CONTRIBUTIONS OF GOVERNOR BRAXTON BRAGG COMER TO
PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ALABAMA, 1907-1911

by

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A DISSERTATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Rationale of the Study

The rationale of this study is based upon the premise that education is a process of enculturation. This process involves an interaction between the individual and his total environment. Since it involves his total environment, all the major institutions of society (schools, churches, government, business, youth groups and others) have their respective influence upon "the enculturation process."

This new thesis in educational historiography has led to a revisionism in the writing of American educational history.

Once it is acknowledged that several institutions in society have influenced the educative process, it becomes necessary to define more distinctly the role of the school. Consequently, the school as an institution is the focal point of investigation. This is important because
the school is the only institution established by society to serve the unique function of providing children with knowledge and skills for successful living through teaching. When it is recognized that education as schooling has been influenced by varied and complex institutions of the social order, it becomes necessary to consider the revisionist's viewpoint about the study of any particular educative process. For this study the problem selected for analysis is the contributions of Governor B. B. Comer to public education in Alabama, 1907-1911.

What are the criteria (or components) represented by the revisionist model for the study of educational history? The writings of Bernard Bailyn and Lawrence Cremin have systematically organized these criteria by which to analyze problems in the history of education.

Bailyn is the author of *Education in the Forming of American Society*. He uses Ellwood Patterson Cubberly, *Public Education in the United States*, as a reference point for critical analysis. Bailyn objects to the Cubberly thesis that history of education should be written in terms of schooling for four primary reasons. First, he contends
that Cubberly committed an anachronism by tracing the origins of the public school solely within the American colonial period. Second, parochialism is evident because he interprets the role of education primarily in terms of schooling. Third, he is excessively "evangelistic" by seeking to inspire teachers with professional zeal rather than an understanding of what really happened in terms of the development of education as a total process in relation to society. Fourth, he charges that Cubberly wrote in isolation from the mainstream of American historiography.¹

Lawrence Cremin agrees with all these criticisms, but has some reservations about the last one.² He notes that no truly significant breakthrough has been made in the last fifty years by educational historians with respect to the new theories of American historical revisionism. No general text has dramatically departed from Cubberly's interpretation. There have been refinements and revisions,³ but no overall rethinking of educational history in response to calls for change by advocates such as Woodward, Schlesinger, and Hofstadter, those historians within the American revisionist perspective. Yet, once this isolationism is
granted, the fact remains that it pertains almost as much among general historians (with the above minority as exceptions) as it does among specialized historians of education. "For ultimately," as Cremin points out, "they [general historians] have the prime responsibility for historical accuracy. To point this out, however, is not to assess blame; but rather to magnify Bailyn's achievement in perceiving the limitations of traditional historiography." 

According to Cremin change in American educational history has now reached a serious stage. Such changes may need to be rather comprehensive if a proper balance and perspective is expected. What kind of approach will be needed to replace the former usages in writing? First, Cremin states that the criticism of Cubberly, referred to earlier by Bailyn, must be given serious consideration. Cremin notes with agreement, "I myself argued some years ago that Cubberly ..., by portraying the great battles as over and won, had helped to produce a generation of schoolmen unable to comprehend--much less contend with--the great educational controversies. ..."

A group of American historians, expressing similar
sentiments, from the American Historical Association formed the "Committee on the Role of Education in American History" in 1954. As a result Paul Buck concluded that an imperfect knowledge of educational history had "affected adversely the planning of curricula, the formulation of policy, and the administration of educational agencies in the present crisis of American education." 7

To return to Cremin, several suggestions are offered on how such a new interpretation should be modeled. First, the questions must derive from a comprehensive view of education. This involves an analysis of the mass media of communication and the organization of those private, quasipublic and public agencies committed to education but not organized as schools. Also, the story of the rise of the public school must be kept in perspective by showing its connection with a much broader inquiry into the nature and uses of education at different times in our past. More specifically, the aim is to examine those formal and informal agencies of American thought and character in terms of the significant relationships between these agencies and the society that has sustained them. Such institutions
might be the family, churches, libraries, youth groups, political parties, business clubs, agricultural societies and others that influence in some way the make-up of society which eventually becomes institutionalized in the form of schooling. This implies not only a greater base for historical material (primary or secondary), but a keener dependence upon the social sciences in general.

A second lead to some new model of interpretation is furnished by the activity current in general historiography. C. Van Woodward has noted this as the "age of reinterpretation" because of the rethinking so active presently. This usually takes two forms. Currently, there is a revisionist trend in American History with significant changes in the selection of content needed to support the new interpretation. Then, also, there are subdivisions within history for specialization such as history of education, religion, or science. What implications does this new change in general historiography have for education? It implies that we must be concerned with the modes and processes of education; with actual educational practices, with the study of variety within educational
professions, and the reassertion of classical ties between education and politics. 9

Finally, advocates of the new interpretation suggest a bolder and more insistent inquiry into the impact of American education, broadly conceived, on the American mind and character. This is difficult to do in precise terms but must be attempted, if history is to be practiced as an art.

However, some scholars assert that Bernard Bailyn and Lawrence Cremin have overstated their case. Robert E. Mason contends that their thesis places too much emphasis upon "the enculturation process" as it relates to public education. He admitted that older educational historians such as Cubberly were guilty of extreme parochialism—so extreme until no conclusions were offered concerning the development of the educative process itself. He contended that older educational historians were guilty of oversimplification, since they placed undue emphasis upon schooling. For little effort was made to explain the relationship between schooling and the total society's influence upon its development.
However, educational historians must give serious consideration to schooling. In this context the term schooling refers to the policy and practice levels that affect the public schools. Policy-making decisions are made by institutions or persons with legislative or executive authority—such as state legislatures, governors, superintendents and boards of education. They establish guidelines for the supervision of the specific instructional process itself (which is the practice level). This is necessary, Mason contended, because the public school is the primary institution in society structured to implement educational change. Mason argued that the solution is found in a modification of the extreme positions of education as enculturation and education as schooling.

