Reform,
1874–1900

Irvin M. May, Jr.

Irvin M. May, Jr. (1939–2000) taught for many years at Blinn College in Bryan. A specialist in the history of agriculture, Dr. May authored Marvin Jones: The Public Life of an Agrarian Advocate and was coeditor of Enriching America’s Past and Southwestern Agriculture: Pre-Columbian to Modern.

In this selection, Dr. May provides an overview of Texas from 1874 to the dawn of the twentieth century, a period of significant change. He discusses the transformation in agriculture, industry, transportation, education, and politics in the Lone Star State. May also considers the reform efforts of Attorney General and Governor James Stephen Hogg.

“Each age is a dream that is dying or one that is coming to birth,” observed Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was born in 1882 and became one of the greatest presidents of the twentieth century. In the culminating years of the nineteenth century, 1874–1900, Texas experienced an age that made a significant impact upon its future. This meant reform: to amend or improve by change

of form or removal of faults or abuses; to put or change into an improved form or condition. When the dreams of that era produced reforms, the results became the immediate foundation of twentieth-century Texas.

What were some of the dreams of the Texan of 1874? Redeemers desired a change in government and a reform of Radical Republican rule. Pioneers wanted a better life and therefore pushed Anglo civilization westward throughout Texas. Entrepreneurs Henry J. Lutcher, G. Bedell Moore, and John Henry Kirby sought wealth in the tall yellow pine forests of East Texas. The railroad, sometimes called the iron horse, captured the spirit of the age, supplied needed transportation, and contributed to the accumulation of great amounts of wealth; but unwise use of the railroad’s power and unethical business practices resulted in government regulation. There were dreams of better education for all, and blacks especially hoped that the Declaration of Independence would finally be fulfilled for them. The political scene witnessed various changes to encourage industrialism and to provide more democracy. Democrats, Republicans, Grangers, Greenbackers, and Populists had their own visions for Texas, and the era produced the last great Texas governor, James Stephen Hogg. As we will see, the years 1874–1900 were an era of change for Texas and the nation.

Statistically Texas experienced great change between 1874 and 1900. Population increased from 818,579 in 1870 (nineteenth in the United States) to 3,048,710 in 1900 (sixth in the nation). Accompanying this increase, the state’s urban population rose from 6.7 percent to 17.1 percent. While this trend began to accelerate, Texas still remained a rural state. When the era began, nearly 60 percent of the state was a frontier, with Washington, Harris, and Rusk counties having the most people, and Galveston, San Antonio, and Houston being the largest cities. Thirty years later, the urban twentieth-century pattern had come clearly into focus, with Dallas, Bexar, and Harris being the largest counties and San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas the largest cities. Metropolitan Texas had emerged.

Accompanying the population trends, the economy also underwent substantial change. The state’s railroad mileage increased from twenty-eighth in the nation in 1872 to first in 1904. The value of industrial products rose from $11,517,302 in 1870 to $119,414,982 in 1900, although the percentage of industrial workers only grew from 1 to 1.5 percent of the population. Agriculture supplied the foundation for Texas industry, and the leading industry in 1870 was flour and grist mill products. This industry fell to third in 1900, surpassed by lumber, first, then cottonseed oil and cake. During the twilight of the nineteenth century, Texas was not yet an industrial state, and its economy was not based upon oil. Although oil had been discovered in Nacogdoches County in 1866 and near Corsicana in the 1880s, the most valuable mineral produced in Texas was still coal, which increased in value from $1,000,000 in 1870 to $5,300,000 in 1900.

As expected, Texans were still agrarian. On the farms and ranches, Texans faced fluctuating cotton prices: from 11.1 cents per pound in 1874 to 5.7 cents per pound in 1898; cattle prices varied from $18.87 per head in 1870 to $24.97 per head in 1900. Rural neighbors talked about interest rates, crops, ticks, abuses by the railroads, and the weather.
As agricultural development moved westward, the Texas frontier continued to shrink. When the era began in 1874, the western border of organized counties included Clay, Jack, Young, Shackelford, Eastland, Brown, Coleman, San Saba, Menard, Mason, Gillespie, Kerr, Bandera, Uvalde, Kinney, and Maverick. East of that line, Stephens, Real, and Dimmitt counties would be organized later. When the era closed, only twenty-four Texas counties remained to be organized. The decimation of the native Indians, the railroad’s expansion west, change in state land policy, and the lure of available land encouraged West Texas growth. Prominent in the development was the cattleman’s expanding frontier.

