

What other "Mississippi Plans" has our state contributed to the nation?

A group of white women organized a movement to improve race relations. Led by Bessie C. Alford of McComb, they set up the Mississippi chapter of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. By 1939 they had gotten people from all 82 counties to sign pledges opposing lynching; 54 sheriffs had signed. Their program of action became a model for the national organization and was called the "Mississippi Plan."

Chapter 12 tells of these hard times.

Politics and Economic Problems

Life was hard for Mississippians throughout the state. Tuberculosis and other diseases were widespread. Farm prices rose and fell but usually were at a low level. Most Mississippians lived in rural areas, and very few of them had telephones, electricity, or running water.

Demagogue: politician who stirs up prejudice to win office or influence.

Some leaders of the state took people's minds off these problems by raising emotional issues, such as fear of a black takeover. This type of politician, called a "demagogue," avoids the real issues and makes emotional promises to win votes. Impressed by the politician's personality, many people vote for him, but in the end, they still suffer from many of their old problems under the new politician.

The Man Bilbo

Some people named their sons after him; others hated him. He was called the "Bilbonic Plague" as well as "The Man of the People."

Theodore G. Bilbo was born on a small farm near Poplarville in 1877. He attended elementary and high schools in Poplarville and worked at odd jobs during his youth. Although he later claimed to be uneducated in order to identify with the mass of his followers, Bilbo attended the University of Nashville, Vanderbilt Law School, and the University of Michigan.

After opening a law firm in Poplarville, he served in the state senate from 1908 to 1912. As a result of his bribery scandal (see Chapter 11, page 199), the legislature asked Bilbo to resign during his term. He refused, was elected lieutenant governor in 1911, and served as governor from 1916 to 1920. As governor, Bilbo pushed for the consolidation of rural schools, the establishment of a bureau of vital statistics, a state tuberculosis hospital, and industrial schools.

From 1920 to 1928 Bilbo held no office and was reported to have no money. In 1928 "The Man" returned to politics and was again elected governor. Many state educators had opposed Bilbo throughout his career. He now had a chance to purge them from the state's schools. He fired hundreds of college teachers and administrators and replaced them with his friends.

a movement to im-
Alford of McComb,
the Association of
Lynching. By 1939
ties to sign pledges
l. Their program of
al organization and

oughout the state.
widespread. Farm
t a low level. Most
very few of them
water.

e's minds off these
h as fear of a black
ed a "demagogue,"
al promises to win
onality, many peo-
ll suffer from many
itician.

him. He was called

plarville in 1877. He
and worked at odd
uneducated in order
ed the University of
Michigan.

he state senate from
apter 11, page 199),
n. He refused, was
ernor from 1916 to
of rural schools, the
erculosis hospital, and

d to have no money.
in elected governor.
areer. He now had a
hundreds of college
friends.

During his second term of office, Mississippians obtained state commissions for the blind and for malaria control. However, the Depression struck. At the end of Bilbo's second administration the state was \$11,500,000 in debt.

In 1934 "The Man" ran for the United States Senate. Two young reporters described his campaign:

Clad in a pinkish suit that would have put a bookmaker to shame, Bilbo made a striking appearance as he stepped to the front of the platform. . . . He promised everything but a guaranteed entry to Heaven, and this wasn't necessary because his election would bring Heaven to earth.

Bilbo easily defeated his opponents and was elected United States senator. As senator, he was not simply a demagogue, for he did support most New Deal legislation designed to help cure America's economic problems. On the other hand, Bilbo tried to send blacks "back to Africa," opposed anti-lynching and anti-poll-tax bills, and spent much of his energy preaching race hatred and white supremacy.

In his re-election campaign of 1946, Bilbo advised: "Do not let a single nigger vote. If you let a few register and vote this year, next year there will be twice as many, and the first thing you know the whole thing will be out of hand." His efforts to prevent black voting were brought before a United States Senate investigating committee. Bilbo denied that his speeches threatened blacks or encouraged white violence. But some black people testified against Bilbo, showing the bloody clothes that they had worn when they were beaten while trying to vote.

Another Senate committee looked into Bilbo's dealings with war contractors and found that he had misused his office for personal gain. The Senate refused to seat him. During the debate, he became severely ill and returned to the South. He died on August 21, 1947, of cancer of the mouth.



Bilbo on the campaign trail.