

Section 4

The Transition in the Countryside

This section will help you meet the following objectives:

8.5.01 Analyze the importance of the agriculture, textile, tobacco, and furniture industries to the economic development of the state.

8.5.05 Assess the influence of the political, legal, and social movements on North Carolina.

As you read, look for:

- problems faced by the state's farmers
- organizations founded to help the state's farmers
- the Fusionist movement
- the 1898 election and its results
- the Spanish-American War
- vocabulary terms **furnishing merchant, interest, supply, Farmers' Alliance, farmer cooperative store, money supply, collateral, Populist Party, Fusionists, white supremacy**



Above: As farming became more difficult, many farmers had to borrow money from furnishing merchants to keep going. This is Murray and Mingus General Merchandise in Catawba, established in the 1890s.

While North Carolina's urban

population grew after Reconstruction, the vast majority of the state's residents continued to live in the country. In fact, the farming communities were growing as fast as the towns. This created a crisis. By 1890, there were so many farm families that there was not enough "good land," land that was fertile enough to raise good crops. As a result, many farm families lost money for years. Some farmers actually lost control of their finances and even their land and homes.

More Farms, Same Amount of Land

How North Carolina farming got so crowded can be understood by looking at the growth of Stanly County, located in the Uwharries. There were just over 800 farms there in 1850, when North Carolina was finally becoming prosperous. Because the state was no longer "Rip Van Winkle," very few of these families left the county and moved west. After the Civil War, when the children of these families grew up, they too stayed in the



area and tried to farm. By 1890, Stanly had more than 2,000 farms, and those farmers were plowing twice as much land as they had before. Much of this newly farmed soil was not very productive. Farmers just starting out had a harder time to make things grow than had their fathers and grandfathers. To compensate, farmers went to town and borrowed money from **furnishing merchants**—storekeepers who let them buy fertilizer, seed, tools, and other supplies to make a crop.

The furnishing merchants in towns and at new country crossroads stores all over the state were happy to provide credit. The farmers who borrowed from the furnishing merchants had to pay **interest** (a charge for borrowing money), which made the merchants even more money. Plus, many merchants loaned money and materials to farmers only if the farmer sold his crop to that particular merchant. That put the farmer at a disadvantage, since he did not have the ability anymore to shop around for the best price.

Falling Crop Prices

Borrowing in town created a second problem for farmers. Since they had to borrow, they increased the size of their crops to help pay back the loans. This was particularly the case in the 1890s. Cotton production went from 336,000 to 460,000 pounds. More significantly, because of the appeal of cigarettes, tobacco production grew from 36,000 pounds to 128,000 pounds. One of the rules of the marketplace is that the more there is of

Above: In the late 1800s, cotton production soared. These cotton bales are waiting for shipment at the Kinston railroad station.

Did You Know?

James W. Cannon of Concord went farm to farm in Stanly County, soliciting business. Cannon eventually started Cannon Manufacturing Company, which later became Fieldcrest Cannon.

Did You Know?

In 1890, the price of cotton dropped to an all-time low of 5 cents a pound.

a commodity—what economists call **supply**—the lower the price will be for that commodity. By the 1880s, North Carolina farmers were hurt in the pocketbook by the fact that so many of them were doing the same thing. The more they grew each year to pay off their loans to merchants in town, the less they got back for all their hard work.

Thousands of farmers throughout the state—both black and white—went broke during the 1890s. They often could not pay off the loans to the merchants when their harvest was sold. The merchants then “carried over” their debt to the next spring. This also hurt the farmers, because their debt kept getting bigger. The farmers then logically bought more seed, tools, and fertilizer to plant even bigger crops. When thousands continued to do the same thing, the price they received for cotton and tobacco continued to be too low to pay off their debts.



Above: This building is a typical sharecropper home in the late 1800s. This particular house is at Poplar Grove north of Wilmington, a plantation where peanuts rather than cotton or tobacco were grown.

