with limited recognition of his mother's influence. Since Victorian-era ideals for motherhood often included some emphasis on the mother teaching and raising her children, Watson's exclusion of Jane Randolph and his emphasis on Peter Jefferson's influence over Thomas' education seems especially strange.[349]

Watson's peculiar interest in describing the masculinity of Jefferson's education might explain why he wrote next to nothing about Jane Randolph's role in raising her son. Celebrating the father-son bond shared by Thomas and Peter, Watson explained how the "proud father" prepared his first son "for a career of usefulness." He accomplished this goal by encouraging his son to train both his body and his mind. This aspect of Jefferson's education seems of particular interest to Watson, who carefully described Jefferson's books and outdoor exercises. Watson's focus on the young Jefferson's physical training, specifically, resembled one of Gail Bederman's observations about late nineteenth masculinity. By the 1890s, a muscular physique and physical exercise "[were] seen as crucial to the development of powerful manhood."[350] Since this biography had a subtext of supporting the authority and masculinity of white males, and particularly those from the South, it comes as no surprise that Watson would highlight the masculine qualities of Thomas Jefferson's education.

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[349] Ibid., ix.
[350] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1995), 15.

Complimentary to his interest in depicting Thomas Jefferson's upbringing as uniquely masculine, Watson also had an intense interest in describing Peter Jefferson's masculinity. Watson highlighted Peter's manly physique and his masculine qualities throughout the opening chapter, saying, for example: "Peter Jefferson, a man of powerful physique and strong mind;" Peter Jefferson, "a rugged, masterful figure, a character whose strength and integrity no one doubted;" Peter Jefferson, "the wise, strong, man, deeply experienced in actual life."[351] Watson, additionally, described Peter as a self-made man, who scraped together his own existence in the vast American wilderness living alongside an unpredictable and "savage" Native American population.[352] Although subtle, this reference to Peter Jefferson's wilderness hardships and experiences with Native Americans were also part of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century efforts to reclaim the frontier and white American masculinity.

Most students of American history have some familiarity with Frederick Jack Turner's frontier thesis and its conclusions about the American character. After the American frontier officially closed in 1890, historian Frederick Jackson Turner famously theorized that the frontier had shaped Americans into a society that could support a democracy. However, Turner's thesis addressed only white Americans. White frontier hardships and conflicts with "savage" Indians, according to the mythology, bred individualism, resourcefulness, and self-reliance into (white) Americans. All of these elements were essential for a viable democracy. The loss of the frontier in 1890, consequently, threatened the health and longevity of America's democratic system. While Turner's thesis certainly remained a touchstone of late nineteenth-century American history, the racial and gendered aspects of this thesis have been downplayed or forgotten by

[351] Ibid., 1-8.
[352] Ibid., 5.

most.[353] White males made up the overwhelming majority of American voters at the end of the nineteenth century, as most other demographics could not legally vote or were denied the right to vote. The American character and democratic spirit Turner argued, in other words, was inextricably tied up with the character of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century white American males.

As described by Bederman in *Manliness and Civilization*, American masculinity at the turn of the century was already in the throes of a dramatic redefinition for white middle-class males, as women and people of color began to more actively challenge the concepts of white supremacy and male dominance in American life. This alleged threat to American democracy caused by the closing of the frontier only deepened the need to redefine masculinity, as white men looked for new outlets to assert their "Americanness" and manliness. The creation of all-male organizations that emphasized outdoor survival imitating Native American lifestyles, such as the Boy Scouts of America, manifested this newfound desire to reconnect manliness and the American wilderness.[354] In light of these revelations, Watson's emphasis on Peter Jefferson's frontier struggle and masculinity should be seen as a very deliberate choice, as Watson essentially presented Peter as an icon of rugged American masculinity and individualism.

The connection between the American frontier and masculinity outlined by Bederman might also explain why Watson occasionally described Native American men in such favorable terms. Although most of these examples present themselves in Watson's 1912 biography *Andrew Jackson*, his discussion of Cherokee leader Oconostota in *Thomas Jefferson* warrants attention,

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[353] For more on the relationship between race, gender, and the frontier thesis, see, for example, Howard I. Kushner, "The Persistence of the Frontier Thesis in America, Gender, Myth, and Self-Destruction," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 22, no. Supplement 1 (1992): 53–82. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/682029/summary.

[354] Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 16.

as it served as one of his earliest examples of progressive racial thought in his American histories. Describing Jefferson's admiration of Oconostota and the chief's storied life as an ambassador for the Cherokee people, Watson called the Native American leader "handsome" and "manly."[355] Although Watson still referred to Oconostota as "the savage" in his brief description of his life, his praise for the chief's masculinity still comes across as particularly striking. Elsewhere in *Thomas Jefferson* and in his novel *Bethany*, Watson only referred to white males as "manly," and even these descriptions were mostly exclusive to white males from the South.