In relation to the context as described above, Mason moderately defended institutionalized education (schooling). He states that Bailyn and Cremin have been overcritical of Cubberly and gives the following words of caution:

Does it really contribute to productive scholarly progress to make use of such judgmental and moralistic language? It is not a "sin," but a legitimate delimitation to devote primary attention to school education;
however, whenever scholars fail to make such crucial delimitations crystal clear, secondary interpreters render a service by exhibiting explicitly the definition which did, in fact operate. . . .

He also contends that general historians have misjudged the proper role of schooling. For he states that:

... as historians use education in the broad sense to denote the total array of cultural influences by which a civilization is perpetuated from generation to generation, a most fertile perspective for social and intellectual history is provided. Certainly however, ... in de-emphasizing the role of the American public school in American history, they may be-fog their own vision of the unique role of a peculiarly American institution which has been central in the forming of American society. . . .

This rationale provides the intellectual framework for the interpretation of a more specific subject or sequence of time. In this study, the administration of Governor B. B. Comer was selected with the objective of ascertaining his contributions to public education in Alabama from 1907 to 1911. A variety of data, indirectly and directly related to institutionalized education, has been used. Political, economic, and intellectual data was used to clarify the total educative process, that is, the role between the school and society. In this study, it is assumed that a survey of such general historical material may clarify and
provide historical perspective for understanding B. B. Comer's contributions to education in Alabama from 1907 to 1911.

Moreover, it is assumed that this general historical material helps to clarify and implement the model adopted for this study. That is, it points out those political, economic, and intellectual forces that directly or indirectly influenced the total educative process. Cremin refers to this combined set of factors that eventually influence or structure educational policy and practice as "education by enculturation." Furthermore, this approach, as was noted in the comments on American educational history, is based upon suggested models found in the revisionist writings within American educational historiography.

Most of these political, economic, and intellectual forces (movements) evolved from abstract ideas. That is, these ideas provided the theoretical vehicle or ideology for the formulation of more specific change.

Subsequently, these general historical forces had to become institutionalized if they were to change the
educational situation during the Comer administration. The transition was brought about by the adoption of policy-making decisions through institutions designed for such purposes (e.g., state legislatures and executive officers). Finally, the policy becomes the criteria for decision-making at the practical level of schooling (e.g., adoption of administrative rules or courses of study).

In this study, emphasis is placed upon the educational policies of Governor B. B. Comer which were formulated, in part, by his educational ideology. This ideology, in turn cannot be contextually separated from the general historical material that was referred to earlier.

In conclusion, it is assumed that this study is based upon a model made up of three interrelated aspects: (1) the political, economic, and intellectual forces that directly or indirectly influenced Commer's educational policy for schooling, (2) the educational ideology of B. B. Comer, and (3) the educational policies of Governor B. B. Comer from 1907 to 1911.

The following is presented to clarify the inter-relationships of the model in terms of a specific example.
An educational problem related specifically to the Comer administration is described to clarify this relationship, and to identify the three aspects described in the model.

In Alabama, it was generally accepted at least in theory, that economic opportunity existed for all. This was an ideal that was traditionally associated with the "American Dream." The common people soon realized that the "ideal" was not attainable within their current socio-economic order. Consequently, they organized themselves into a powerful pressure group known as Populism. They demanded radical economic reforms, and the control of big business to insure a more equitable economic opportunity for all. Eventually, most of their program was adopted by the Progressives. The Progressives advocated a "participant democracy," an expansion of governmental services for the economic welfare of the total population and the extension of governmental services to the people.

Concomitantly, educators realized that the public school needed to be changed. The curriculum was based upon the classical educational model which was irrelevant for the economic needs of most children. For, they could not
find jobs upon graduation. Another basic problem was the need for clarification and delineation of the role of secondary education. Liberal educators such as William T. Harris proposed that high schools be formed with a vocational-technical curriculum to enable more young people to have an equal economic opportunity and successfully practice a skill. Eventually these goals became assimilated with the new educational progressivism of John Dewey. As a result of efforts by professional educators and politicians, the opportunity for economic growth became a reasonable expectation for young people. In Alabama similar educational changes began under the educational progressive leadership of State Superintendent John Abercrombie and the political helm of Governor B. B. Comer. Thus, equal economic opportunity had passed from an abstract or theoretical level to the point where it might be viewed in terms of tentative policy.

In examining the governor's speeches, it becomes clear that Comer considered the school as the primary social vehicle for educational training. More specifically, public schooling was to teach students skills needed for employment.
If economic opportunity were available to all, Comer believed that a progressive state with responsible citizenship would be produced. The governor's strong belief in equal economic opportunity constituted a major aspect of his educational ideology. The early historical events, as was described above, supported his educational ideology.

Finally, the governor implemented his educational ideology as it related to equal economic opportunity. This was accomplished through his political power as governor. He established the county high schools during his administration. In his speeches to the legislature, he based his recommendations for their formation on the contention that rural children were being held in poverty because of their lack of educational opportunity. The governor asserted that rural children's potential for employment was commensurate with their educational level. By increasing the educational level of rural youth, their opportunity for better employment would be benefited.

It is assumed that this analysis clearly shows the interrelationships between the three aspects of the model adopted for this study. Topics other than equal economic
opportunity as related to schooling could likewise be analyzed.