Growing Numbers of Sharecroppers

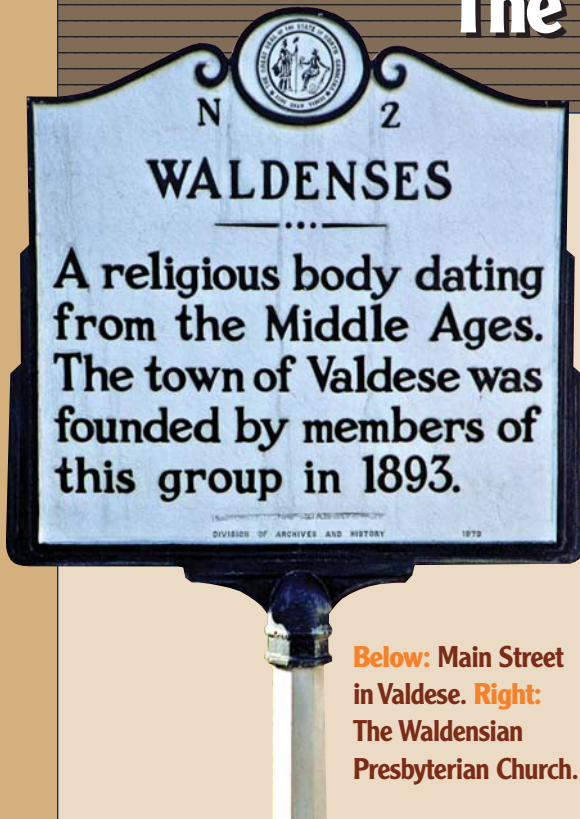
While merchants in town continued to make profits that they put into factories, many white farmers fell into the same sharecropping arrangements that African Americans had been forced into during Reconstruction. Almost 93,000 farmers were sharecroppers in 1900, compared to 53,000 in 1880. Sharecropping, remember, was an arrangement between the landowner and the farmer to split the profits from the harvest of a particular crop. Because the landowner wanted the most for his investment, he typically required

the farmer to plant one crop only. That crop was usually cotton or tobacco, which was sure to sell and be used in the state’s factories. This hurt sharecroppers, for they usually had to borrow even more money to buy food and clothing for their families while they grew the crop. Thus, the debt increased again. In many areas where cotton and tobacco farming was booming, the majority of farmers were sharecroppers.

Thousands of families became so discouraged they moved to town to take industrial jobs. John Frye, for example, was one of those young men from Stanly County who tried to make a living off the land. Frye had been wounded at Gettysburg and was partially disabled. He inherited about eighty acres—barely enough for himself, let alone his four growing sons. Frye borrowed year after year for fifteen years, seldom making any money. In 1885, he lost his land and continued on as a sharecropper. In 1890, Frye finally packed up his family and moved to the Odell cotton mill in Concord. All four of his sons became weavers.

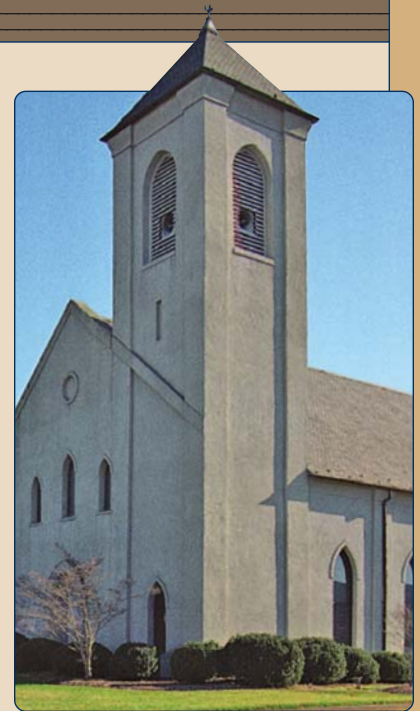
HISTORY BY THE HIGHWAY

The Waldensians



Below: Main Street in Valdese. **Right:** The Waldensian Presbyterian Church.

A Protestant religious group known as Waldensians moved from the Italian Alps to North Carolina in 1893. They were the only significant group of immigrants to come into the state during this period. In the early 1900s, the Waldensians established the town of Valdese in the foothills. When they found that farming was not thriving in the state, they built their own factories and knit socks and made bread. The Waldensians continued to have their own church and customs through the twentieth century.