Examples of Watson's interest in white male masculinity appear throughout the Jefferson biography. Watson described young Thomas Jefferson as "a fine specimen of manhood" in both his appearance and his mannerisms. Jefferson's manliness, Watson argued, was evident in "his capacity for friendship," defining these relationships as "manly friendship."[356] Other references to the masculinity of white males concerned warfare. According to Watson, the white men who fought at Bunker Hill during the American Revolution engaged in "manly fighting." White men who gave engaging political orations presented a "manly speech."[357] Watson, additionally, urged white American men to consider Georgia Washington as the ideal white male. Watson highlighted the masculine nature of George Washington, as he highlighted the manliness of Washington's physique, his relationships with women, and his willingness to beat a slave as punishment.[358]

Apart from Watson's intense interest in white manliness, Watson made limited but noteworthy references to white women in *Thomas Jefferson*. His characterizations of white women conformed to Victorian-era gender ideals, offering romanticized, one-dimensional

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[355] Watson, *Thomas Jefferson*, 9-10.
[356] Ibid., 23.
[357] Ibid., 141, 218.
[358] Ibid., 148-9.

descriptions of upper-class white women from the eighteenth-century United States, often focusing on white female appearance and their embodiment of beauty and virtue. For example, in a description of a formal ball Jefferson attended, Watson gave a romanticized account of the women at the ball: "Fair women, bright-eyed, and rosy-cheeked...radiantly lovely, innocently joyous..."[359]Although Watson clearly thought very highly of white women, his description of them elsewhere in this biography indicate that he believed they were subservient to white men. One of the most noteworthy examples of this subservience appeared in a description of the Jefferson family's idyllic home life at Monticello. Watson explained that Martha Jefferson could "worship" her husband Thomas because of his good character and his generosity towards their family.[360] None of Watson's descriptions of white women particularly come as a surprise, as they appeared to accurately reflect both Jefferson and Watson's patriarchal values and gender expectations. Given Watson's hyper-focus on white male masculinity, examining how he described white women seems necessary to develop a clearer picture of how Watson understood whiteness.

While Watson made no noteworthy references to women of color in the Jefferson biography, Watson briefly addressed politics and women in the book's penultimate chapter, "Political Opinions." In a chapter titled "Political Opinions," Watson penned a laundry list of Jefferson's political ideology. Most of these ideas, if not all, seem to reflect Watson's personal political beliefs and those of the southern radicals, who saw their political ideology as a revival of Jefferson's political ideals.[361] After rattling off several examples of Jefferson's political beliefs, such as his support of a graduated income tax and his opposition to any national debt,

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[359] Ibid., 117.
[360] Ibid., 122.
[361] See Joel Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 286.

Watson mentioned that Jefferson "opposed the appointment of women to office," and made no additional comment about the matter.[362] Watson essentially threw this idea into a list of other "good" ideas Jefferson had about American politics and society, making it reasonable to assume that Watson might have also agreed with Jefferson's idea. While this example does not directly address race, Watson's implicit opposition to all women—regardless of race—from holding political office adds further nuance to how Watson understood both white supremacy and male supremacy. Although scholars dealing with Watson have closely examined his racial views and his belief in white supremacy, there seems to be a noteworthy absence of literature dealing with Watson's ideas about gender equality and feminism and how these concepts interacted with his ideas about race.

6.2 *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*

The subtext of masculinity in *Thomas Jefferson* likewise appeared in the frontmatter of *Bethany*, which Watson published in 1904, a year after *Jefferson*. The dedication explicitly stated that Watson wrote his novel for a northern male audience: "To the magnanimous men of the North who are willing to learn the truth about the South." Given our knowledge of Watson's anti-black racial views, which arguably peaked around 1904 one can reasonably assume that Watson only meant to dedicate this novel to white men in the north, and not any northern men of color. Watson, additionally, described the study of history and its interpretation as a strictly male occupation, implying that the responsibility to heal sectional strife rested in the hands of white men alone.[363] Sectionalism, patriarchal dominance, and white supremacy heavily influenced Watson's interpretation of Civil War history. These concepts, however, also appeared in John

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[362] Watson, *Thomas Jefferson*, 499. It seems worth noting that Rebecca Felton, who was a close friend of Watson, a southern radical, and a white suffragette, would have disagreed with Jefferson's opposition of women to political office.
[363] Ibid., vii-xi.

Burgess' *The Middle Period*, indicating that Watson's white supremacy was not bound to the South and that white supremacy had a national audience.

In *Bethany*, Watson continued to emphasize the ideas introduced in *Thomas Jefferson* about white southern masculinity. The protagonist of *Bethany* Part II, the narrator's Uncle Ralph, represented the idealized version of white southern masculinity. Watson went into great detail describing the masculinity of Ralph's character and appearance. Speaking from the perspective of the Horton family's unnamed son, Watson wrote:

> Let me go back a little and tell you more of my Uncle Ralph. You would have liked him—you could not have helped it. He was so frank, genial, and manly; he was so free and sociable in all his ways; he was so good to look at, with his blue eyes full of light, his freckled cheeks full of healthy color, his tall, straight, slender figure so full of life and strength. There was nobody on the place who did not like Uncle Ralph. The negroes were fond of him, and proud of him.[364]

Subsequent characterizations of Uncle Ralph further emphasized his physical vigor and masculinity, noting, for example, that he "excelled in all manly, out-of-door sports and recreations."[365] Watson's focus on Ralph's masculinity and his emphasis on how Ralph's physical attributes manifested his masculinity was especially reminiscent of how he described Thomas Jefferson's education. The male body and physical fitness, likewise, appeared inextricably related to how Watson understood manliness and masculinity.