The agricultural revolution, cotton, agricultural science, and lumber were significant to Texas during 1874–1900. However, the most important, with the greatest political results, was the agricultural revolution. Prior to 1870, subsistence agriculture had been the way of life on Texas farms, and little cultural difference existed between the farm and the city. The farmer did not have a sense of inferiority. That situation changed. With the emergence of industry after the Civil War, United States farmers believed that they had been reduced to second-class citizens. As agricultural historian Gilbert Fite explained, the agricultural revolution, building up in the 1870s and 1880s and reaching a climax in the 1890s, was a rebellion against the power of big business and in favor of the restoration of the farmers as the most influential group in the United States. Many Southern farmers, including Texans, were caught in a trap of poverty and low productivity. A surplus of produce and labor, and the inability to raise their standard of living by themselves spurred farmers to organize the Texas Farmers’ Alliance and the Colored Farmers’ Alliance in a desperate effort to solicit government action.

While this agricultural movement caused political reforms, changes occurred in the production of cotton, the state’s principal cash crop. Cotton production moved from East Texas to the Blacklands and thereafter to the South Plains, where dryland farming required irrigation. There the prospects for profits overcame a prior anticotton bias, and cotton cultivation and processing became the major West Texas agricultural activity. Some astute cotton farmers knew that cotton production increased six times (from 516,000 to 3,438,000 bales), while the price declined by 50 percent.

Consistent with these hard-times developments, farm tenancy was the prevailing labor for cotton cultivation. From 1880 to 1900, the nation’s tenancy increased from 25.6 percent to 35.3 percent; whereas, tenancy on Texas farms increased from 37.6 percent to 49.7 percent. While not as extensive as in many Southern states, Texas tenancy still trapped whites and blacks alike in poverty. Low interest rates, affordable land and machinery, and long-term credit were not available to those misfortunates who performed the needed service of cheap labor.

Encouragement to farmers to diversify came from prominent agricultural journals such as the Texas Farm and Ranch and progressive farmers and scientists such as Charles Bruce Richardson of Henderson. They wanted Texans to build upon the existing foundation of field crops, fruits, nuts, and vegetables as well as to adapt new crops to Texas. They hoped that soil conservation and a stable, independent farm culture would result. While the demand for corn and wheat
increased during this era, the prices per bushel decreased. Wheat had a high of 94.4 cents per bushel and a low of 63.3 cents; corn, the state's staple crop, ranged from 40.9 cents to 29.7 cents per bushel. New varieties of soft winter wheat and the expansion of the wheat frontier to the Texas Blacklands increased production. Irrigated rice farming began near Beaumont in 1891. Other commercial crops included barley, rye, apples, peaches, and potatoes, but the extensive variety of commercial Texas agriculture seen in the twentieth century had yet to emerge.

Agricultural science enhanced the development of both private and public Texas lands during the era. Most of the time, private scientists took the lead in agricultural achievements. Thomas Volney Munson, a viticulturalist in Denison, established one of the most famous vineyards in the South. He received the French Legion of Honor for saving French vineyards from the dreaded disease phylloxera by grafting French vines onto phylloxera-resistant American grape rootstocks. Marcus Black made significant contributions to the peach industry and later to the Rio Grande Valley citrus industry. Emor Crew of Hempstead was an expert in the cultivation of celery, watermelons, and cantaloupes. John O. Meusebach experimented with developing new and better varieties of fruit as did Heford Halbert with pecans. The scientific investigations of Eduard Becker, William Falconer, and David and William Watson made Brenham an agricultural science center.

In 1887 the United States Congress passed the Hatch Act, which created the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, in conjunction with Texas A&M. The public was still skeptical of book-learning agriculture. The state had inadequate facilities and funding for scientific investigations. Despite the prevailing anti-intellectualism, Mark Francis performed significant investigations of infectious and epidemic livestock diseases (such as Texas Tick Fever). Frank Gulley contributed cotton and silage studies, and Henry Harrington analyzed soils and fertilizers. Scientific agriculture increased the quality of agricultural instruction at both college and adult education levels. These results marked the beginning of public agricultural reforms in Texas.

Agriculture stimulated not only education but industry. In 1870 Texas industry consisted principally of local blacksmithing, wagon-making shops, flour mills, and perhaps brick kilns or cotton gins. Total Texas industrial production consisted of only 25 percent of the total value of agricultural products.

John Spratt observed in The Road to Spindletop that throughout the era Texas remained an industrially backward state with manufacturing concentrated in specific areas. The ten leading manufacturing counties of 1870, headed by Galveston, Marion, and Harris, produced 44 percent of all Texas manufactured goods. Thirty years later, Marion County did not make the list, and Galveston fell to fifth. The ten leading manufacturing counties were headed by Harris—dependent upon cotton, lumber and railroads—Dallas, and El Paso. These counties produced 55 percent of the state's manufactured goods.

During this era Galveston principally engaged in the mercantile and processing industries. Houston, however, experienced a great boom because progressive leaders there had developed the state's first and most extensive railroad system and had encouraged manufacturing and a diversified industrial economy. As expected, most manufacturing occurred east of Austin.
Sometimes entrepreneurs boomed; sometimes they busted. For example, the boom town of New Birmingham, a thriving Cherokee County community between 1888 and 1892 with its Tassie Bell iron furnace, ceased to exist after showing great potential.