Top: Leonidas L. Polk helped launch the Populist Party in North Carolina. **Above:** The Farmers' Alliance tried to ease farmers' economic problems by creating cooperative stores. Shown here is an advertisement for a tobacco product made by the Farmers' Alliance.

North Carolina's leaders were aware by the 1880s that most farmers had problems. One of the reasons North Carolina College of Agricultural and Mechanical Arts was opened in 1889 was to help farmers learn new methods to grow crops more efficiently. Most farmers, of course, could not afford to send themselves to college, so they organized into groups of like-minded neighbors to help one another. By the 1890s, the state's farmers had become angry enough to turn their organization into political protest groups.

Farmers' Organizations

In the 1880s, one North Carolinian became the champion of farmers throughout the state. Leonidas L. Polk, an Anson County native, became the first commissioner of agriculture for the state. After serving in that post, Polk became editor of *The Progressive Farmer*. This Raleigh newspaper tried to give farmers good advice about planting and help them solve their problems. When the **Farmers' Alliance**, which had been started in Texas by troubled farmers, reached North Carolina in 1887, Polk headed it. By 1890, Polk had moved to Washington, D.C., to become the national head of the organization, in effect, the nation's chief farm leader. Polk died soon after. Had he lived, he might have been a strong candidate for president of the United States in 1892, since so many farmers across the nation were experiencing the same problems that North Carolina faced.

The Alliance first tried to help farmers by opening **farmer cooperative stores**. These stores bought fertilizer and other supplies in bulk, which lowered the cost. Too many farmers, however, were already so far in debt that they could not take advantage of the offers. Most of the co-op stores did not survive.

Polk and other Alliance leaders tried to find a solution to the farm problem. They believed there was not enough money to go around in the nation to give farmers their fair share. The nation was rapidly building cities and factories in the North, and the **money supply** (the amount of currency and coin available for each person) was actually going down each year. If there was more money to go around, farmers would be able to borrow it at a cheaper rate. Plus, if farmers had more money in their pockets, they could grow less, which would make farm prices go up.

The Alliance leadership asked Congress, and in particular Senator Zeb Vance, to pass laws that would allow the government to print new money and loan it to farmers. The farmers would use their crops as **collateral** (something pledged to guarantee the repayment of a loan). Vance did not like the idea, since crops can eas-

Did You Know?

In 1900, the Farmers' Alliance had more than 2,000 chapters and 90,000 members in North Carolina.

ily be lost to weather or mismanagement. After Polk's death, angry Alliance leaders decided that farmers needed to elect their own congressmen to pass the new laws. Many Alliance members joined a new political group, the **Populist Party** or People's Party, to accomplish this.

The Fusion Movement

The Populists in North Carolina ran candidates for the state legislature (which still chose U.S. senators) and for Congress throughout the 1890s. Most Populists had once voted for Democrats, the party that had cancelled many of the reforms of Governor Holden. When the Populists did not win in 1892, the Republicans in North Carolina offered to help them win the 1894 election, in return for restoring some of the Holden reforms. And so, the Republicans and the Populists nominated one set of candidates, with each party providing half of the candidates. Together, they swept the state.

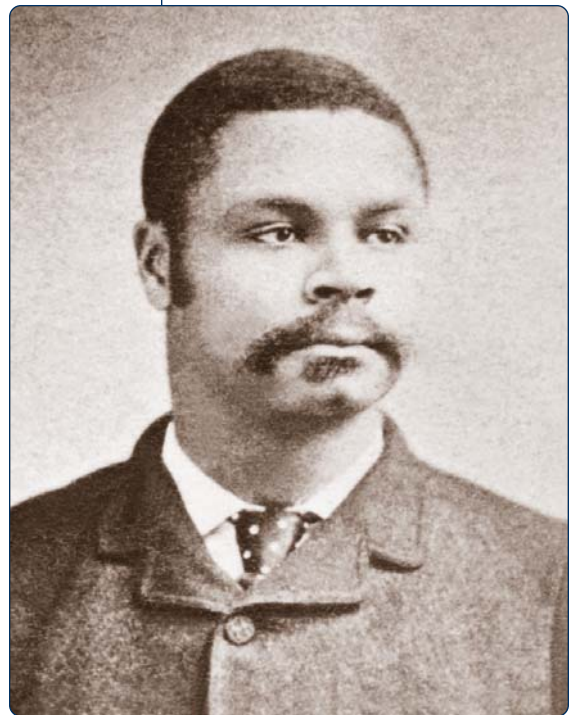
The **Fusionists**, as they were called, controlled North Carolina from 1895 through 1898 and reintroduced many of the old Holden reforms. The legislature made county government elective again, allowing the people of a county to choose their own justices of the peace. Fusionists also passed an election law calling for an election judge from each party to be present when votes were counted. All three political parties could now be sure that they were getting a fair count. The Fusionists wanted to improve schools in rural areas, but the farmers were not willing to pay more taxes.