Further confirming Watson's hyper-focus on masculinity in his American histories, the same obsessive references to the masculinity of white southern men that appeared in *Thomas Jefferson* made a reappearance in *Bethany*. Watson, for example, described Jefferson Davis' voice as "manly;" a Confederate soldier condemned to death for desertion had a "manly" bearing; an orator in favor of secession had a "manly face;" William Yancey, a Fire Eater and an

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[364] Ibid., 128-9.
[365] Ibid., 129.

outspoken leader of the secession movement, had "a manly, handsome, countenance."[366] The list of examples could go on almost endlessly. Watson missed no opportunity to emphasize the manliness of southern white males in this novel. Although this connection cannot be overstated, Burgess' challenge to southern masculinity in *The Middle Period* comes to mind when examining how frequently Watson discussed manliness in *Bethany*. Clearly, some tension still existed between white men in either section of the country concerning the causes and legitimacy of the Civil War, and a debate over masculinity became part of this debate.[367]

Watson's references to white women, like his characterizations of white southern men, very closely resembled how he depicted women in *Thomas Jefferson*. Ralph's romantic interest, Nellie Roberts, embodied the ideal white southern woman. Watson described her as extremely virtuous, humble, youthful, and submissive, with "a sweet maidenly reserve." The narrator recalled that her graceful presence would inspire chivalric feelings in any man, and that Ralph's love for her made him even more manly, as it helped him to mature into a more thoughtful southern gentleman.[368] Aside from assigning Nellie a place in *Bethany*'s tragic, war-torn romance, Watson would also use her to examine and debate many of the contemporary feminist issues of the early twentieth century, such as marriage, careers for women, and gender roles.

Reminiscent of the Toombs-Stephens debates Watson included in *Bethany*'s Part I, which examined the political conditions leading up to the war, Watson explored the nature of white southern womanhood in a friendly conversation between Nellie and Ruel Wade, a well-liked visiting pastor who took a romantic interest in Nellie while Ralph was serving in the Confederate

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[366] Ibid., 198; 203;119; 91.
[367] Once again, it seems appropriate to note that John W. Burgess was originally from Tennessee, a state that joined the Confederacy in 1861. Burgess, however, fought for the Union Army, and held a position a Columbia University in New York. Culturally speaking, he was effectively a northerner.
[368] Ibid., 132-4.

army. This is, notably, the same conversation where Ruel stated that slavery had cursed everyone in the South except black people, who whites and Watson claimed were the solitary beneficiary of slavery. The contents of this dialogue could likely fill its own research paper, as Watson, using Ralph and Nellie as mouthpieces, presents a striking analysis of white feminism and southern gender roles. However, in the interest of space, a condensed examination of the most relevant portions of this dialogue will have to suffice.

The conversation between Nellie and Ruel essentially dealt with Nellie asking why upper-class white women had limited career opportunities compared to other white women across the United States. Ruel attempted to reassure her that white women could rely on white men to protect and provide for them, and that the limited opportunities available to white women outside of the home was actually a mark of their privileged status in the South. Manual labor in the South had become increasingly associated with slavery and the lowest rungs of society, making it impossible for a white woman to work without losing her status. Although Ruel admitted that the slave system actually harmed all white southerners, he maintained that white women should not attempt to work or to compete with men in the public sphere. In a friendly manner, Ruel reminded Nellie that the patriarchal rule was the natural state of humanity, that men were naturally better than women at almost everything, and that women could achieve the most success by staying home and taking care of the domestic sphere. Ruel ended his monologue with a very conventional defense of separate spheres and of patriarchal dominance. Ruel explained: "a woman is never more divinely missioned than when she is the good angel of the house. Into the lives of all good and great men have gone the ennobling spirits of the mother and the wife."[369] While this defense of patriarchy and the insistence that women were better-suited to

[369] Ibid., 239.

stay in the domestic sphere presented nothing groundbreaking to a study of nineteenth-century gender roles, the peculiar way Nellie responded to Ruel might indicate how Watson might have felt about white feminism and any threats to male dominance in society.

Nellie refrained from asking any further questions after Ruel finished his speech and instead started to play the piano in her family's drawing-room.[370] Throughout the entire conversation with Ruel, she had been extremely curious and persistently asked why white southern women could not pursue careers or become more independent. After Ruel's response, however, Nellie stopped her inquiry about gender roles, distracting herself with something else. This ambiguous response seemed intentional on Watson's part, nevertheless, it is difficult to explain. Given what Watson had said about gender elsewhere, especially his passing reference to Thomas Jefferson opposing women in political office, it is plausible that Ruel's patriarchal defense and beliefs reflected Watson's conceptions of white women's place in the southern hierarchy. Nellie's response, in this light, might serve as an idealized version of what Watson hoped would happen with white feminism in the South, as Nellie stopped challenging male authority and seemingly resigned herself to her celebrated but limited station as a white southern woman.