**Importance of the Study**

The importance of this study was related (1) to the rationale as stated above, (2) to the significant need for more research related to the educational history of Alabama, (3) to the latest trend of writing American educational history from the context of a broad socio-economic base in order to understand those political, economic, and intellectual forces which influenced the educative process of a particular era, (4) to the educational contributions of Governor B. B. Comer in terms of establishing a contextual relationship with the political and economic history of Alabama from 1907 to 1911, (5) to the implementation of the theory of Bernard Bailyn and Lawrence Cremin that "education is a process of enculturation," and (6) to the identification of B. B. Comer's educational ideology and his educational policy.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to identify the contributions made to public education by Governor B. B. Comer
from 1907 to 1911. In this study, consequently, a critical analysis of the educational ideology of Governor Comer was made. From this analysis, implications for the educational policy of the Comer administration were made.

**Limitations of the Study**

Governor Comer emphasized four social issues during his administration: (1) public schooling (2) child welfare (3) regulation of railroads and (4) prohibition. This study was focused on the first two social issues.

**Procedure of the Study**

Due to the historical nature of this study, the major procedure for gathering data was library research and study. When feasible, the interview technique was applied.

The library material was divided into two major groups, secondary and primary. The secondary material used for this study included general histories of the United States and of Alabama; specific histories of special areas of study of a social, economic, or educational nature; and selected articles from periodicals. Also, an extensive
examination of material was made about current trends in American and educational historiography, which is also classified as secondary material.

For this study an exhaustive amount of primary material was examined. They included such a variety of items as: the personal, legal, and business letters of B. B. Comer; the speeches of B. B. Comer as recorded in contemporary newspapers, Alabama State Records (located at Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama), and personal collections of the Comer family; the examination of the Journal of the House of Representatives and Senate and the Acts of the General Assembly of Alabama; an examination of the attitudes of newspapers toward the policies and activities of the Comer Administration through the use of newspaper articles, particularly editorials; an examination of the B. B. Comer Papers found in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and an examination of State Department of Education Annual Reports in an attempt to ascertain the changes in educational conditions in Alabama from 1907 to 1911.
Organizationally, this study is composed of five chapters: the introductory chapter; a chapter on the political, economic, and intellectual forces that directly or indirectly influenced the Comer educational policy; a chapter on the delineation of the educational ideology of B. B. Comer; a chapter which identifies the educational policy of the Comer administration and its implications for public schooling; and summary, conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER I

FOOTNOTES


3 Some examples are: the stress on continuing controversy by Butts and Cremin; the substantial discussion of denominational education by Drake; the emphasis on social and economic history since 1860 by Edwards and Richey; and the lengthy treatment of Southern education by Knight.

4 Cremin, The Wonderful World . . . , p. 46.


CHAPTER II

THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENTS, 1865-1906, THAT INFLUENCED THE COMER ADMINISTRATION

If the suggested techniques found in the latest writings of American educational historiography are implemented, those general historical forces that helped mold the educative process of a period must be critically examined. The usage of these current analytical techniques in the writing of American educational history was discussed in the rationale of this study. The following will identify and critically examine those historical forces in American society (1865-1906) of an economic, political, intellectual, and educational nature. It is assumed that these general historical forces subsequently influenced the educational ideology, policy and schooling practices of the Comer administration, 1907 to 1911.
The economic and political climate of the United States from 1865 to 1890 was characterized by drastic change. These forces decisively contributed to an increase in governmental activity, and resulted in the virtual death of the dominance of the agrarian classes, the demise of the power of states' rights, the abandonment of laissez faire as a pragmatic practice for government and business, and the downfall of the rugged individualism associated with the tenets of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian Democracy. These were in turn replaced by the dominance of big business, and its great advocate, the Republican Party, and protector, the National Government. A by-product of this relationship was the tremendous growth of National power and political strength at the expense of the states, the future stability of small business, and the individual freedom of the citizen. An important consequence of this new governmental strategy was that the American people now faced an important moral decision. That is, will a self-centered policy based upon selfish motives, and perpetuated by an alliance of political spoilsmen and big business tycoons,
be allowed to make policy for this country; or would the usage of political power serve as a positive good for the protection of all the people?

Eventually, the people of the United States and of Alabama chose the latter alternative. However, in order to place the political and intellectual context of Progressivism in its historical setting, it is necessary to clarify those political and intellectual concepts that comprise the dominant movements in the United States from 1865-1890—namely, the laissez faire economic theory of governmental practice and the theory of Social Darwinism.

The economic activity of the United States, in terms of the relationship between business and government, was based upon the laissez faire theory. This theory originated in the eighteenth century with the writing of the famous English economist, Adam Smith, in his classic, *Wealth of Nations*. His theory was used to formulate economic policy for approximately 170 years (1800-1870). When implemented, governments did not initiate any policy of a restrictive nature that might interfere in the right of private business enterprise to make profits. The government
was to remain aloof and allow the economic process to evolve in its own natural pattern and sequence.

However, the big business magnates only accepted half of the theory. They agreed with the principle of non-governmental control and regulation of business; even though some control of trusts might have been in the public interest. Nevertheless, anything less than absolute protection from such intervention by government was construed by capitalists as an infringement upon their corporate rights and liberties. What, then, was the role of government? The business community answered in simple terms: the protection and encouragement of their productive powers by government in terms of the profit motive.

Consequently, there arose, after the Civil War, an era of close cooperation between business tycoons and politicians. The Congress provided industries and railroads incentives such as protection from foreign competition by means of high tariffs; the right to exploit the public lands for needed raw materials; and financial aid in the form of large subsidies and by the enactment of low corporate taxes. Subsequently, less than ten years after
the Civil War, many of the giant industries and railroads were well on the way toward economic domination of their respective fields.