Fusionist reforms clearly restored the fortunes of Republicans in the state. White voters in the Mountains had an easier time at the polling place, as did black voters from the Coastal Plain. As a result, in the dozen counties where blacks were the majority, they elected African American officials. All thirty-two justices of the peace elected in Edgecombe County were black. Most of the city officials in Wilmington were black.

The reformers also attempted to help the poor of both races. They passed a law making it easier for someone to pay back their debts without losing their land. The legislature even discussed taking tax money away from the public universities and sharing it with the private colleges, to give people more choices in education.

The 1898 Election

All the Fusionist ideas alarmed the Democrats. If Republicans gained a new foothold, they feared the state would be plunged back into "Negro Rule," and Democrats would lose their power. In particular, the leaders in the east saw they would no longer be able to control their own legislators and congressmen. Eastern Democrats, led by Furnifold M. Simmons of New Bern and Charles B. Aycock of Goldsboro, decided they would repeat the same type of racial slurs that they had used during



Above: In 1896, George Henry White was elected as the Fusionist candidate from North Carolina's Second Congressional District. At the time, he was the only African American representative in Congress. He was reelected in 1898.

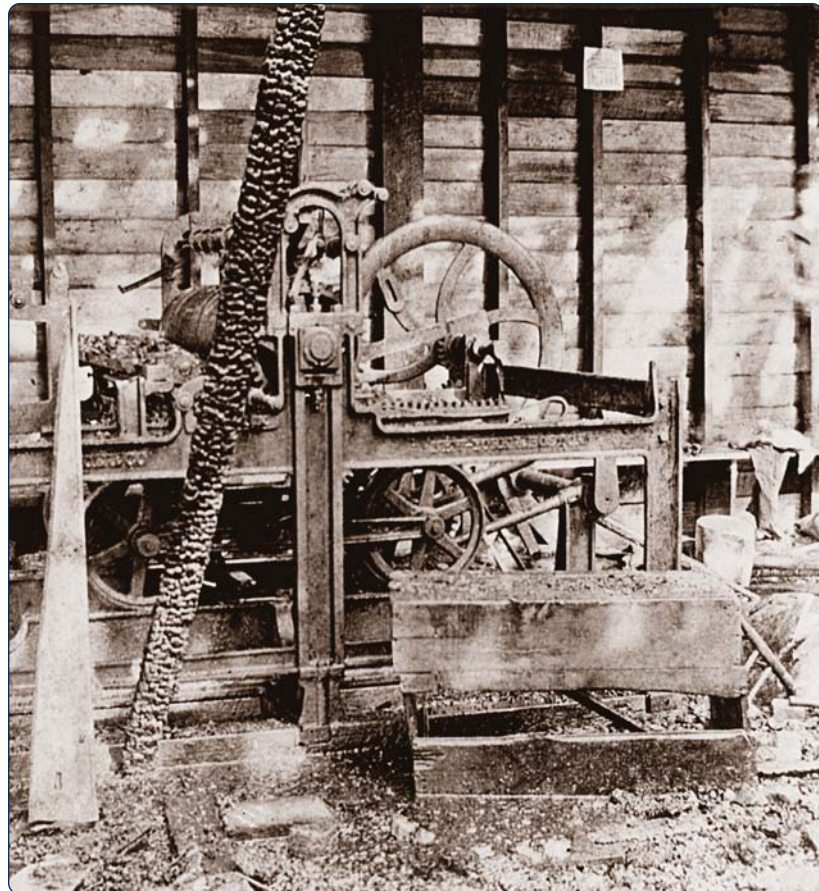


Above: Furnifold M. Simmons, a former congressman, was the mastermind of the Democrats' 1898 campaign. **Right:** During the Wilmington race riot of 1898, a white mob burned the offices of a black newspaper and attacked black neighborhoods.