Outside of this intriguing conversation between Nellie and Ruel, Watson returned to discussing race and gender within the context of the Civil War. On more than one occasion, he explained that protecting white women, and not states' rights, was the main Confederate military objective. Describing the call to arms across the South in 1861, he wrote:

> Southern men are rushing to the defense of their native land. Nothing more. Nobody doubts that it can easily be done. Nobody thinks of retaliation. To invade the North and make war upon its homes is no soldier's purpose. This sunny home-land of ours is invaded; we will defend it. These mothers, sisters, sweethearts of ours are in danger; we

[370] Ibid., 239-40.

> will rush to arms to save them. That, that, is the sole motive of the Confederate Volunteer.[371]

Although this selection did not explicitly mention black men and sexual violence against white women as a major concern of southern white men, elsewhere, Watson connected sexual violence against white women as one of the Confederacy's major concerns, stating that white southern men would rather die than live to see a race war where black men raped their wives and daughters. In support of this, Watson cited the slave insurrection in the French sugar colonies as one of the major sources of southern white fears, hearkening back to his French histories and how he narrated these revolts through a distinctly pro-white lens.[372]

Although Watson's mention of race war and rape denounced sexual violence perpetrated by black men against white women, his description of one of the Horton family's mixed-race slaves named Sam indicated an indifferent attitude about sexual relationships between white men and black women. Watson, speaking as the narrator, randomly referred to Sam in the middle of a description of Grandfather Horton, stating:

> By the way, I now recall that there was a bright mulatto boy on the place, named Sam, whose mother's color was a smooth, universal black, and whose son Sam bore a distinct likeness to my Uncle Ralph. I mention this as a singular coincidence, just as I might tell you of the two mulatto fiddlers at Charlottesville, Va., who bore such an impertinent and irrelevant resemblance to the Sage of Monticello.[373]

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[371] Ibid., 151-2. The connection between black discrimination and the protection of white women was conventional during Watson's lifetime. Rebecca Felton, as mentioned previously, campaigned for black male disenfranchisement on the basis of preventing the rape of white women. Additionally, Watson's assertion that southern white males fought to protect white women is not incorrect, as it has been proven in works such as James McPherson's *What They Fought For, 1861-1865* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994). The point of this example, however, it to illustrate that Watson emphasized protecting white women as the "sole motive of the Confederate Volunteer."

[372] Ibid., 81-2.

[373] Ibid., 17.

The narrator made no further comment on whether the family considered his Uncle Ralph's sexual relationship with Sam's mother offensive, as he immediately moved on to a discussion of what books his grandfather owned. Watson seems to blindside the reader with this information, leaving little to no explanation for why he mentioned Sam or Thomas Jefferson's mixed-race children.[374] Based on these very brief and inconsequential references to mixed-race children with white fathers and black mothers, it seems that Watson had a permissive view of sexual relationships between white men and black women. Sexual violence against white women in this novel could animate an entire army of white men; sexual violence against black women, however, was met with indifference in Watson's *Bethany*.

This permissive attitude about sexual violence against black women might be explained, in part, by Watson's belief that black women were less virtuous than white women. Watson alluded to this belief in his account of the Horton family's slaves, and in his reference to a female slave named Mandy. The narrator described Mandy as an anomaly among the Horton family slaves because "she was virtuous." Expanding on this characterization, he explained: "It was said among white men, as well as black, that no temptation could reach her….She was regarded and respected on the plantation as a strictly virtuous girl."[375] Mandy, in other words, did not have a reputation for sexual promiscuity. The fact that men of both races knew about Mandy's reputation suggests that white and black men alike viewed her as a sexual object. Mandy being singled out as uniquely virtuous among her peers also suggests that other black women lacked

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[374] Watson briefly mentioned Jefferson's rumored sexual relationship with his black female slaves in *Thomas Jefferson*. Discussing Jefferson's presidential campaign, Watson noted that the rumor of Jefferson having mixed race children had been used to malign his character. Jefferson, however, did not address the rumors, believing it would be below his station to acknowledge such scandal. See Watson, *Thomas Jefferson*, 366.

[375] Ibid., 14-15. It is unclear why Watson claims to know that black men also know of Mandy's reputation. For more on black women, slavery, and sexuality, see Deborah Grey White's *Are't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1999).

virtue and were considered libertine or promiscuous. This reference to Mandy arguably offers the only example of Watson saying something positive about a woman of color in any of his histories. However, even this compliment comes with implicit criticism of all other black women, not unlike his singular praise for Toussaint L'Ouverture in *Napoleon*.[376]

6.3 *The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson*

Unlike his two other American histories, Watson made no reference to masculinity or sectionalism in the preface to *Andrew Jackson*. Although he continued in the same vein of historical revisionism, explaining that "the biographies of Andrew Jackson were either too eulogistic or too defamatory," Watson did not dedicate this biography to northern men—or to anyone—and made no explicit defense of the South's reputation.[377] The absence of sectionalism or references to gender makes the preface to *Andrew Jackson* markedly different from his other two American histories. The unique nature of this preface, additionally, echoed the more progressive attitude Watson had about race and gender in this biography.

