

Section 1

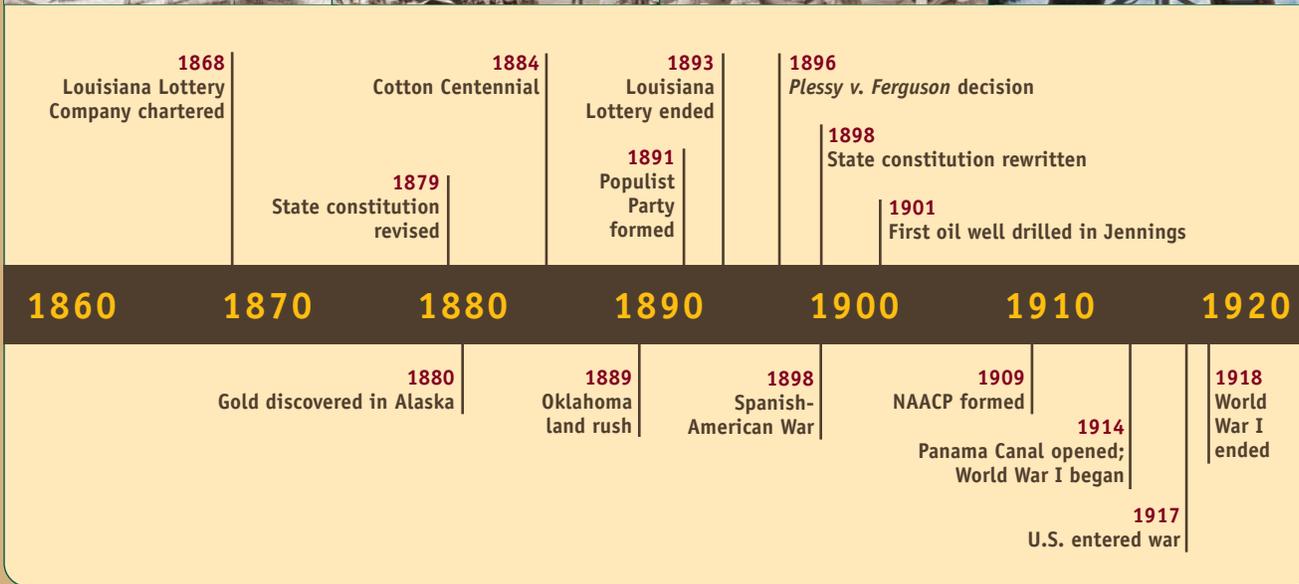
Political Control

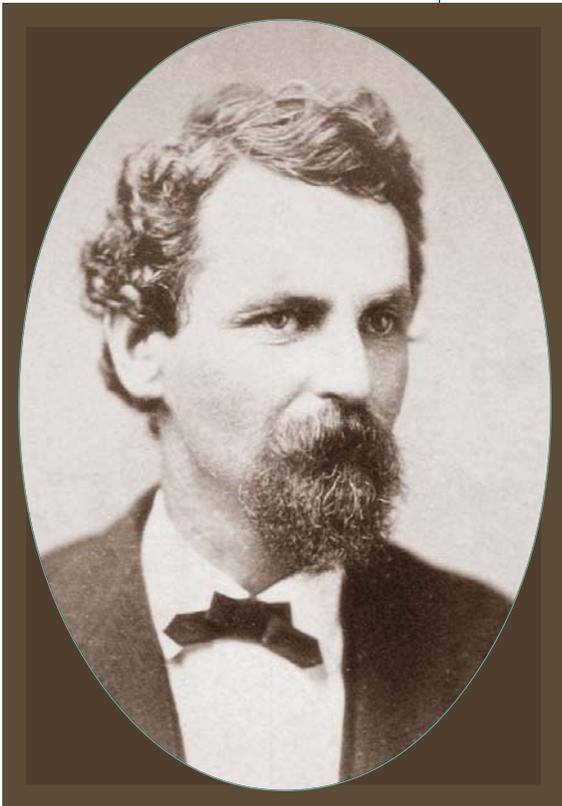
As you read, look for:

- the Bourbon Democrats,
- the influence of the Louisiana Lottery Company,
- the rise of the People's Party,
- the effects of the 1898 constitution, and
- vocabulary terms **Bourbons**, **reactionary**, **Louisiana Lottery Company**, **Farmers' Union**, **Populists**, **fusion movement**, **disfranchise**, and **grandfather clause**.