Lumber proved to be the leading Texas industry on the eve of the twentieth century. As late as 1880, few people realized the economic significance of the great pine forests of East Texas. By the end of the 1880s, lumber surpassed cotton as the region's principal product. Texas's leading forestry historian, Robert Maxwell, noted the following developments in explaining East Texas's booming lumber industry: (1) the great white pine forests were being quickly reduced; (2) settlers migrating westward onto the Great Plains needed lumber; (3) the Panic of 1873 was ending, causing a revival in business optimism, and (4) a surge in railroad construction. These needs for lumber overcame a previous prejudice against yellow pine, and entrepreneurs quickly entered the tall forests.

Dreams of wealth attracted entrepreneurs from many places. Some were Texas-born such as the tall, robust John Henry Kirby, a poor country lawyer from Peachtree Village, Tyler County, who created the state's first million-dollar corporation, the Kirby Lumber Company. Pennsylvanians Henry Lutcher and G. Bedell Moore came to Texas in 1877 and developed the first large saw mills. Not only did they become financially successful, they contributed generously to civic projects in Orange, Texas. From Germany came Joseph Kurth, who migrated to Polk County and then moved to Lufkin. He created the Angelina County Lumber Company and became a leading Republican. His son Ernest, aided by Charles Herty, created the Southland Paper Mill in 1936 and produced newspaper from southern yellow pine in 1940. Thomas L. L. Temple arrived from Virginia, built a small saw mill at Diboll, and developed a diversified lumber and wood products company, the Southern Pine Lumber Company. These companies bought or leased vast tracts of land, created company towns, and opposed labor unions. While the lumber barons could be generous, civic-minded, and religious, they could also be tough, shrewd businessmen.

Production of lumber increased from 3 million board feet in 1880 to more than 2 billion in 1907 Texas became a leading timber state, but greedy, shortsighted people cut more trees down than could or would be planted to replace them. In 1900, 537 saw mills operated in Texas.

Fortunately, W. Goodrich Jones, a Galveston-born, Princeton-educated banker in Temple, was concerned for the future. The earliest prominent advocate of forest conservation, Jones actively encouraged conservation, management, and replanting of forest lands in 1889. Yet he failed to prevent the last leg of the timber boom which paralleled the rapid railroad development. With Kirby's support, Jones's efforts had laid the basis for the revival of the lumber industry in the twentieth century.

One of the state's greatest reforms was in transportation. When the era began, the principal form of travel consisted of expensive and slow wagons and stagecoaches. Galveston served the state as its major port, but some goods flowed down the Red River to the Mississippi, leaving Texas at Jefferson. In 1870, Texas had only 583 miles of railroad track, most of which radiated from Houston. The lack of adequate transportation had been a major factor in the state's lack of progress.
The next decade witnessed the growth of interstate railroads plus numerous feeder lines, the construction of which was funded by liberal government subsidies. In 1872 the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad (Katy) crossed the Red River at Denison, and the next year the Houston and Texas Central Railroad was built northward from Houston through Hearne and Dallas to join the Katy, for the first time establishing major north-south rail transportation. Soon thereafter came the International and Great Northern Railroad, connecting Longview in East Texas with Hearne, Austin, San Antonio, and Laredo.

Part of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe system, the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad linked Galveston with Fort Worth and Amarillo. That line crossed Collis Huntington's Southern Pacific Railroad, which ran from Beaumont to El Paso, at Richmond. Also proceeding west from Longview to Dallas, Fort Worth, and El Paso was Jay Gould's Texas and Pacific Railroad. To the north and west, the Fort Worth and Denver City Railroad went through Amarillo, and in 1893 it joined the Burlington system. Before the end of the era, Texas had an interlocking, interstate chain of railroads.

Numerous feeder lines supplemented the major companies to form the rail system. They ranged from short lines that tied county seats to interstate lines to lines that connected railroads to the lumber industry. Rusk Countians believed that a train should always come locomotive, or head-first, into the county seat. Thus the Henderson and Overton Railroad backed from Henderson, the county seat, the sixteen miles to a rendezvous with the International and Great Northern at Overton and then went cow-catcher ahead back to Henderson.

Three railroads penetrated the lumber country, which had not been served prior to 1870. The Houston East and West Texas Railroad went from Houston to Shreveport via Livingston and Lufkin. Known as "The Rabbit" or "Hell Either Way Taken," it became part of the Southern Pacific system. The Texas and New Orleans ran northwest from Beaumont along the route of many East Texas saw mills to Nacogdoches and then on to Dallas. The third major line became the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad after the acquisition of John Henry Kirby's Gulf, Beaumont, and Kansas City. This railroad enabled Kirby and others to ship Texas longleaf pine timber to Great Plains cities and to Chicago.