Another consequence that resulted from this activity was an increase in governmental jobs needed for enforcement of Congressional legislation. Many of them were given to political favorites or to the highest bidders. This led ultimately to open political graft and social corruption, which eventually became characteristic of this era. Apparently, morality had dropped to an all time low ebb in the country. It was a common practice for big business to bribe state legislatures and to hand-pick the United States Senators from many states. In return for favored state or Congressional legislation, or for the defeat of controversial bills, many Congressmen or legislators were given opportunities to make financial gains. Since the government was not entirely neutral in its affairs with business, no keen observer could honestly claim that the laissez-faire economic theory was being fairly implemented.¹

Was the United States the land of economic opportunity during the last quarter of the nineteenth century?
The new economic bourgeoisie liked to think so; but there appeared a noted group of intellectual critics who attacked these views as attempts on the part of big business to maintain the status quo in the form of the same idealistic values of the past which were no longer relevant to the real socio-economic world of the latter part of the nineteenth century. For a time the "success fever" was idealistically adhered to by most Americans because of their equalitarian spirit and belief in fair play; but soon disillusionment and outright hostility against the system developed when the evidence began to prove that the theory did not work, when put to the test of practice. Then the government intervened as an instrument of control and for protection of the public interest; which inaugurated a new function for the role of governmental power that took the form of Progressivism itself.

An examination of the concepts associated with the American success story is needed, because they were part of the value system taught the children in the nineteenth century. The youth were told that if they followed certain paths, then success would more than likely be reached and
their goal attained. In this race for success, it was generally believed that those born with a background of poverty and in a rural area had a decided advantage. It was believed that most successful men had such beginnings; besides, the majority of the people were poor and had been raised in rural areas. So to play up the advantages of poverty and country life was to exemplify the great opportunities that existed for most Americans.

It was a common moralistic story to remind school boys that Andrew Carnegie had initially come to this country from Scotland with only a few cents in his pocket. But lo! Look at his great victory over poverty. Carnegie expressed such sentiments when he pleaded in defense of poverty: "Abolish luxury if you please, but leave us the soil upon which alone the virtue and that is precious in human character grow; poverty--honest poverty."²

In addition to these, other qualities of character had to be practiced for success to be assured by the ambitious. These cultural attributes are collectively known as the Protestant ethic. Ideally, they were deeply rooted within the value system of most Americans of the nineteenth
century. They included the cultivation and practice of such values as industry, thrift, perseverance, frugality, punctuality, loyalty, and obedience.

Most Americans had heard all this before. As children they had read these same value laden appeals in school textbooks. What did it truly mean to them in terms of their belief that success in the real world was assured? Unfortunately the literature espousing the success story contributed in some degree to developing an attitude of doubt, pessimism, and disillusionment by many Americans. The fact of the matter is that most who rose to the top during this period were not self-made men who started out as poor farm boys, but instead, men who had decided advantages in the race to the top.

Perhaps the most powerful influence in American thought and intellectual history after the Civil War was the theory of evolution. It was first formulated by Charles Darwin, and was later expanded and applied broadly by Herbert Spencer, Thomas Huxley, William Graham Sumner, and others. The general principle was that all complex forms of plant and animal life--including man--had evolved over
a long period of time from some lower organisms. In this process of evolution only the hardiest individuals survived—the "survival of the fittest." Geologists and paleontologists doubtless established the evolutionary process in many species of plants and animals. The missing link between the lower animal and man was not factually established, however; but most scientists and men of letters had a tendency nevertheless to accept the principle of evolution in accounting for man's existence.

Social philosophers quickly seized upon the idea of evolution as the underlying principle not merely of the individual person but of society itself. In short, society was an organism and was in the process of evolving into a higher form. Such a conception made men of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century optimists; for regardless of what individuals might do, society as a whole was growing better day by day. In the eighteenth century, perfection was considered attainable by man's mastery of all the laws of nature; but after the evolutionary theory came into general acceptance, individual man was relieved of much of his responsibility for the progress of his species, for
nature now would take care of such matters.

Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and other capitalists found ultimate truth in a social Darwinism which bolstered their activities. Their success demonstrated their fitness to rule giant industrial empires, and the products of their factories strengthened the country. Although they championed laissez faire, as noted earlier, they also destroyed it.

The literature of the social sciences sanctioned the doctrine of laissez faire. The first social science apostle of social Darwinism of importance was Herbert Spencer. Again and again he emphasized that progress came in a free society where men of ability could accumulate property. Every attempt, he claimed, of government to protect the weak or limit the rich checked movement toward an ideal society.

William Graham Sumner found "folkwars," "mores," and institutions relative to time and place; they changed slowly but painfully and should not be interfered with by government. He opposed protective tariffs and all limitation on competition; but his denunciation of reform by
legislative action endeared him to the industrialists.

For a time even the common people adhered to the principles of social Darwinism. Inside and outside academic ranks hundreds of teachers and ministers defended the existing order. Behind them were the majority of the people who "clung to the ideas that had served them or their fathers in the past, ideas made clear and familiar by a thousand associations, memories, and aspirations." In the fluid society of America, the common man expected that either he or his son would achieve wealth and position. The famous preacher Henry Beecher declared that a dollar a day was sufficient to support a working man, while other religious leaders held that God sanctioned inequalities in wealth to make man labor and that private property was a divine right.

Cremin draws several implications on the influence of social Darwinism in educational thought and practice.