Watson's description of Andrew Jackson's mother, the widowed Elizabeth Hutchinson Jackson, closely resembled his references to the ideal white woman in *Thomas Jefferson* and *Andrew Jackson*, especially in terms of a white woman's extremely virtuous nature and their obligation to nurture others. However, compared to his description of Jane Randolph Jefferson and her role in Thomas' upbringing, Watson offers significantly more detail on Elizabeth Jackson and her contributions to raising Andrew, frequently describing the strength of her character and sacrifices. Watson called Elizabeth "a woman of strong, loveable traits...who was 'as gentle as a dove and as brave as a lioness.'" Watson, additionally, celebrated Elizabeth for

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[376] Thomas E. Watson, *Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, His Character, and His Struggles* (1902; repr. New York: Macmillan, 1903), 311. Citations refer to the reprint edition.
[377] Watson, *Andrew Jackson*, n.p.

her efforts outside the home as a battlefield nurse during the Revolutionary War. He described her as "a ministering angel" and "the Good Woman of Christian nations" who cared for the sick as "angels of Mercy."[378] Although Watson made a handful of references to the sacrifice made by white women during the Civil War in *Bethany*, his description of Elizabeth Jackson and her efforts as a nurse indicates that Watson had become more open to white women performing physical labor and working outside the home.

References to white men in *Andrew Jackson* closely resemble Watson's descriptions in *Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany*. Watson, once again, heavily emphasized the masculinity of southern white men: Robert Henry Clay's farewell address to Congress did not simply express regret, but "manly regret;"[379] Andrew Jackson was "a manly man" when leading his militia and dealing with prisoners;[380] Jackson's scandalous courtship of his wife Rachel "was the strong man's masterful way of getting the woman he wanted;"[381] Confederate general Robert E. Lee was "the flower of Anglo-Saxon chivalry;"[382] Virginia politician William H. Crawford had "a gigantic stature and manly bearing." By contrast, Crawford's northern political opponent John Quincy Adams lacked such masculine qualities; Watson seems to have taken special care to describe the abolitionist as effeminate and almost grotesque: "In physique, [Adams] was unprepossessing. His figure was short and not well formed; his head was bald and his eyes watery."[383] While Watson never definitively called northern white men effeminate, southern white males clearly embodied masculine ideals in Watson's mind.

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[378] Ibid., 13, 17-8.
[379] Ibid., 272.
[380] Ibid., 191.
[381] Ibid., 258.
[382] Ibid., 265.
[383] Ibid., 297.

Although Watson's praise for southern white men comes as no surprise, his admiration for Native American men in this biography does. In spite of his core gender beliefs and white supremacy reinforcing masculinity, Watson regarded Native American men positively. During one of his many references to the U.S. government interacting with Native American nations, Watson inserted a personal story about his own interactions with the Seminoles, stating that he socialized with them on his annual winter vacation to Florida. Watson wrote: "They are simple, cheerful, sociable folk, easily pleased and grateful for favors. The men are models of physical perfection."[384] Watson's fixation on physical exercise and the masculinity of white males in his other two histories helps explain why he found the bodies of the Seminole men so impressive. The connection between masculinity and the outdoors that had become so popular in the early 1900s likewise brought some clarity to this unusually favorable comment from Watson.

Another noteworthy example of Watson's favorable attitude towards Native American men appeared in his description of a Creek chief named Weatherford and his leadership during the Creeek War of 1813-1814. According to Watson, Weatherford had a white father and in many ways lived like a white plantation owner, operating a successful farm and owning several black slaves. However, when whites encroached on the tribe's territory, Weatherford, "the fearless Indian hero," gathered an extremely valiant army of Creek warriors that ultimately did not succeed in protecting their tribal lands. Captured by Jackson and anticipating his execution, Weatherford surrendered on the condition that the Creek women and children be provided with food to prevent starvation. Deeply moved by Weatherford's sacrifice and his commitment to protecting women and children, Jackson spared Weatherford's life and allowed him to return home and live peacefully, without further encroachment from whites.[385]

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[384] Ibid., 237.
[385] Ibid., 187-91.

Watson provided an extremely favorable account of Weatherford and the Creek resistance movement, declaring that Weatherford acted "with a magnanimity and a breadth of patriotism which deserves to be remembered as long as human annals are kept." He, likewise, lamented the fact that the Chief's heroic actions were not known across the globe, noting that white resistance leaders that had done significantly less could claim fame and admiration.[386] In the five other histories examined in this study, Watson had only recognized white resistance movements as legitimate and always denounced black or Native American rebellions as savage and illegitimate. On this occasion, however, Watson recognized the injustices the Creeks had suffered and went into great detail describing the heroism of Weatherford and praising him for his manly leadership.