The railroads had been aided by generous government land grants. Reflecting the wishes of businessmen and farmers, and following the examples of the United States Congress's Pacific Railway Acts of 1862 and 1864, the Texas legislature passed the Land Grant Act of 1876. This statute granted the railroads sixteen sections—a section is 640 acres—for every mile of track completed. Until 1882, forty railroads received 32,153,878 acres of land for 2,928 miles of track. Railroads had been promised 8 million more acres that were available. Small towns, dreaming of how much a local railroad would support their development, actively worked to attract a line. Towns provided tax exemptions, depots, and sometimes, although it was unconstitutional to do so, public bonds. As a result, Texas rose in railroad mileage to first in the nation with approximately 10,000 miles of track, some of which had been built with convict labor (much to the anger of citizens who wanted jobs). These railroads contributed significantly to the Texas population explosion of the era and provided new markets for agricultural products. On the other hand, the rail baron's price gouging, which made the farmers angry, intensified the state's agricultural revolution.
In concert with the lumber-railroad industrialization, labor unions developed in Texas. They were vigorously opposed by lumber barons and feared by Texas politicians who tried to industrialize Texas with New South appeals of cheap labor. Early Texas unions included the Screwmen’s Benevolent Association and the Knights of Labor. The former were longshoremen, who, with screw jacks, packed cotton bales into ocean-going ships on the Galveston wharfs. As historian James Reese’s article in the Southwestern Historical Quarterly (October, 1971) noted, the union had reached its peak by 1891. It was doomed because of the expansion of the cotton crop, the lack of skilled laborers, the competition from black longshoremen, and, above all, the introduction of high-density cotton compresses at the Galveston wharfs.

The Knights of Labor had existed nationally since 1866 and made their appearance in Texas in 1878. Reaching a membership of 30,000 members in 1885, the union appealed to most working classes. Welcoming women and blacks, the Knights worked to improve the livelihood of workers with better working conditions and regular pay days. They also supported political reforms such as direct election of United States senators.

In 1883 the Knights successfully struck against the Mallory Line at Galveston for discharging white union laborers and replacing them with black, nonunion workers. Other strikes were common, but the climax to the Knights’ activity in Texas came when longstanding disputes between railroader Jay Gould and the union erupted in the Great Southwest Strike. Violence flared from March 10 to May 4, 1886. Governor John Ireland called out the Texas Rangers, and the union conceded defeat.

The reform labor spirit died, and during the remainder of the era the newly created American Federation of Labor (AFL) placed more emphasis on skilled labor while seeking less political action and direct confrontation. By 1900 the AFL, with 8,475 Texas members, had become the leading advocate of business unionism. While Texas was neither a prolabor or highly industrial state, the AFL had adjusted to reality with practicality.

Although not national leaders in industry or education, Texans had sustained life and conquered the frontier. Such actions left little time for sophisticated education and long-range planning. During the Radical Republican era, public education had been provided by a highly centralized state school system that was headed by a State Superintendent for Public Instruction. Reacting against the Radicals, in the Constitution of 1876, reformers wanted the focus of education to be like the 1840s model, making parents totally responsible for their children’s education. Partially in order to have more hands during harvest time, partially as a reaction against black education, Texans abolished compulsory attendance. Schools became segregated. Blacks received the hand-me-down educational facilities of their local area. Community schools had no boundary lines and could not levy taxes. The dominant trend in education from 1874 to 1890, decentralization, had reached its peak.

Concerned about the impermanence of community schools and inadequate education, another reform movement’s work led to the passage of the School Law of 1884. This statute returned control of the state’s schools to an elected state superintendent, but the objectives of the law were infrequently met. For example, independent rural school districts rarely were created, few permanent buildings were constructed, and local taxes remained low.

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The values of urban and rural educators often conflicted. Urban teachers viewed education as a necessary ingredient for adulthood in an urban America in which knowledge could be quantified, produced, and standardized. On the other hand, the little country schoolhouse remained a prominent fixture in Texas education until at least 1926. Here rural residents lavished great time and personal labor that went far beyond money. The country school served as a civic center. While urban educators wanted longer school terms, better education for teachers, professional supervision, and higher pay, rural Texans expected the teacher not only to distribute knowledge but to be an example for students to imitate. In rural areas, teachers "lived in glass houses." Admirably, rural parents drilled their students in their studies and quickly enforced school discipline.

This conflict of values continued throughout 1874–1900. Fortunately, few teachers were radical political reformers. Educational historian Jack Campbell concluded that the political conservatism of teachers in this era, plus their political connections, saved public education from the fate that befall the Radical Republicans. Despite hard work and good intentions, national educators hardly held Texas education in awe.

Higher education also underwent reform and change. Until the reform era, higher education in Texas had been ecclesiastical and primarily for whites. Existing in 1874 were Baylor, Texas Christian, Austin College, Southwestern University, Lon Morris College, St. Mary's, Trinity, Mary Hardin Baylor, and two black colleges, Paul Quinn (1872) and Wiley (1873). Rustic frontier Texans frequently referred to these institutions as "dude factories," implying that a real man could make better use of his time and talents than wasting years in college.