The departure of the U.S. Army at the end of Reconstruction signaled drastic changes in Louisiana. After 1877, the president and Congress no longer interfered in Louisiana's government. Political control shifted from the radical Republicans to the Redeemer Democrats.

Figure 26 Timeline: 1860–1920





Above: Francis T. Nicholls was elected governor in 1877. When the state constitution was revised, the governor's term was reduced to one year. This was a result of Nicholls's challenge of the Louisiana Lottery Company.

The Democratic Party soon directed Louisiana's political life. Without support from Washington, the Louisiana Republican Party could not maintain power. Without the strength of the Republicans, the political voice of the African Americans was slowly silenced.

The Bourbon Democrats

The Redeemer Democrats who were now the political leaders of Louisiana saw themselves as southern gentlemen. Others, less complimentary, called them **Bourbons**. This term referred to the kings of France, whose royal family name was Bourbon. Louis XIV, the most powerful Bourbon king, had said, "I am the state." This attitude was shared by the Louisiana politicians also called Bourbons.

The Louisiana Bourbons believed their background, education, and success meant they should lead the government. They wanted to continue their way of life and did not accept the need for change. These powerful men continued their prewar beliefs in states' rights and in their superiority to the former slaves. They were accused of looking to the past yet not learning from it.

Some of the Bourbons believed that a person who has wealth and power should help those who do not. Other Bourbons, however, wanted to keep their wealth for themselves and were not concerned about the needy. Those Bourbons could be labeled **reactionary**, meaning they strongly opposed progress. They usually described the best government as the least government. The reactionary Bourbons resented paying taxes for government programs. They reduced the money spent on public schools and on programs to improve the quality of life for fellow citizens.

The Democrats in Power

The Louisiana Bourbons did not create a new political party but built their power within the Democratic Party. As a result, the Democratic Party became the party of whites in the South.

Whites held political power by controlling the votes of the blacks. They made economic or physical threats. An employer told his workers how to vote. If they refused, they could and did lose their jobs. They were also threatened with violence.

If necessary, the actual votes were simply ignored to give the Democrats the victory. The Returning Board was no longer around to check the votes; it had been eliminated when the Republicans lost power.

The first Democratic governor after Reconstruction was Francis T. Nicholls, elected in 1877. This former Confederate officer believed those in power should work for the good of all. Even an African American newspaper said he tried to be just and impartial, but other politicians thought he was too generous toward blacks.

Nicholls had high ideals and was not afraid to take a stand. He criticized some of the wealthy Bourbons in his party for not paying their property taxes. Then, Nicholls challenged the Louisiana Lottery, a private company that had operated in Louisiana since 1868. He believed this corrupt group should be shut down, but he was no match for the powerful lottery. There were more lottery supporters than opponents in the legislature.

The Louisiana Lottery

In 1868, the state had granted a 25-year charter (permission to operate) to the **Louisiana Lottery Company**. The Louisiana Lottery was a private company set up to make money for the company instead of the state. In fact, the only benefit the state received was a small payment of about \$40,000 a year for the charity hospitals. This was less than 1 percent of the income the lottery made. It usually brought in more than \$20 million a year and kept at least half of that as profit. During that same period, the average worker made \$2 a day.