Concerning William Graham Sumner, he said:

In essays . . . Sumner placed himself squarely in the ranks of those who resisted most reform. . . . He opposed almost every reform movement of his day, save in education, where he was a progressive influence. Yet except for his advocacy of the sciences and the
elective system, he seems as antiprogressive there as elsewhere. He maintained a healthy bias against public education in general, but state universities in particular, contending that the right to vote did not imply any right to free schooling. And while he supported limited compulsory education, he believed it more as a guarantee of public order than a lever of social uplift. . . . And he was equally caustic in his criticism of all public plans for popularizing knowledge among the masses. Ultimately, he placed his faith in the processes of nature. The principal contribution of sociology, he concluded, would be to awaken men to the enormous complexity of the social organism, and hence to the slim prospects of any scheme for the rapid alleviation of social problems. 6

Richey offers the following comments about the attitude of American educators toward the socio-economic problems of the latter part of the nineteenth century:

An examination of the record discloses that from Lincoln to Wilson American educators, with few outstanding exceptions, insofar as they manifested any social theory at all, accepted the tenets of industrial capitalism. Most of them expressed loyalty to the democratic dogma; they labored valiantly to extend a richer educational opportunity to youth; they improved the processes of education by arduous scientific research; but they exhibited no great sensitivity to the forces that were transforming American life, and they failed to appraise correctly the social conflicts of their day. In the struggle between the farmers and the industrialists, they espoused the cause of the latter. When labor undertook to better its condition and to share more equitably in the national income, they took the side of capital. Even the social sciences were often so taught as to buttress the status quo. The planters of the South had found educators willing to give
support to their particular social system; the industrialists of the North at a later day found educators little less willing to do the same. If southern educators had seen nothing ethically wrong with slavery, and if they had regarded the aristocratic slaveholders as the highest fruit of civilization, northern educators, with some notable exceptions, saw nothing wrong in the exploitation of natural and human resources in the interests of profits, and they held business leaders in no less regard than southern educators had held the masters of slaves.7

After a careful examination of the social ideas of American educators in this period, Merle Curti concludes:

With few exceptions, they not only advanced social ideas throughly in keeping with the existing system of profit-making industrialism; they also aided in its struggles with farmers and workers. Even within the framework of the capitalistic system, educators in the period between Lincoln and Wilson failed to deal in reforms for the remedying of obvious social disorders.8

In Alabama the progress that had been made for public education was retarded by the Civil War due to hostility by native whites toward public education, political pressures of Northern carpetbaggers, and overzealousness of freedmen to bringing about the political and social equality with native white Southerners. However, some promise for the liberalization and progress of public
education can be noted, particularly in the Constitution of 1868 which provided for a widespread system of public education for all citizens, black and white. Unfortunately, due to the political and social wranglings of Reconstruction itself, these reforms were either misunderstood or opposed by the white majority and failed miserably when time came for implementation. Part of the fault must lie with the "reformers" themselves, since some of them as Moore reports were "unscrupulous rascals." 10

With the advent of Home Rule in 1876, marking the end of Reconstruction, there begins the conservative period of Alabama history known as the Era of Redemption or the Period of Bourbon Democracy. The Constitution of 1875 radically changed certain provisions of a liberal nature as corporated within the Constitution of 1868. 11 These conservative politicians disapproved of the school being used as an instrument for political change. Instead they believed that the school was simply to give the rudiments of an education primarily to white children. There was a consensus of agreement among most white leaders that education for all classes and races was not the responsibility
of the state. They were in basic accord with the industrialists in their insistence upon rule by the few and able. The result was lack of significant educational progress and reform for a period of at least twenty-five years, 1875-1900.

It should be noted, however, that had the attitude of native Southerners been more liberal, little real financial support could have been given. Native Alabamians were reduced to dire poverty caused by the ravages of the Civil War, the economic exploitation associated with Reconstruction, and the attempted period of recovery that followed. 12

By the middle of the 1880's, such intellectuals as E. L. Godkin and Henry George had convinced many Americans that the old success story was a myth. As a result some men of wealth began to decline as worthy identification figures for American youth. Godkin called big businessmen the "robber barons." 13 This discontent was given greater strength with the publication of Progress and Poverty by Henry George. In it he argued that the progress of the few had been built on the poverty of the many. His solution
to eliminating the gap between the rich and the poor consisted of a proposed massive single tax on land, which would hit the rich the hardest. 14

These new attitudes seemed to set off a reaction of extremism in the United States, ranging from the renewed vigor of organized labor to the aroused activity of socialists and anarchists, which were directed against the dominant economic establishment. The business community recognized the deterioration of their former positive hero image and immediately began a movement to redefine their role in order to regain their position of leadership and respect. Andrew Carnegie in Triumphant Democracy recognized that the structure of society had changed when he said:

"There is no doubt that it is becoming harder and harder as business gravitates more and more to immense concerns for a young man without capital to get a start for himself, . . . when larger and larger capital is essential, it is usually difficult." 15 He contended however that material progress was feasible only because of political equality that existed in this country.

After tracing the material greatness of America,
Carnegie pointed out that one of the bulwarks of American equality was American education. "The free common school system of the land is," he wrote, "probably after all, the greatest single power is the unifying powers which produce the American race." In these common schools, where all receive the same, good education, "the children of Irishmen, Germans, Italians, Spaniards, and Swedes, side by side with the native Americans . . . are transmitted into republican America and are made one in love for a country which provides equal rights and privileges for all her children." 16

By 1884 Andrew Carnegie had formulated a new theory to solve the social and economic ills of the country. This very famous treatise is entitled, "Gospel of Wealth" and was published in the North American Review. It became a favorite contemporary topic of conversation during the life of Carnegie and has been given due analysis by American educational and economic historians since that time. The first part of the article defends the capitalistic theory and system by contrasting its merits with the corrupting evils of socialism. Then, Carnegie attacks the basic problem. Since capitalism allows great wealth to accumulate
in the hands of the few, how can this surplus of wealth be fairly disposed for the benefit of all people?