Although Watson's praise for Native American men and recognition of their masculinity presented a unique and striking feature in his Andrew Jackson biography, his favorable descriptions of these men led one to question why Watson made no specific mention of Native American women or of the masculinity of black men as well. Watson's histories reflected his understanding of white dominance and male authority. Consequently, most of his characters are white and male. Women and people of color had very little representation in these histories, and when they do appear, they often embody negative stereotypes or romanticized versions of these groups. Consequently, the dearth of references to Native American women should not come as a surprise.

Likewise, any dicussion of black men or their masculinity would potentially challenge Watson's belief in white male supremacy, by recognizing that this group of men might also have a claim to hold power. By 1912, when Watson published *Andrew Jackson*, Native Americans

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[386] Ibid.

had significantly smaller numbers compared to white and black populations in the United States, and most Native American nations lived separately on reservations. Groups that did not threaten white male supremacy, such as the defeated Creeks or the independent Maroon community in North Florida, seem to receive Watson's most favorable treatment.

This chapter on how Watson discussed race in connection with gender in his American histories has exposed how Watson conflated white supremacy and male supremacy. Although most of the post-1970 scholars identified and confronted Watson's white supremacy and examined his actions in light of this revelation, his understanding of male supremacy and female inferiority has been addressed very little, if at all. Given Watson's association with disenfranchising black men in Georgia in 1904, it seems peculiar that scholars would not also consider where he landed on the issue of suffrage for white women; Woodward, for example, made no mention of women's suffrage in *Agrarian Rebel*. Watson's position as a politician, a newspaperman, and a professed white supremacist strongly suggested that he had a public position on this issue. Although many of his references to white women in these histories had a favorable tone, he often emphasized their place in the domestic sphere and their dependence on white males for protection. Thus, it seems more likely that Watson would not have supported granting suffrage to white women. The absence of this topic in *Agrarian Rebel* or in the subsequent works dealing with Watson strongly indicates that Watson's views on the white feminist movement of the early twentieth century warrants further study.

Aside from exposing this inattention to Watson's views on feminism and white female suffrage, this chapter has also shown Watson's frequent efforts to highlight the masculinity of white southern men, which seems indicative of an effort to bolster white male dominance in American society. This focus on white manliness and masculinity becomes even more striking

when examined alongside his celebratory references to select super masculine Native American leaders, and his decision to not extend the same recognition to black men. The increasingly popular association with white masculinity, physical exercise, and the outdoors seems to have also extended to Native American males, who presumably did not pose a significant threat to white male dominance.

In contrast to his veneration of specific Native American men, Watson made a concentrated effort to illustrate the inferiority of groups who threatened white male dominance the most during the early twentieth century: for example, white women and black men. Depictions of white women almost always referred to women's traditionally assumed delicate natures and dependence on white male protection. Likewise, black men were stereotyped as a dangerous sexual threat to white women reinforcing the need for white men to assume the protector's role. Consequently, Watson did not focus on women of color—black and Native American—in his American histories, suggesting that the women deemed inferior but sexually promiscuous posed a limited threat to white male power. Watson's inattention to women of color in these histories seems to suggest that this demographic posed very little threat to white male power.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to analyzing Thomas E. Watson's decision to write history and the racial sentiment expressed in these histories, it is worthwhile to remind readers that Watson made no secret of how his political beliefs influenced his historical interpretations. Evidence of Watson's agenda was presented in Chapter Two. Watson was clear in promoting his own political ideology in his historical writings, stating: "With my own party out of business, there was nothing for me to do in the way of political work, and I turned to literature and advocated the same eternal principles of human liberty and justice and good government in historical works..."[387] C. Vann Woodward acknowledged this confession in *Agrarian Rebel*, citing this same passage and categorizing these works as "populist history."[388] As this study has shown, Watson's populist ideology presented itself in his histories, as he frequently focused on the common man, reformers, and resistance movements. Another implication of Watson's political ideology influencing his historical writings, however, manifests itself in how he discussed race, gender, and white supremacy

Although most of the post-1970 scholars cited in Chapter One readily acknowledged Watson's unwavering allegiance to white supremacy and C. Vann Woodward's blindness to how this belief system influenced his subject, these scholars have primarily focused on Watson's racial views during his early 1890s populist campaigns that ended with the failed 1896 election. These late twentieth and early twenty-first century studies have aimed to recalibrate the Woodward thesis. Focusing on Watson's racial ideology during his Populist days, these scholars concluded that Watson's 1904 call for black disenfranchisement did not indicate a dramatic

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[387] Thomas E. Watson, *The Life and Speeches of Thos. E. Watson* (Nashville, TN: self-published by the author, 1908), 22.
[388] Woodward, *Agrarian Rebel*, 335.

reversal of Watson's racial views, as Woodward had suggested, but rather a noteworthy shift to the right by a publicly self-identified white supremacist. In clarifying how white supremacy influenced the course of Watson's political career, these scholars have ultimately been successful. Most of these post-Woodward reexaminations of Watson's life, however, have hinged on debunking this single aspect of Watson's political ideology, leaving his literary efforts and most of his activities after 1896 virtually untouched since the first edition of *Agrarian Rebel* in 1938.