This attitude changed. As a result of the Morrill Act of 1862 and with the leadership of A. J. Rose, worthy master of the state Grange, Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College began in 1876. Seven years later, The University of Texas started and soon had begun schools of law and medicine. Aided by revenues from public lands, these two universities became the state's most prominent public institutions. Meanwhile, Sam Houston State Normal School opened its doors for teachers in 1879. Prairie View A&M, authorized in 1876 and begun in 1879, provided a similar service for black teachers. This institution later expanded as a black land-grant university under the Texas A&M University system.

Twenty other colleges founded during this era continue to operate. These colleges reflected church preferences or the desire of local citizens for a college. In 1883, Blinn College began as a Methodist academy and later became the first county-owned junior college in Texas. East Texas State University started as a private institution but later became public. Tarleton State and the University of North Texas were founded during this era as were Howard Payne (Baptist), St. Edward's (Catholic), Texas Lutheran, Southwestern Adventists, and Texas Wesleyan (Methodist). From 1874 to 1900 the state had greatly increased its number of college graduates.

If change and reform existed in education, the most significant change occurred in government. The Constitution of 1876 and the construction of the state capitol symbolized this reform. The new constitution signaled that the Redeemers had gained control of Texas politics. These Democrats wanted to reform Radical Reconstruction rule by trying to industrialize the South.
reduce government, lower taxes, and oppose unions. In creating these reforms, they borrowed from the past as well as the present.

On September 6, 1875, ninety delegates came to Austin for the Constitutional Convention. This relatively undistinguished group included seventy-five Democrats and fifteen Republicans. Among them were twenty-nine lawyers, six blacks, and probably more than forty Grangers. Mediocre leadership prevailed except from famous Texas Ranger John "Rip" Ford and two rising political stars, John H. Reagan and Lawrence Sullivan "Sul" Ross.

When the constitutional convention ended on November 24, the resulting constitution reflected the dominant political spirit of the time. The new constitution reacted against the previous Radical constitution written in 1869 and favored a return to the ideals of Jefferson and Jackson, previously manifested in the Constitution of 1845. This meant frugal, limited government with greater democracy. The Constitution of 1876 reduced the governor's power and cut the office's annual salary by $1,000. In a strong demonstration of democracy, it provided for the popular election of the lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, comptroller, land commissioner, and treasurer. Judges were elected, and the terms of state senators reduced from six to four years. Grangers and Republicans helped defeat a poll tax that would have reduced voting rights for poor whites and blacks. But women remained without suffrage.

The conservative Constitution of 1876 borrowed from the past by returning the legislature to biennial sessions. The influence of the Constitution of 1845 can be seen in a debt ceiling of $200,000, a low tax rate, and the requirement that property be taxed in proportion to its value.

In land policy, the framers borrowed from precedents such as the United States Homestead Act of 1862. This act and the Texas acceptance of it provided for 160 acres of land to each head of a family. While such land grants could sustain life in East Texas, this acreage was insufficient in West Texas. In passing this law, Texas revealed its Southern tradition.

When presented to the voters, neither the Democratic nor Republican parties officially endorsed it. Backed by Governor Richard Coke and the Grange, the voters approved the constitution by a margin of 136,606 to 56,562. This poorly organized document, with its more than 63,000 words, would be one of the nation's largest constitutions. By 1989, the voters had approved 326 amendments. The Constitution of 1876 placed too many restrictions on the governor and the legislature; yet attempts to write a new constitution in 1919 and 1975 both failed.

During the 1876 constitutional convention, the framers recognized the need for a new capitol. The expanding population, the closing of the frontier, immigration, and the people's increased desire for better civic services resulted in W. H. Stewart's resolution to set aside 3 million acres of public land to raise money for a capitol. In 1879, the Texas legislature appropriated 3,050,000 acres and created a Capitol Board to sell the land. It became the famous XIT Ranch. Two years later, a fire destroyed the old capitol, and in a sense of urgency, Elijah Meyers, a talented, hardworking but self-destructive hypochondriac, became the architect for the state capitol. Work began in 1882. On May 16, 1888, the state dedicated a dynamic Renaissance Revival capitol. It measured 556.5 feet from east to west, 288 feet north to south, and was crowned by a Goddess of Liberty, which was positioned 311 feet above the Texas soil.
Writing in the October 1988 issue of the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, architectural historian Willard Robinson noted the pride of "far sighted Texas forefathers who had a vision to build an edifice that, a century later, still reflects their pride in the state and its representative government, and that will continue to impress countless generations to come."