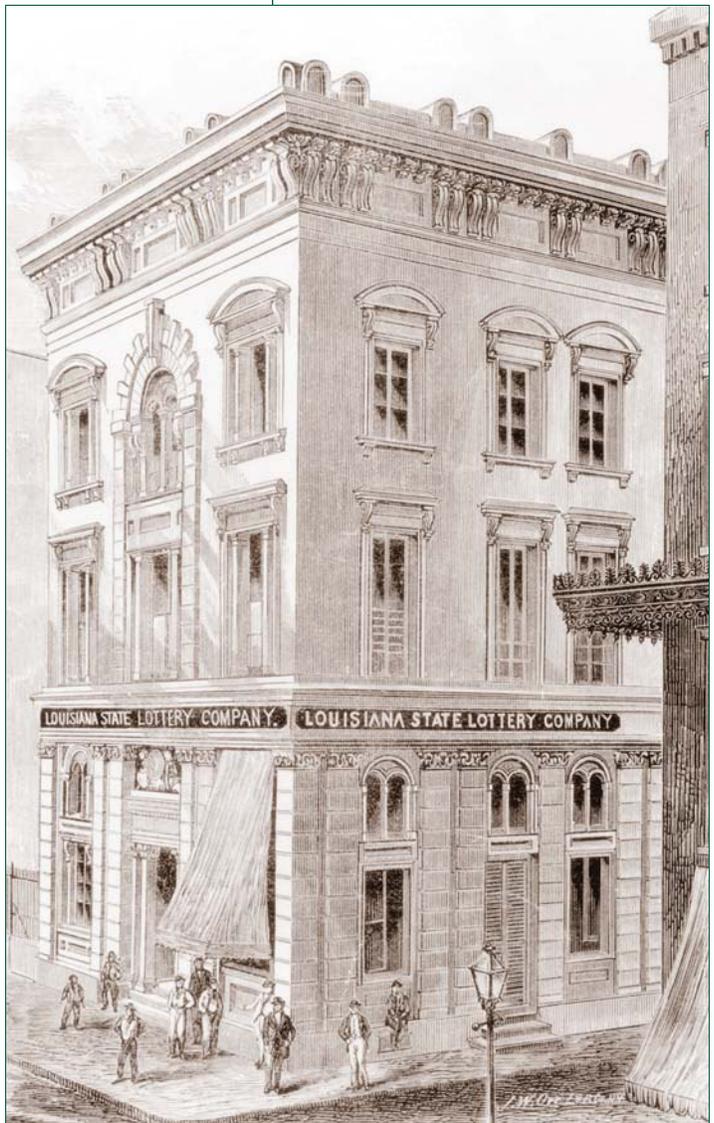
The lottery drawings were probably not rigged. Cheating seemed unnecessary because the company was making so much money. To appeal to the public, two old Confederate generals supervised the drawings. Advertisements announced that honest “orphan boys” drew the winners.

During Reconstruction, the lottery company became very powerful. It gained political influence over the radical Republicans and later the Democrats by contributing large sums of money to elected officials. Opponents called the money “bribes” rather than campaign contributions.

The lottery controlled the Reconstruction government so completely that a

top lottery official became the state treasurer. E. A. Burke was broke when he arrived in New Orleans after the war and took a \$1-a-day job. He claimed to be a former Confederate army major, but his critics claimed that he had actually been a Yankee spy. Burke is sometimes called the “ultimate carpetbagger.”

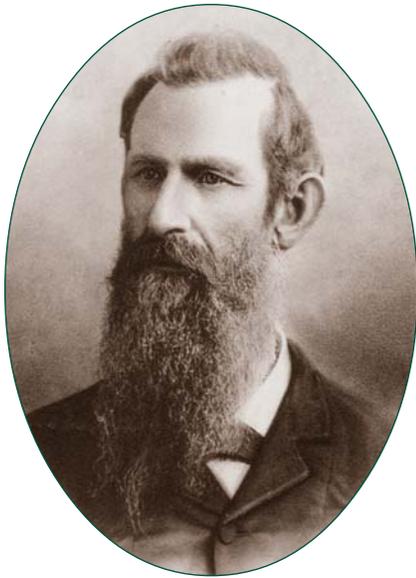
At the same time Burke served as state treasurer, he expanded his in-



Above: The Louisiana Lottery Company was a private, for-profit organization. This is an engraving of its headquarters in New Orleans.

Lagniappe

At the time, the Louisiana Lottery Company was the largest in the country, and its tickets were sold nationwide.



Above: Murphy J. Foster ran as an anti-Lottery candidate. His election as governor ensured the death of the Louisiana Lottery.

Lagniappe

The grandson of Murphy J. Foster—also named Murphy J. Foster but better known as “Mike”—became governor of Louisiana in 1996.

fluence on the state as the managing editor of the *New Orleans Times*, a newspaper owned by the lottery. This paper later merged with another, increasing its political strength.

The Constitution of 1879

Lottery officials pushed for a convention to write a new state constitution. They wanted the lottery to be protected by the state constitution.