His answer is simple and quick in reply; namely, have such wealth administered by its possessors during their life time. This mode, he submits, is "the true antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth." It is founded upon "the most present most intense Individualism." To carry it out requires "only the further evolution of existing conditions, not the overthrow of our civilization." With this mode of distribution of surplus wealth, Carnegie promises an ideal state, one where "the surplus wealth of the few will become in the best sense, the property of many, because administered for all." 17

Therefore, he advocated that hospitals, churches, colleges, schools and other institutions be built with such money. Of these, he held that educational institutions and public libraries deserved the favored support. This plan, Carnegie reasoned, enabled Americans to retain the capitalistic system, since the best interest of all was promoted by the acts of the very able who have thus re-created new opportunities through the distribution of
surplus wealth in benefactions that help people to help themselves. Colleges and other educational institutions, acting as ladders upon which the aspiring can rise, deserved special aid, since they had the best opportunity to implement such a theory. It is apparent that Carnegie now recognized that economic opportunity had become restricted. 18

However, a vast number of the general public began to notice the prejudiced treatment given big business by the power structure of the Federal and state governments. Slowly, but with increased momentum and zealousness (during the 1880's and 1890's), the small businessman, the farmer, and the general consumer began to demand reform of governmental policy, and as a consequence a control of practices of big business.

The first significant political group to break with the majority was dissident Republicans who began a movement of reform within the party itself. The Liberal Republicans were ably represented by such reformers as Carl Schurz and Horace Greeley. Their goal was the break-up of the privileged treatment given business at the expense of the general
consumer and the elimination of the spoils system in order to promote civil service reform. However, the Liberal Republican movement failed due to the lack of organization on the part of its leadership.

There was a significant group of politicians who left both political parties and became Independents. The "Old Guard" Republican stalwarts sarcastically called them the "Mugwumps." These dissident politicians exerted greater influence upon the national scene in Congress than their small numbers should have merited under normal circumstances. They became politically powerful because neither political party from 1874 to 1894 could sustain enough strength to control all branches of the National Government. Nevertheless, they were still not able to push strong reform legislation through Congress. It is true that the Interstate Commerce Act and the Sherman Anti-Trust Act were passed, but these laws contained built-in legal loopholes and other protective devices for business, and thus prevented any enforcement of meaningful control. The only forceful and realistic reform of the system, resulting from "Mugwump" leadership, was in the area of civil service reform, whereby
Congress passed the Pendleton Act which established a workable merit system. There were certain implications for education that arose from these initial political reform movements. Nevertheless, many reformers became discouraged and, at times, disillusioned about the usage of the political democratic process as a vehicle for change. Perkinson notes:

After the fiasco of 1872, the liberal reformers had lost all faith in the intelligence, virtue, or even good will of the masses. They realized, too late, that they had placed too much faith in democracy, had relied too much on popular deliberation. Popular deliberation had cost them control of their political convention; it had returned Ulysses Grant to the White House. The liberal reformers now agreed that the people could never be trusted to elect men of superior intelligence and virtue to public office. This fear of popular deliberation, which amounted to a fear of expanded democracy, is clearly revealed in the way the liberal reformers approached education. After the debacle of their Liberal Republican party, the reformers turned to education—to the schools—not with the hope of raising the level of popular deliberation, but with the intention of curtailing it.

The country had entered a period of transition in its educational progress. The most important figure during this period was William T. Harris. Harris believed that the school should serve society. Therefore, adjustments in objectives had to be made periodically, as the political
and economic conditions changed. As a result Harris attempted to redefine the role of the school in terms of the various political and economic conditions of the time. However, he did not believe in massive change; and, therefore, certainly cannot be classified as a progressive. Instead, he is usually considered a liberal educational reformer who paved the way for progressivism.

Harris agreed with earlier educational leaders in their contention that the common school was the best institution in society to sustain the democratic life, maintain economic mobility, and promote popular responsiveness to social evolution. However, Harris further reasoned that institutionalized education must assimilate itself with the contemporary culture; reflecting and sustaining the dominant societal structure, instead of acting as an independent vehicle, separated from the realities of the immediate contemporary period. Cremin noted that "the difference between Mann and Harris is a crucial difference of emphasis. Mann's common school was to contribute substantially to fashioning an emerging social order governed by a new public philosophy; Harris's was merely to play a
part in confirming an order that had already come into existence." 21

To Harris the primary function of the school is "to lift all classes of people into a participation in civilized life." 22 Harris construed "civilized life" to be a life of order, self-discipline, civic loyalty, and respect for private property. The civilized man, acting as a part of society, simply reflects the dominant view of the world of his day. Hence, the purposes of education must be closely related to certain enduring principles deeply imbedded in the wisdom of the race. The individual contributes to the system; but his contribution is small, when compared with the massive amount of input variables needed for social change.

When Harris applied this philosophy to American education, he articulated in rather precise terms the American liberals' conception of the political function of the school. First, he recognized that the school is but one of several educative institutions, and thus sharply limited in power. The child is molded by family, church, civil community, and state before he ever comes to school, and their
influence continues unabated during his years as a student.

Second, the school had four primary duties to perform for youth: to train them in the habits of regularity, punctuality, silence, and industry. The cultivation of these habits enabled the pupil to adjust, to sustain, and to preserve the continuation of the social order. He insisted that children must learn to accept authority. When the child understood his relationship to the general society, Harris believed that he would willfully accept and sustain a belief in authority.