This study found an opportunity to bridge the knowledge gap concerning Watson's literary career and the extent and implications of his white supremacy. By closely examining how Watson became a relatively successful author and historian after 1896, the depth of this study has surpassed C. Vann Woodward's efforts in *Agrarian Rebel*. Although Woodward acknowledged the significance of Watson's writing career, even calling his original dissertation "The Political and Literary Career of Thomas E. Watson," it appears as if Woodward neglected to thoroughly question Watson's interest in writing French history or why he appealed to major American publishing houses.[389]

As discussed in Chapters Two and Four, Watson's appeal to the average man, his celebrity status as a former Vice Presidential candidate, and eventually his reputation as a respected author persuaded Macmillan and D. Appleton to partner with him and publish his histories. In Watson's correspondence with these publishers and in the favorable and unfavorable reviews of his books, Watson met no resistance to how he discussed race in these histories. How Watson discussed race clearly did not strike Watson's editors or his presumably white readership

[389] Roper, *C. Vann Woodward* 102; 108-10. The title of the Tom Watson manuscript only changed to *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* after Macmillan agreed to publish the work pending some modifications

as something objectionable or even unique.[390] Although one can easily argue that the early twentieth century clearly had different racial sensibilities and lower standards for publishing than today, it seems more accurate to observe that white supremacist ideology thoroughly permeated American culture and society that Watson's racial ideas did not seem worthwhile to acknowledge.[391]

Aside from an examination of the circumstances that allowed Watson to enjoy relative success as an author and publisher, this study has also surveyed how Watson discussed race in his French and American histories. Scholars often described Watson's 1904 call for black disenfranchisement as a seemingly random turn of events, offering very little context regarding any changes in Watson's life leading up to this public development in his racial views. Although knowledge of Watson's white supremacist views helped explain his seemingly random call for disenfranchisement, this explanation alone does not fully address why Watson decided to publicly change his views on black suffrage in 1904. Since Watson's writing career became the substitute for his political aspirations in the interim between 1896 and 1904 and then continued beyond these dates, it followed that an in-depth examination of how Watson discussed race in these histories would possibly yield some striking results concerning a reactionary shift in Watson's racial views. The findings of this survey, I would argue, fall into four categories: Watson's allegiance to white supremacy, a subtle shift in his racial views between his French and

[390] C. Vann Woodward, who presumably would have firmly disagreed with all of Watson's reactionary racial ideas presented throughout these histories, notably did not specify this as one of his major objections to Watson's histories.

[391] The available reviews for Watson's books presumably all come from white authors. However, it seems very reasonable to assume and important to acknowledge that people of color who read Watson's work would have objected to many of his ideas about white supremacy and black inferiority.

American histories, the peculiar and more liberal shift in Watson's racial views in his final American history, and Watson's belief in white patriarchal supremacy.

Watson's comments on race in his French and American histories further confirm the conclusions of post-1970s scholars who observed that Watson held white supremacist views during his Populist campaigns of the 1890s and prior to 1904. Although this survey could only present the most striking examples of Watson's white supremacist beliefs in his histories, examples not directly cited in these chapters appear throughout these works.

As Watson shifted his focus from French to American history between 1902 and 1903, his observations about race became increasingly more frequent and arguably more racist, confirming Woodward's observation about Watson's reactionary beliefs and my initial question about whether a discernible shift in Watson's racial views appeared as his publication dates neared 1904. The books published closest to 1904, *The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson* and *Bethany: A Story of the Old South*, unsurprisingly contained some of Watson's most reactionary racial ideas. Watson's intimate familiarity with American history and how it eventually translated into the political and social conditions in which he found himself left little room for racially progressive ideas in his first two American histories.

Scholars generally described Watson's political career and racial ideology after 1904 as increasingly more reactionary, epitomized by his continued support of black disenfranchisement, his public defense of lynching, and the violent anti-Semitism he expressed during the sensationalized Leo Frank murder trial in 1913. Consequently, I anticipated that Watson's final American history, his 1912 biography of Andrew Jackson, would contain some of his most reactionary references to race. Surprisingly, however, the opposite proved true. While it cannot be overstated, since this book contained many of the same racist and white supremacist ideas

Watson presented in his previous histories, *Andrew Jackson* offers some of Watson's most progressive ideas about race, especially when it came to his admiration of select Native American males. Although Watson does not give reasons for his attitude towards these men, it is likely that Watson did not view this group as a threat to white male supremacy because of their severely reduced southern population, and the fact that most Native Americans had been segregated onto reservations by the first decade of the twentieth century. The popular connection between outdoor lifestyles and masculinity, and the Native American's association with the land and the wilderness, might have also influenced Watson's favorable characterizations. However, it remains unclear why 1912 marked this distinct change in Watson's attitude about Native American males.

