The One-Eyed King: The Reforms of Ben Tillman as the Reason for the Absence of Populism in South Carolina

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Abstract
This thesis is intended to demonstrate the tangible reforms initiated by Benjamin Ryan Tillman between 1885 and 1895 for farmers and other citizens of South Carolina. After exploring the most notable historiography surrounding the Tillman era in South Carolina, the thesis examines Tillman's appeals to the farmers' depressed condition, the establishment of Clemson Agricultural College, and state-level reforms of business and government institutions. Tillman's restructuring of the South Carolina Penitentiary, the Lunatic Asylum, and the creation of the state liquor dispensary are shown to be significant accomplishments in the reformer's political career. Tillman's assaults on what he perceived as monopolistic capital—in the form of the phosphate mining industry and the railroads—are also thoroughly discussed.

The emphasis of this analysis is to show that Tillman's reform movement, and not the concerns over white solidarity that stigmatized any third-party movement, was the primary reason for the lack of a Populist party in South Carolina. The fact that Tillman and the majority of white Democrats in South Carolina did not support the socio-political equality of African Americans is not in question. However, the purpose of this thesis is to illustrate that without Tillmanism and the real reforms that came along with the movement, South Carolina would have experienced a significant third-party bolt similar to other Southern and Western states in the 1890's.

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"For the following eight years South Carolina was governed largely by a ruthless band of thieves," she wrote. Reconstruction gave Oliphant another opportunity to portray blacks as passive and easily manipulated creatures. Edgar adds, "For the state's farmers, support of whom was the reason the reform movement had come into being, life was little better for all of Tillman's promises." Under Tillman's administration the anti-Charleston state created the Dispensary system, by which the state held a monopoly on the sale of alcohol. First are those who say that Ben Tillman is forgotten to the vast majority of South Carolinians. Why bring attention to him and stir racial animosities with this campaign? To this I say that racial animosities are here already.