Third, the curriculum of the school would be structured in terms whereby the child could appreciate the ideas and cultural heritage of his contemporary world. Initially, the vehicles for such training would be subject matters such as grammar, arithmetic, geography, and history. Later, content would include literature and the arts. The primary long range objective of this curriculum model was assimilation of the individual with society. Commenting on this matter, Perkinson declares:

"Once he perceived its underlying rationality and accepted his culture, once it had become "a living reality," the child could participate in that culture--no longer isolated, no longer alienated."
Fourth, to be prepared for the necessities of modern life, the student had to gain insight into the reasonableness of moral commands. If the schools demanded the development of blind obedience as a trait of acceptable student behavior; then, as adults such obedience might be given to extremists in the political arena. So without the proper education, the masses, especially the immigrant masses, would remain alienated corrupting the political life of the country. Harris emphatically showed his concern over this problem, when he emphasized that:

All the evils which we suffer politically may be traced to the existence of an immense mass of ignorant, illiterate, or semi-educated people who assist in governing the country while they possess no insight into the true nature of the issues which they attempt to decide. 24

Harris attempted to implement these objectives in the public schools of St. Louis, Missouri. He exerted a strong influence over administrative practices. His influence in the movement toward progressive education is disputed by scholars, however. Some believe that he laid the foundation for progressive change; while others contend that he was basically a conservative, and thus hindered any movement of significant social change. In summarizing
Harris and his influence upon education, Perkinson takes the former view, when he claims, "Under the forceful guidance of William T. Harris, the American schools now prepared citizens who accepted rational authority, citizens who accepted the leadership of men of superior intelligence and virtue." On the other hand, Cremin takes the latter view described above, and does not view Harris very sympathetically in terms of his positive influence upon progressivism:

Ultimately, Harris's social philosophy became an apology for the new urban industrial order, while his pedagogy rendered service to its educational needs. But it is futile to contend that his pedagogy is wholly static. The doctrine of self-activity cannot but leave the way open to change, while the social analysis he deemed central to the determination of educational policy allows for reform as well as reaction. Moreover, the continuing tension between social adjustment on the one hand and individuality on the other lends an unmistakable dynamism to his system. Yet granted this, the temper of Harris's pedagogy is patently conservative. His emphasis is on order rather than freedom, on work rather than play, on effort rather than interest, on prescription rather than election, on the regularity silence, and industry that "preserve and save our civil order." His attempt to define the precise functions of the school tended inevitably toward formalism. In the end, Harris consolidated the revolution Mann had wrought; but his pedagogy itself became the target of a succeeding generation of protest.
The need for further training of youth was clearly evident, and the school faced the primary responsibility for its implementation. Therefore, the American public school had to undertake a profound transformation in its curriculum in its effort to educate young people in preparation for a livelihood. Once Americans began to look at the educative process as central to the economic life of the country, the number and kind of schools increased. Moreover, if the schools functioned realistically as a ladder upon which the aspiring could rise, they had to be assimilated into a cohesive system of education.

It was now the responsibility of professional educators to institutionalize these new concepts into patterns for schooling. These changes were radical in some areas and resulted in the demise of the traditional structure of the school, particularly those where the curriculum was patterned from the classical models, with its heavy emphasis upon mental disciplining of the mind.

The first significant change came in higher education. Due to the new economics and technology, educators drastically expanded their curricula in the field of
vocationalism. First, new areas of study such as business administration, forestry, journalism, veterinary medicine, and social work were integrated into the college curriculum. Second, this led to a period of specialization of study which accordingly necessitated that the student select courses relevant for the most part to a specialized vocational area of study. Therefore, some of the older required classical subject matters, Greek or Latin, for example, fell into a state of neglect and were eventually discarded as requirements for graduation. Third, this insured the triumph of the elective system in higher education which gave more freedom for students to specialize in terms of a chosen vocational field of work.27

These changes in higher education led to a clearer delineation of the role and function of the secondary school. There was no consensus of agreement upon the proper definition of a high school before 1890. Consequently, there was no uniformity of purpose or practice. The curriculum of some was primarily structured in patterns similar to the elementary school. In others what was known as "college departments" were maintained and such "institutions"
It was Charles W. Eliot who led a movement of reform to correct this confused situation. His intention was two-fold. First, the definition of a curriculum (in terms of scope and content) had to be established for the high school. Second, a pattern of articulation and sequence needed to be established between the elementary school and college in order for the high school to function in terms of a defined role. The high school movement spread rapidly across the country during the 1890's, but diversity of purpose, curriculum, and administration was still common.

Eliot reasoned that curriculum structure could be solved, through the development and articulation of a course of study for the high school, similar to the recently revised college curriculum. As a result in 1892 the NEA established the Committee of Ten, with Eliot as chairman, to solve the problem of articulation and present a plan for the high school. The report prescribed no uniform program for high schools. Instead, it suggested the use of the elective system, and the "principle of equivalence of
studies," which categorized the various subject matters into nine areas to be considered as equivalent for the purpose of admission to college. The areas were Latin, Greek, English, other modern languages, mathematics, physical science, natural history, history, and geography. The result was "no less than a blue print for a type of secondary school that would fill the gap between the elementary school and the college. Once the gap was filled, Americans would have an American system of education--a solidly constructed ladder upon which the aspiring could rise."  

This new movement received further impetus when Carnegie offered money for educational reform with the establishment of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The most important change for high schools that resulted from these reforms was the "Carnegie Unit." This plan clearly defined the make-up of the high school course of study in terms of sixteen units of 120 classroom clock hours in each subject. The specific subject matter was classified in a pattern similar to that adopted by the Committee of Ten. As a result most high schools of the country began to use these two plans as
models for curriculum planning and organization. 29

Although progress had been made in educational equalization of opportunity and in the delineation of the high school role, many economic needs of the people had not been met since no provision was made for preparation in lower level jobs. Such was the goal of the manual training movement. The advocates were unsuccessful in its original inception because they refused to recognize the correlation between manual training, vocational training and the technical trades. Eventually, the role of these schools became clearer, and consequently technical and/or commercial high schools arose in many areas of the country, particularly in the urban population centers with large industrial establishments. By the twentieth century the movement was widely accepted by the conservatives who saw vocational education as the means of providing increased job opportunities, which they found desirable since this would restore economic stability to American society. On the other hand, the liberals saw vocational education as providing job opportunities, also, but its objective was to make the individual autonomous from the evils of
industrialization.  