Reconstruction to recapture unhappy white voters. With their white supremacy campaign, the Democrats successfully took back control of North Carolina. **White supremacy** is the belief that the white race is superior to the black race, or any other race.

The white supremacists organized clubs in every county in the state and, through sympathetic newspapers like *The Charlotte Observer* and *The News and Observer* in Raleigh, spread any stories they could about blacks making mistakes or committing crimes. They were helped when a white girl, Emma Hartsell of Cabarrus County, was murdered. A neighborhood posse of whites and blacks immediately lynched two black men found with blood on their shirts. Emma's father had been a Populist; when he publicly regretted ever voting for Fusionists, the tide turned. As racial tensions got worse throughout the state, the Democrats won a narrow victory and took back the legislature from the Fusionists.

Just after election day, violence swept through Wilmington, as white mobs took vengeance on African Americans who had long run the city. Republican officials were given hours to take a train out of town, black businesses were burned, and perhaps as many as sixty African American residents of Wilmington were murdered. Some of the bodies were thrown in the Cape Fear River. This episode became known as the Wilmington race riot.



CAROLINA CELEBRITIES

Charlie Soong

North Carolina has long had a close connection to the vast Asian nation of China. For example, Matthew T. Yates of Raleigh was the first Christian missionary to go into that country, in 1847. He served for forty years, and hundreds of other state residents went there to do similar service.

The most famous connection was a Chinese native who came to North Carolina as a refugee. He used the lessons he learned and the connections he made in North Carolina to create the most powerful family in China in the first half of the twentieth century.

Soong Jiashu (pronounced “soon yal-shue”) was one of the impoverished Chinese who came to the United States at the time of the American Civil War. Soong worked for an uncle in a shop in Boston selling silk and tea. When the uncle objected to Soong going to an American school, Soong stowed away on a ship. The ship captain took pity on him and brought him home to Wilmington. The people of Wilmington befriended him, and he joined the Fifth Avenue Methodist Church. It was at this time that he became “Charlie.” The local newspaper announced in 1880 that he was “the first Celestial [the nickname for Chinese there] that has ever submitted to the ordinance of Christian baptism in North Carolina.” Soong met Julian S. Carr, the owner of Bull Durham Tobacco. Carr all but adopted Soong and paid for him to take courses at Trinity College. Carr then paid for his