The increase in racial progressivism in *Andrew Jackson* might be at least partially explained by the biography's 1912 publication date and the 1906 disenfranchisement of black men in Georgia. After six years without black suffrage in his home state, Watson perhaps felt more secure about his status as a white man, less anxiety about the social and political status of blacks, and therefore, able to make more favorable references about people of color, or to at least to refrain from including his typically negative comments about black people. Although this hypothesis helps explain the subtle warming of Watson's racial tolerance toward black people between the publication of *Bethany* in 1904 and *Andrew Jackson* in 1912, it does not fully explain why he suddenly had such a favorable attitude toward Native American men in this biography.

With the exception of how he characterized Cherokee Chief Oconostota in *Thomas Jefferson*, almost every other reference to Native Americans in Watson's French or American histories mentioned savagery and racial inferiority of some kind. References to masculinity in his

first two American histories, additionally, almost exclusively focused on white males—and specifically, white men from the South. Watson's sudden willingness to discuss Native Americans in a sympathetic light and compliment select Native American men for their masculine qualities seems to indicate some change in Watson's racial tolerance and how he viewed masculinity. Reminiscent of his newfound ability to make concessions about black success in *Andrew Jackson*, Watson's favorable comments about Native American men appear partially related to the hypothesis regarding white insecurities and black disenfranchisement. The disenfranchisement of black men helped consolidate white political power, but specifically that of white men. Watson, one can speculate, felt more secure as a man and as a white person by the time he wrote *Andrew Jackson*, and could now recognize how certain Native American men embodied his definition of masculinity. The same cannot be said, however, for how he viewed Native American women.

Although Watson's favorable comments about Native American men suggest a slight cooling of his white supremacist beliefs, they also provided a more subtle indication of how Watson viewed gender. His ability to praise certain Native American men for their masculine characteristics and his decision to make almost no mention of Native American women subtly pointed to Watson's little-discussed belief in male supremacy. While many post-1970s scholars have acknowledged how white supremacy influenced many of Watson's political maneuverings, how he conflated the constructs of white supremacy and male supremacy is ripe for further examination, especially when it comes to how he viewed suffrage for white women.

Professional disappointments and embarrassments leading up to the publication of *Andrew Jackson* might have also inspired Watson to include more racially progressive ideas in his final biography. Appleton's disinterest in publishing a third history by Watson, implicitly

because of his political views and reputation, might have motivated Watson to write a distinctly more liberal American history that Appleton would eventually regret not publishing. Likewise, the public embarrassments Watson suffered in 1910 might also have motivated him to reclaim his status as a distinguished scholar and a leading reformer: in this case, one who recognized the injustices people of color had suffered at the hands of white Americans. The humiliation of the 1896 election and the more progressive racial ideas that appeared in his French histories in 1899 and 1902 lends some credibility to this theory. This hypothesis, however, also leads to difficult questions about why his racial intolerance increased so dramatically around 1903 and 1904.

Although this study contributes a unique and nuanced interpretation of how Tom Watson's racial views changed between 1899 and 1912, the conclusions of this study cannot be overstated: any discussion of Tom Watson being racially progressive must always be taken with a clear understanding of his unwavering allegiance to white supremacy. Likewise, the conclusion that Watson's sixth and final history *Andrew Jackson* actually contained his most racially progressive ideas should not diminish or distract from the extremely racist things Watson said and did during his lifetime, and especially in the second half of his political career. In some ways, this study only offers a starting place for reexamining Tom Watson's life and career, and hopefully serves as an early example of studies that return to *Agrarian Rebel* to revisit C. Vann Woodward's conclusions about the Georgia Populist.

The relatively limited amount of materials utilized in this study provides yet another reason why its conclusions cannot be overstated. Watson's extremely prolific writing career throughout his life has left today's scholars with a vast wealth of written material to examine. An overwhelming amount of his magazines, periodicals, letters, speeches, and books have been digitized, and are readily available on reputable online databases. The sheer amount of material,

however, might also explain why a new biography of Watson has not appeared; it would be extremely difficult to read, analyze, and summarize the vast Tom Watson archives, especially in a way that would rival the authoritative biography produced by C. Vann Woodward. Because of the vast amount of available material, the scope of this study has been intentionally small, choosing to only focus on six of Watson's histories, supplemented and contextualized with some of his private letters and shorter publications. This study, in other words, only offers a snapshot of Watson's writing or his racial views, and by nature could not provide an authoritative or comprehensive analysis of Watson's life and career.

What the study lacks in its ability to make sweeping, authoritative conclusions about Tom Watson's life and his racial views, it hopefully makes up for in its reexamination of a long-neglected area of the Georgia Populist's life. As Woodward acknowledged in *Agrarian Rebel*, the poor quality of Watson's histories has rightly earned them an obscure place in the historiographies of France and the United States. These books, however, proved extremely rich in illustrating how Watson's racial views changed and developed during this pivotal and understudied time in his political career. This study, additionally, has provided readers with an interesting glimpse into the publishing standards of the turn-of-the-century United States. Watson's histories and the derogatory and white supremacist ideas they presented were accepted by more than one reputable publishing house, and never commented on by any of his reviewers. Watson's racial views, in other words, were nothing extraordinary for their time, a fact which leaves readers in the twenty-first with plenty of reasons to pause and consider America's storied and complicated history with race and racism.

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