Politics experienced significant change during this age of reform. Texas reformers included not only the Redeemers but also the agrarian reformers who battled for agricultural concerns and the political manifestation of their way of life. As historian Randolph Campbell concluded in *A Southern Community in Crisis* (1983) these local politicians of the 1870s were similar and sometimes the same people who controlled Texas politics prior to secession. Change was painful. Somewhere in the process were those ordinary Texans such as Smith County farmer Martin Thompson from S creech Owl Bend, who planted his vegetables and cotton, acquired land, went to church, mourned the tragedy of the Civil War until his death, and joined his ancestors in Asbury Cemetery.

The Redeemers replaced Republican governor Edmund J. Davis with Richard Coke, a Virginia-born, former Confederate captain and Waco lawyer whose supporters included the Grange. In Texas two years later, Coke, a Democrat, had decisively defeated Republican gubernatorial nominee William Chambers, 150,681 to 47,719. Manifesting the same electoral pattern, Democratic United States presidential nominee, Samuel Tilden, received 108,383 votes in contrast to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes's 45,013 votes. Nonetheless, in the highly controversial Election of 1876, Hayes became president of the United States. As governor from 1874 to 1877, when he resigned to replace Republican Morgan Hamilton in the United States Senate, Coke quickly removed Radical Republicans from office and sought to reduce the public debt of $3,167,335. But Texas had not recovered from the Panic of 1873, and expenses for Texas A&M, frontier defense, veterans' pensions, and interest raised the debt to $5 million. The failure of Coke's successor, Richard Hubbard, to resolve the debt issue prevented him from winning the governorship himself.

The same year that Coke went to Washington, the Greenback Labor party came to Texas advocating inflation. Calling for taxation of national bonds, a federal income tax, restriction of working hours in industry, better schools, railroad regulation, lower state taxes, and economical government, the Greenbackers posed more of a threat to the Redeemers than did the Republicans. In their first gubernatorial campaign, they nominated prominent Robertson County railroad and land developer William Hamman.

In the election of 1878, the Democrats knew Hamman well, for he had been active in their party. Deadlocked between Hubbard and Congressman James Throckmorton, the Democrats turned to Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court Oran "The Old Alcalde" Roberts. A popular and lovable person, but a boring speaker who advocated small government, Roberts easily defeated Hamman by a vote of 158,933 to 55,002. Some Republicans followed E. J. Davis's support of Hamman; others cast 23,402 votes for Anthony Norton. Two years later, Roberts defeated Hamman again, 166,101 to 33,721, after Davis made his last Republican gubernatorial bid by getting 64,382 votes. That year Texans supported Democratic nominee Winfield Scott Hancock for president (155,963 votes) over Republican James Garfield (57,275) and Greenbacker James B. Weaver (27,471).
As expected, the voters approved of Roberts’s Redeemer rule. A fiscal conservative, the tall, grey-bearded governor cut the debt by $1 million, reduced funds for frontier defense, cut ad valorem taxes by 40 percent, tried to improve the collection of taxes with the “bell punch” tax on liquor sales, cut funds for public education and offered public land for sale through the ridiculous Fifty Cent Law. Rampant land speculation resulted, and state government operated at a minimum level.

Republicans furnished little opposition to the Democrats during the period. In an effort to defeat the Democrats, Davis tried to fuse the Republicans with Greenbackers. With the approval of President Chester A. Arthur, Republicans supported the colorful orator and United States Congressman from Bastrop, George W. “Wash” Jones, a Greenbacker. Jones failed to attract a majority of farmers or laborers and lost the governor’s race in 1882 to John “Oxcart John” Ireland by 150,809 to 102,501 votes.

After Davis died, in 1883, the Republicans continued to play a minor role in Texas politics. Leadership passed to Norris Wright Cuney, a shrewd customs inspector from Galveston, and, until his death in 1897, the most important black leader of his day. As head of the Republican party, he solicited black support until they became a party majority. Yet Cuney could neither unite all the anti-Democratic forces under Republican leadership nor resolve black-white disputes within Republican ranks. Consequently, gubernatorial candidates Anthony Norton in 1884, Archelaus Cochran in 1886, Webster Flanagan in 1890, and William Makemson in 1894 all failed, as did Prohibitionist candidates opposing the Democrats.

Reformers became the status quo in a short time, and the Redeemers were no exception. Ireland, a resident of Seguin, who previously had been defeated in a bid for governor and United States congressman, was a man of integrity. Climaxing his political career with victories over Jones in 1882 and again in 1884, Ireland changed Robert’s land policies by stopping the rapid land sales, in order to preserve land for future homesteaders. He advocated tougher law enforcement but retained Robert’s frugal financial program.