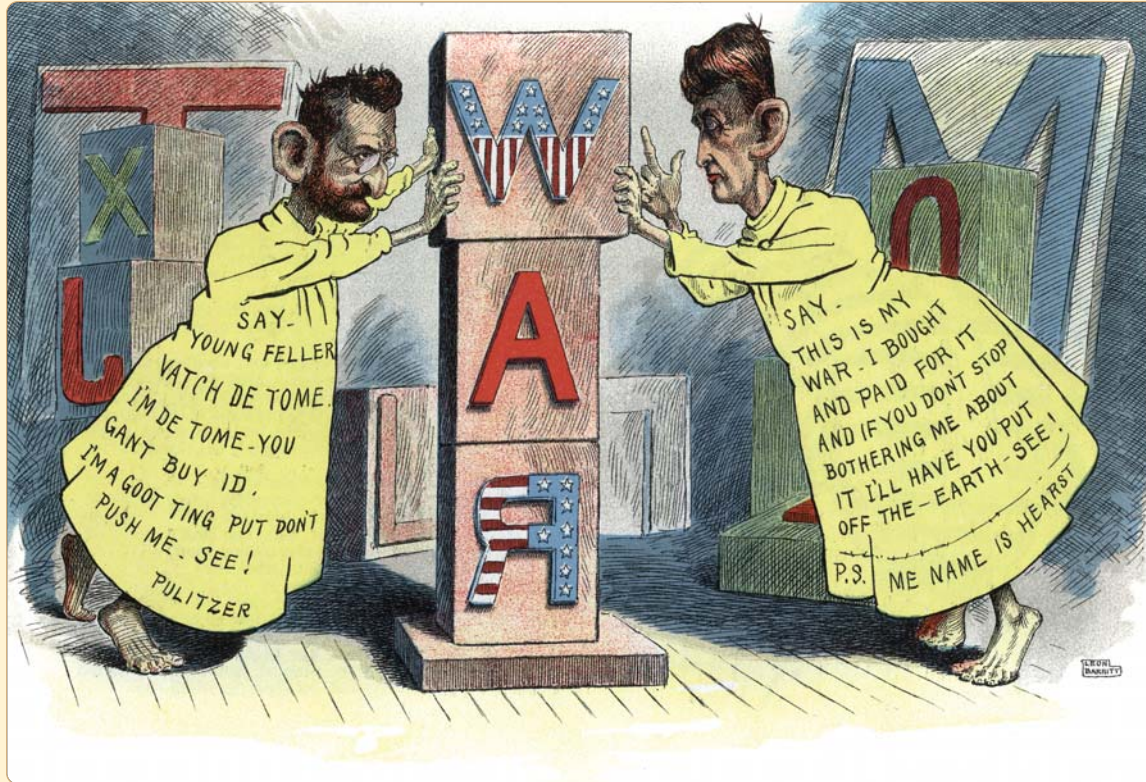
Above: Charlie Soong first attended Trinity College and then graduated from Vanderbilt, where this photo was taken.

education at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

In 1886, Soong returned to China as a Methodist missionary. When he encountered financial hardship, he combined preaching with business. Soong proved to be an ambitious entrepreneur. After working as a translator for westerners at the largest flour mill in China, he saw a need for Bibles written in Chinese. He printed them and sold them to other missionaries. Soong then began to print literature for “the Chinese nationalists,” reformers who wanted to reorganize the old empire along Western ways. Soong himself became an ardent Nationalist. Soong also began to import the cigarettes made in Durham. This made him a multimillionaire.

Soong died during World War I, but his children, all of whom were raised to be Methodists, continued to be some of the most important citizens of Nationalist China. His first daughter was married to the richest man in China, H. H. Kung, head of the national bank. His second daughter was married to the president of the republic, Sun Yat-sen. His third daughter was married to the most important military figure of the republic, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang later was the head of the Nationalist government that went into exile on the island of Taiwan after World War II. His sons all created great fortunes in the Chinese republic and later in San Francisco and New York.