In the new 1879 constitution, the lottery charter was renewed. Lottery supporters also used the new constitution to reduce the governor’s term by one year. This punished Governor Nicholls for fighting the lottery by ending his term early.

The writers of the constitution of 1879 intended to change the radical Republican direction of the state government and return to home rule in Louisiana. But they did not take the right to vote away from the African Americans because they feared the reaction of Congress. They were also afraid that if they did, their workers might leave the state. But some of the rights that had been put into place by the constitution of 1868 were removed. For example, the equal rights amendment was not included in the 1879 constitution. To separate black and white students, Southern University was established as a black college.

Other constitutional changes were made to please those in power. The property tax was lowered, and more restrictions were placed on borrowing money for state improvements. The powers of the governor were increased while those of the legislature were decreased. Separate public school systems were established for both races, but they were not well funded.

The End of the Lottery

In 1888, Francis T. Nicholls returned as the governor. He still strongly opposed the lottery and its hold on the state. More and more people agreed with Governor Nicholls’s opposition to the lottery.

In 1889, a scandal involving the lottery was uncovered. E. A. Burke was accused of stealing more than a million dollars of state funds while he was the state treasurer. He fled to Central America, and the money was never recovered. Burke had already established business ties in Honduras and operated a mail-order lottery from there.

Despite the scandal, the Louisiana Lottery expected to continue to operate. In fact, in 1890, it offered to give the state \$1.25 million a year if the legislature extended its charter. The legislature voted to ask the people to renew the lottery in the 1892 election. Governor Nicholls refused to sign the bill saying, “At no time and under no circumstances will I permit one of my hands to aid in degrading what the other was lost in seeking to uphold . . . the honor of my native state.” (Nicholls had lost one hand and one foot in a Civil War battle.)

The 1892 campaign for governor centered on lottery supporters and opponents. In the election, the voters chose Murphy J. Foster as governor. Foster had

campaigned against the lottery as a “polluting monster” and promised to remove this corruption. The voters also rejected the amendment to renew the lottery’s charter. The Louisiana Lottery Company finally ceased its operations in the state in 1893.

The Populists

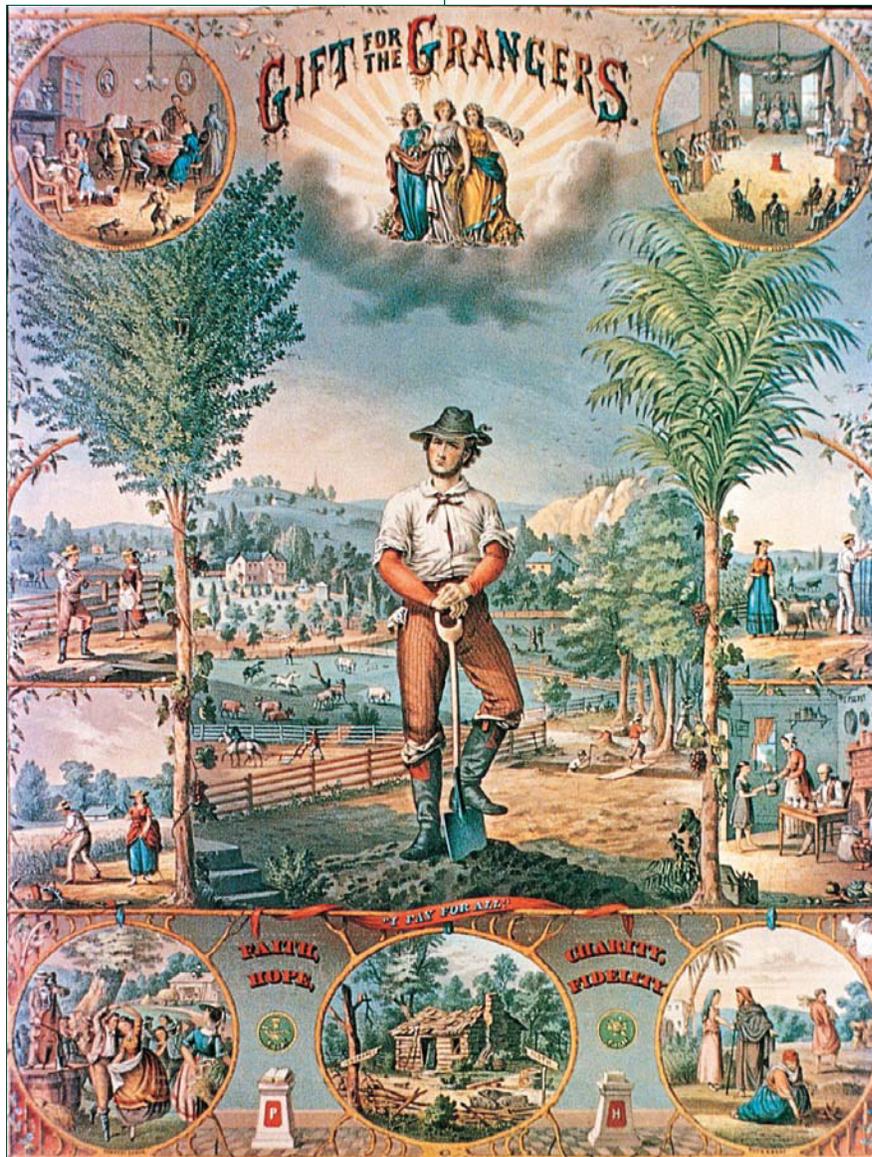
After the Civil War, new political ideas spread across the United States. America’s farmers led a new political movement.