In the gubernatorial election of 1886, a slender, sensitive state senator with a camp-meeting drawl, Lawrence Sullivan Ross, easily received the Democratic nomination. Aided by an astute campaign manager, George Clark, Ross easily won by defeating Independent candidate Marion Martin. A Jeffersonian Democrat, Ross believed in limited government and conservative spending. During his administrations taxes fell and revenues rose. Another tough law-and-order man, Ross wanted prisons to be self-supporting and promoted the Gatesville State School for Boys. Realizing that the state should expand its charitable institutions, his administration created a state home for Confederate veterans, a deaf, dumb, and blind institute for black youths, and a state orphans’ home. Although he desired to improve the Texas public school system, one of the nation’s poorest, the legislature failed to endorse Ross’s reforms for free text books and his desire that local taxes could support public schools. Ross had not been a reformer, but his administration included one of the era’s greatest advocates for change, Attorney General James Stephen Hogg.

Leadership in Texas had not been limited to the governor. In the United States Senate were Samuel Bell Maxey (1874–1887), frequently supported by railroad and business interests, and Granger favorite Richard Coke (1877–1895). Congressmen Roger Mills of Waco fought for

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low tariffs, and John H. Reagan authored the Interstate Commerce Act and supported the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and Sherman Antitrust Act. Alexander W. Terrell later sponsored the Terrell Election Law, which provided for direct party primaries. While these were mature politicians, the era also saw the rise of congressmen Joseph Sayres, Joseph Bailey, and John Nance Garner. The core of the powerful Texas delegation during the New Deal—Sam Rayburn, Tom Connally, Marvin Jones, and Hatton Sumners—was born in this era.

The principal reform movement came from the agricultural revolution. Fearing the rise of the city, farmers turned to agricultural organizations. The first of these, the Patrons of Husbandry, better known as the Grange, made its appearance at Salado in 1873. The Grange, under the leadership of Redeemers William W. Lang and Archibald Ross, favored the Constitution of 1876, state support for education, and railroad regulation. They promoted crop diversification. They also advocated fellowship and cooperative marketing through the creation of the Texas Cooperative Association.

When the Grange and the Greenback movements declined, farmers, desiring direct political action, turned to the Texas Farmers Alliance or to the Populist party and voted for reform Democrats such as James Stephen Hogg or the Populist Jerome Kearby. The Texas Farmers Alliance had a precarious beginning. Low prices, the failure of the Texas Cooperative Association, and unfavorable weather made farmers responsive to the message of economic independence proclaimed by Alliance recruiter S. O. Dawes. By 1886 the Texas Farmers Alliance boasted of 100,000 members, and a white Baptist minister, Robert Humphrey of Lovelady, had organized the Colored Alliance in Houston County as a parallel group. Favoring railroad regulation and inflation while opposing high interest rates, the Texas Farmers Alliance met in Waco during January 1877. Charismatic Charles Macune announced the merger of the alliance with the Louisiana Farmers Union. Thus began a movement that resulted in the Southern Alliance (Farmers Alliance and Cooperative Union of America), the largest and most influential nineteenth-century farm organization. Spreading like wildfire, the Southern Alliance attracted over 1.5 million members, advocated Macune’s subtreasury plan, and eventually became a significant element of the Populist party.

At that time the most powerful reformer in Texas politics was the 6'3", 300-pound James Stephen Hogg. A former East Texas journalist and an effective stump speaker who skillfully analyzed campaign audiences, Hogg made villains of fraudulent insurance companies and the railroads. Called a “reform leader, a progressive conservative,” by his able biographer, Robert Cotner, Hogg favored business, but he wanted honorable business. He encouraged reputable insurance companies but succeeded in driving out many companies which had, by fraud and misrepresentation, swindled Texans. Believing in strict and fair law enforcement, Hogg incurred the wrath and political opposition of legendary rancher Charles Goodnight when, as the attorney general, he tried unsuccessfully to convict Judge Frank Willis for favoring large ranches. Operators of large ranches who leased public lands knew that Hogg favored schools and rural settlers when he obtained the return of over half a million acres to the state.

The Texas Constitution of 1845 had opposed monopolies, and now Texas farmers, led by the Grange and the Alliances, called for regulation of businesses that monopolized the processing of agricultural commodities such as beef and cotton. Influenced by the Sherman Antitrust
Act, Hogg assisted Representative Alvin Owsley and Commissioner of Insurance Statistics and History, Lafayette Foster, to write a Texas antitrust law. Hogg then successfully prosecuted the Texas Traffic Association, which was a railroad pool that fixed rates. Although unsuccessful in obtaining effective railroad regulation and lower rates for small rural communities, Hogg made railroad regulation and reform a major political issue in the election of 1890.

In 1890 voters considered a constitutional amendment for a railroad commission and the gubernatorial candidacy of Jim Hogg. Although suffering opposition from the railroads, led by their talented and ambitious lobbyist George Clark, Hogg still won the Democratic nomination and then a landslide victory over Webster Flanagan by 262,452 to 77,742 votes. Voters approved a proposal to create a railroad commission by 181,954 to 73,106 votes. Thus, reformers had little reason to join the Populists, and Hogg proceeded toward leading a moderate reform program.