THE ART OF POLITICS



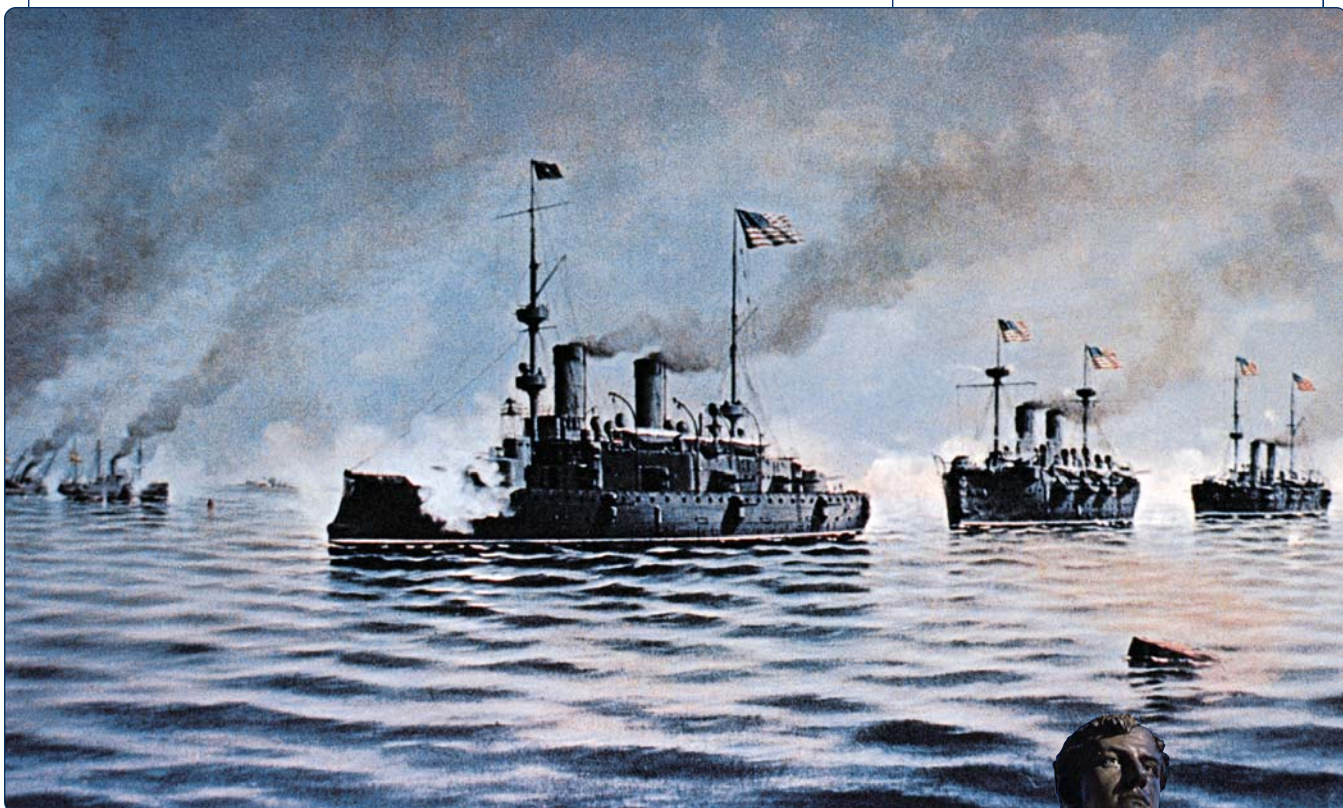
“Yellow journalism” is a term coined in the 1890s to refer to newspapers that relied on sensational reporting of crime and other stories to build up circulation. Sensationalist news reports following the explosion of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana harbor is often given as one of the reasons for the Spanish American War. In this cartoon, the two leading practitioners of yellow journalism, Joseph Pulitzer (left) and William Randolph Hearst (right) are shown pushing against a stack of children’s blocks spelling “war,” symbolically fighting over who deserved credit for starting the war.

Opposite page, above: On May 1, 1898, Commodore George Dewey led a force of eight gunboats into Manila Bay in the Philippine Islands, soundly defeating the Spanish navy. **Opposite page, below:** This statue of Ensign Worth Bagley stands on the grounds of the State Capitol in Raleigh.

The Spanish-American War

North Carolinians had more on their mind than white supremacy in 1898. During the summer, the United States went to war with Spain over conditions in Cuba. During what came to be called the Spanish-American War, America won quick victories in Cuba and the Philippine Islands in the Pacific. The United States eventually annexed the Philippines and helped Cuba become an independent nation.

North Carolina raised three regiments for the war. Given the tensions of the times, the regiments were totally segregated. Two were made up



of whites; the third was black volunteers. A white company from Hickory was even told it could not keep its black barber in camp, even though he was an official member of the unit. Despite the racial prejudices of the day, an African American, Charles Taylor of Charlotte, commanded the black regiment. Colonel Taylor became the highest-ranking black officer in the army during the war.

None of the North Carolina regiments came under fire in the war, but naval officer Worth Bagley, a Raleigh native, was one of the first Americans to be killed. State citizens soon erected a statue to honor his memory in the Capitol square. Several other state residents were later killed serving with the Philippine occupation forces in an unofficial war that lasted into the new century.



It's Your Turn

1. How did a furnishing merchant earn a profit?
2. What North Carolinian became the national leader of the Farmers' Alliance?
3. What two political parties formed the fusion movement?
4. Why were newspapers such an effective weapon in promoting the white supremacy campaign?