The farmer’s place in the economy had changed. The independent, self-sufficient farms were disappearing. In Louisiana, cotton became the farmers’ main crop, and their economic future depended on the crop lien system. They borrowed against next year’s crop to pay this year’s expenses. As a result, farmers got caught in a credit cycle. Many factors, some beyond the farmers’ control, affected their income.

It was natural for farmers to get together and talk about their mutual problems. In 1867, an organization called the National Grange was founded to help farmers. This group was never very strong in Louisiana, but other farm organizations soon developed. One group that gained members in Louisiana was the Farmers’ Alliances, which started in Texas in 1876. This movement was followed some years later by the **Farmers’ Union**, set up in 1888.

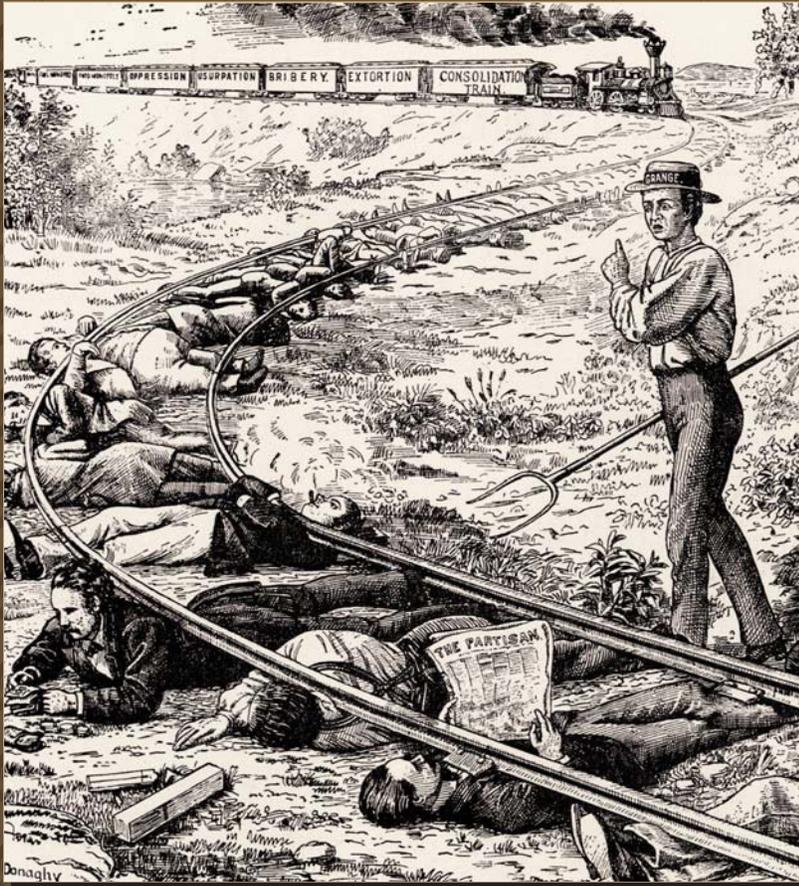
The Lincoln Parish Farmers’ Club was organized when a group of farmers discussed their problems after church one day. Their leader said they proposed to “protect the farmers of our country from these thieving pirates of modern civilization.” Farmers’ Union chapters or branches organized in several parishes. In Caddo Parish alone, there were six chapters of the Farmers’ Union.

