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Oligarchy in Control

Most citizens, black or white, had little voice in their own government. A few men controlled the Democratic Party conventions which nominated candidates for state office. Thus, they controlled the party. And since there was no longer an effective Republican Party to challenge them, they controlled the state.

For twenty years after Reconstruction, John M. Stone and Robert Lowry shared the governor's office with each other. County politicians passed positions around among themselves and stayed in office for years. Throughout the state, little was done without approval of the two chief Bourbon leaders, J. Z. George and L. Q. C. Lamar.

Oligarchy:
rule by a few.

Bourbon: a
politician who
clings to old
ideas.

A Powerful Politician

The most powerful man in Mississippi politics after Reconstruction was Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar. In 1849, Lamar moved from his native Georgia to Oxford, where his father-in-law was president of the new University of Mississippi. He practiced law and taught at the school.

In 1851, Lamar supported Jefferson Davis for governor. When Unionist candidate Henry S. Foote came to Oxford, Lamar took him on in debate. Although Davis lost the election, Lamar had caught the public eye.

In 1857 Lamar beat James L. Alcorn, a Whig, for Congress. He left his plantation and went to Washington. There he supported the South's position on slavery, but he knew that secession would mean war. "When the sun of the Union sets," he wrote, "it will go down in blood." He resigned from Congress with the rest of the Mississippi delegation, returned home, and wrote the Ordinance of Secession adopted by the state convention in January 1861.

Serving in the Confederate army until his health failed, Lamar was then appointed special envoy to Russia, England, and France. In 1872 he was elected to Congress, the only Democratic representative from Mississippi. He realized that if Northern public opinion could be softened toward the white South, Republican power in Southern states could be eroded. When Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts died in 1874, he got his golden opportunity. Before a packed chamber, Lamar praised the sincerity and idealism of Sumner, who had championed the cause of black civil rights. Lamar made a dramatic appeal for an end to sectional hatred, ending by saying, "My countrymen, know one another and you will love one another." Later Lamar spoke throughout the North on behalf of the Democratic Party, explaining white Southern attitudes.

Lamar played a major role in the "Revolution of 1875" in Mississippi. The 1876 legislature then chose him to be United States senator. Although as senator and, after 1885, as secretary of the interior he spent most of his time

in Washington, he was still the "kingpin" in Mississippi politics. As one historian put it: "The fate of candidates for office seemed to rest in his hands; his approval was almost sufficient to guarantee election—his disapproval, to insure defeat."

From 1888 until his death in 1893, Lamar served as associate justice of the United States Supreme Court. Lawyer, teacher, congressman, soldier, senator, cabinet member, judge—no other Mississippian ever held so much power on the state level and had so much influence on the national scene as L. Q. C. Lamar.

Economic Policies

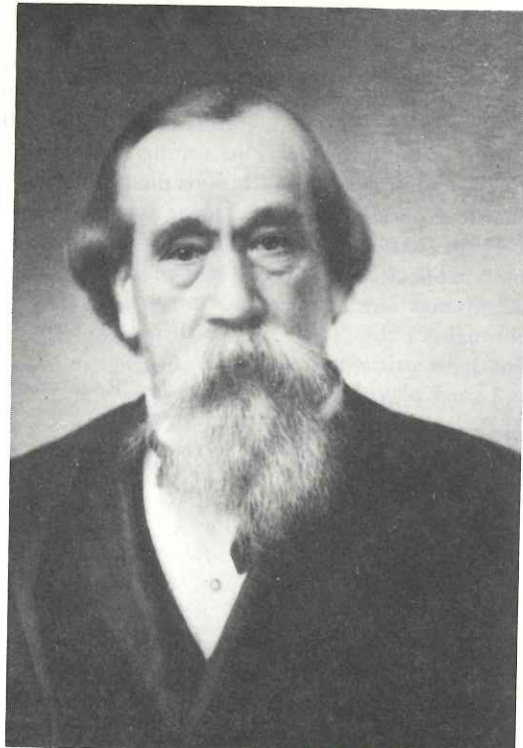
Conservative leaders believed in low government costs and low taxes. They abolished several state offices and set salaries of public officials at a low level. State expenses were cut from \$1,130,000 in 1875 to \$547,000 in the next year. As a result, government services to the people were sharply reduced.

The conservatives strongly supported industry. They told Northern investors about the low wages and unorganized workers in Mississippi. They gave tax breaks to corporations. But Mississippi's economy failed to grow. By 1883, there were only fourteen plants and mills in the state. Railroads did grow. A state railroad commission was established in 1884 to regulate freight and passenger rates, but citizens continued to complain. And Mississippi continued to be overwhelmingly rural.

Table 2.
Railroads

1882	1890
1078 mi.	2366 mi.

L. Q. C. Lamar.



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