The major item on Hogg’s gubernatorial agenda was the railroad commission. Thomas J. Brown, Martin Crane, and Alexander Terrell led the Texas legislature in establishing it. Hogg then persuaded Reagan to resign as United States senator and become the first chairman of the Texas Railroad Commission. After 1891 the commission fixed schedules, reduced rates slightly, and reduced intrastate discrimination for over forty Texas railroads. The rails responded, again through Clark, who waged a vigorous gubernatorial campaign against Hogg in 1892. With support from most of the state’s newspapers plus railroad, banking, and big-business interests, Clark posed a challenge to reform. Thus, the Democrats were split. More liberal than Hogg were the Populists, advocating the subtreasury plan and rallying behind the candidacy of Christian gentleman Judge Thomas Nugent. When the election ended, Hogg emerged with 190,846 votes, followed by Clark with 133,395 and Nugent with 108,483 votes. While Hogg had not received a majority, he remained governor. Considering that Hogg and Nugent were reformers, the Texas voters had rejected conservatism.

Hogg’s second term (1893–1895) marked the passage of numerous reforms. Hogg promoted The University of Texas and Texas A&M, urged prison reform, and advocated the Perpetuities and Corporation Law, which gave land companies fifteen years to sell their land holdings, the Alien Land Act, which forced out-of-state landowners to sell their holdings, and the Stock and Bond Law, which gave the Railroad Commission power to regulate the sale of securities. On the negative side, the Hogg administration, acting within the spirit of the times, forced the railroads to provide separate facilities for blacks and whites.

After two terms Hogg tired of public life and desired financial security. He preferred business ventures to a seat as United States senator. Hogg wanted John H. Reagan to succeed him as governor, but Hogg’s clever campaign manager, Edward House, had other ideas. House supported Attorney General Charles Culbertson, who received the Democratic nomination. Culbertson defeated Nugent, the Populist, by 216,373 to 159,676 votes.

Culbertson provided a moderate reform administration characterized by strict law enforcement. He preserved the Hogg reforms by giving the Railroad Commission greater authority, and he supported tougher antitrust regulations. Culbertson favored judicial reforms, rigid economy, and black education. To prohibit the Corbett-Fitzsimmons boxing match, he called
the Texas legislature into special session. At the end of his governorship, Culbertson replaced Roger Mills in the United States Senate and was followed by another House-sponsored governor, the more conservative former lieutenant governor and United States congressman Joseph Sayers of Bastrop.

The Populist crusade culminated in the United States presidential election of 1896. During the final years of the agricultural revolution, Populist leaders actively solicited the black vote through the efforts of mulatto preacher John Ranger of Robertson County. In 1894 the Populists made gains in their gubernatorial vote and in black support, but far less than anticipated by their leaders. The nomination of William Jennings Bryan as the Democratic presidential nominee took the breeze out of the windmill, for the Texas Populists who then led the fight to prevent the national party from endorsing the great champion of free silver, Bryan, failed.

Texas Republicans joined with Populists in support of Jerome Kearby for governor. A famous criminal lawyer and former Greenbacker, Kearby waged an enthusiastic campaign. The Populist effort to form a biracial party failed as over 40,000 party members chose Culbertson over Kearby. It may be, as historians Cantrell and Barton suggest, that these white Populists could not accept the racial stigma associated with the Republicans. Nonetheless, Kearby lost to Culbertson by 298,568 to 238,688 votes, and Bryan on the Democratic ticket took the electoral vote by 290,526 to the Republican William McKinley’s 163,413 votes and the 79,572 votes the Populists could muster for Bryan’s candidacy. McKinley won the election of 1896 and became president of the United States. While white supremacy was strengthened in Texas, the Populists had made an unsuccessful appeal to all reform Democrats. Nor had the Populists carried all the black vote. Black Republican William “Gooseneck Bill” McDonald had campaigned vigorously for Culbertson. Thereafter, the Texas Populists followed the national party with internal disputes, but with the rise of national prosperity, both died.

With the end of the Culbertson administration, the reform period ended. What was its meaning? Texas had assumed control of its own political destiny again. The economy had changed much for the better, and the agricultural revolution—a great dream itself—had come, made its impact, and died. The direction of education had changed, especially in the orientation of higher education but also in the conflict of educational values. The transportation revolution provided by railroads, albeit with abuses, encouraged the rise of industries with conservative government and helped lay a solid foundation for the dreams of entrepreneurs. Dreams for labor and blacks had not been fulfilled. Although adequately reflecting the will of the majority, the Constitution of 1876 was too short-sighted and restrictive of state government. Tougher law enforcement remained a political objective. Political reformers, once in power, were changed through the efforts of James Stephen Hogg. Finally, even though the intensity of Hogg’s reform spirit failed to last, such has been the ebb and flow pattern of reform movements and dreams. But because of the reform movement, with its many well-intentioned leaders, Texas in 1900 was a better state than in 1874.