The Farmers’ Union urged members to work together to keep costs down. For example, a merchant might agree to keep the costs reasonable in return for the business of Farmers’ Union members. Farmers in Sikes in Winn Parish operated their own cooperative store, while the Farmers’ Union in Grant Parish expanded its efforts to include a private school.



Above: This “Gift for the Grangers” poster depicts the contributions farmers made to the nation’s welfare. The Grange was one of several farmers’ organizations formed in Louisiana.

The Art of Politics



This political cartoon is called “The Grange Awakening the Sleepers.” The farmer on the right, representing the Grange, is trying to awaken the public (*sleeper* also refers to the wooden cross-ties that support railroad tracks) to the oncoming train, which represents corruption in the railroad industry. Railroad monopolies, represented by the “Consolidation Train,” meant it cost farmers more to ship their goods to market, because of a lack of competition. The Populists wanted the government to own the railroads.

These organizations of American farmers led to a new political party in 1891—the People’s Party, whose members were called **Populists**. The party’s statement of beliefs said, “We believe that the powers of government should be expanded . . . to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.” The Populists believed that middlemen and manufacturers were taking too much of the farmers’ profit. They wanted the government to help the small farmers. They promoted government ownership of the railroads so that transporting goods to market would not be so expensive. The Populists also wanted changes in money and banking.

Fusion

When Louisiana farmers and other voters left the Democratic Party to become Populists, political strength in the state shifted. The sugar planters also stopped supporting the national Democratic Party because President Cleveland did not support a protective tariff on sugar. They began supporting the Republicans.

In 1896, the Republican planters decided to oppose the Democratic candidate for governor. John Pharr, a wealthy sugar planter himself, was their choice. Pharr sought and received the support of the Populists.

The Republicans and the Populists saw an advantage if they joined together. This political strategy was called the **fusion movement**. The fusionists—the Republicans and the Populists—hoped to end Democratic control in the state. The sugar planters could provide Republican votes with their plantation workers.

The Democrats expected to re-elect Murphy J. Foster. The campaign that followed was bitter. Threats and violence inflamed the voters, and accusations of fraud followed the Democratic victory.

The Constitution of 1898

The 1896 election and the fusion movement threatened Democratic control. The Bourbon Democrats reacted to this threat by writing another new constitution. One delegate described the constitutional convention as being like a family meeting of the Democrats. They intended to use the new constitution to maintain their control of the state, without bringing down federal disapproval.

The new constitution was much like the previous one. The major addition was the requirement that voters own property, be literate (able to read and write), and pay a poll tax. These restrictions **disfranchised** (took the right to vote away from) the freedmen.

The Democrats, however, did not want to lose any white voters because of the new restrictions. A special section of the constitution, called the **grandfather clause**, stated, "No male person who was on January 1, 1867, or at any date prior thereto entitled to vote . . . shall be denied the right to register and vote in this state by reason of his failing to possess the educational or property qualification prescribed by this constitution." In other words, white males would not have to pass a literacy test or own property.

The freedmen were not covered by the grandfather clause because they did not receive the right to vote until 1868. The restrictions had the intended result. In 1896, there were over 130,000 African Americans registered to vote in Louisiana. But by 1900, that number had shrunk to about 5,300. In 1904, there were only 1,300 registered black voters in the state.



Above: President Grover Cleveland was not popular with Louisiana planters because of his opposition to a protective tariff.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Why did the Bourbon Democrats believe they should lead the government?
2. What did Governor Nicholls believe that people in power should do?
3. How did the Louisiana Lottery Company gain and keep its power?
4. What was the purpose of the Farmers' Union and other similar organizations?
5. Did the Populist Party want to expand or reduce the powers of government? Why?
6. What happened to the freedmen's right to vote in the constitution of 1898?

Lagniappe

One store owner in central Louisiana charged 20 percent interest on credit accounts, which was considered a good rate at that time.