In conclusion, it seemed evident that by 1900 the school had adjusted to current economic conditions, thus forcing a radical change in service to its patrons. In 1870 education was construed to be schooling with rather restrictive goals, too idealistic in nature, and frequently not attuned to realistic economic conditions of the day. Slowly, however, this situation changed; the school evolved into an institution more responsive to the economic needs of society. With the recognition of realistic situations and problems, educators ultimately realized that schooling must respond to valid economic situations. Only then would the school become worthy of the distinction of lasting support for progressive educational change.

What was Alabama's economic condition in 1900? How does this condition relate to the situation that has been described for the nation. Moore places these points in perspective when he notes:

Alabama in 1900, with her mines, furnaces, factories, large saw mills, railroad systems and Pullman cars and diners; with her new farms, her Birmingham and other large towns supplied with waterworks, electric lights, electric street railways and telephones; and with her banks, improved
schools, beautiful churches, public buildings and residences in her leading towns, seemed a hundred years advanced over her low estate in 1875. Twenty-five years of herioc endeavor had worked wonders. Marvelous, indeed, seemed the progress made within the memory of all who had reached even their teens. It gave the people a confidence, a pride, and a sense of worth that they had not known since the fortunes of the war began to turn against them. What did it matter if the annual costs of the State government were increasing and if the State were carrying a bonded indebtedness of more than $9,000,000? The population increased from 1,262,504 in 1880 to 1,828,697 in 1900, and the true value of property from $428,000,000 to $774,682,000.

But all was not as well as it seemed. The per capita wealth was less than in 1860, and wealth was quite as unevenly distributed. The State was still distinctly agricultural, and agriculture throughout the country was unremunerative. More than eighty per cent of the people lived in the country. 32

In similar fashion the general social conditions of the state with special reference to educational characteristics are noted by Moore. This gives one a clear view of some problems B. B. Comer would face in education—whether this analysis is made in comparative terms between Alabama and the nation, or simply in an assessment of the local situation based upon progress over a period of time, namely, 1880-1900. Moore concludes:
The great majority of people possessed little of the world's knowledge, and many were uncultured and uncouth. . . . Including Negroes, fifty per cent of the people above ten years of age were illiterate in 1880, and in 1900 at least thirty-four per cent were still unable to read or write. Fifteen per cent of the native whites at the latter date were illiterate. Newspapers were plentiful, but a great number of people could not read, did not want to read, or were too poor to subscribe for a paper. . . . A very large percentage of the people classed as literates could do little more than read and write with a moderate degree of proficiency and solve the simplest problems of "ciphering." Children were taught three or four months during the winter or summer, in old field, one-room log cabins or board "shacks." Their daily intellectual pabulum consisted chiefly of reading, writing, arithmetic, and grammar—all taught by the rule of thub. Under the general conditions that prevailed it is not strange that the people were gullible and superstitious. They were easy marks for the promoters of numerous "get-rich-quick" schemes. . . . 33

The Emergence of Populism, 1890-1896

It is now necessary to return to the political scene and trace those events that occurred during the 1890's. It will be recalled that the Liberal Republicans and their allies had been defeated during the 1870's and 1880's. They retired from the political arena with bitter memories. During the nineties the Populist Movement renewed the struggle with even greater zeal.
There were two primary differences between the earlier reform movements and the Populists. First, the Liberals were primarily from urban areas; while the Populists were from rural areas. Second, the early reformers were intellectuals, who advocated change gradually and by means of rhetoric. The new group were farmers, who demanded change in strong terms by means of massive political pressure, coming at times very close to revolutionary activity.

During the eighties and nineties the farmers became louder and louder in their denunciation of the existing economic order, primarily because of steady declines in farm prices. Some analysts explained the low prices in terms of the law of supply and demand. The farmers had steadily increased their production, so the selling price naturally went down. However, the farmers would have none of these as reasons for their distress. They blamed their plight on the middlemen—the railroads, the grain elevators, and the merchants. Much of their profit was consumed by the cost of transportation and storage. Other groups that took advantage of them were bankers and financiers. They had used their influence to formulate a strict hard-money
policy which adversely affected debtors.

It was the loud complaints of the farmers that had forced Congress to pass legislation purported to eliminate such evils. The Interstate Commerce Act, for instance, was designed to regulate interstate freight rates. However, as was noted earlier, it was not effective, due to built-in safeguards within the bill. This, naturally, fanned the flame of agrarian discontent, and in the nineties the farmers turned to politics, forming the People's Party. The Populist Party called for truly revolutionary changes, including public ownership of railroads, a drastic lowering of tariffs, and an inflationary monetary policy based upon free silver.

To many people in the United States, particularly outside of the Farm Belt, such proposals were looked upon as radical. In the East, Populism symbolized revolution and the ultimate overthrow of the government of the United States by means of revolution. These fears reached a zenith pitch in the election of 1896. This was one of the most colorful elections in American History. Concurrently, it was one of the hardest fought also. The Democrats nominated
William Jennings Bryan, who rose to power because of his famous "Cross of Gold" speech. In this noted address, filled with emotional pleas for the uplift of the common man, he advocated the radical inflation of the currency, which would relieve the debtor classes of their financial dependency upon the "money interests." The Republicans nominated a financial and political conservative, William McKinley. The American people had a clear choice—the acceptance of new policies to help distribute more evenly the wealth of the country; of the continuation of the status quo with a strong financial and business outlook. The country was more fearful than optimistic. Bryan lost, and with his loss came the death of Populism as a significant force in future American political activities. The ideas advocated were not dead, however. Many of them, indeed, would be implemented in the Progressive programs. Many people in the country again temporarily lost hope. Political power fell again into the hands of the rich. Apparently, the United States was ruled by a plutocracy.

Changes in the Alabama political climate began during the eighties and increased in activity throughout the nineties. These political movements resembled those
described earlier for the National scene. However, there are some significant differences in the structure of Alabama politics, as well as the delineation of campaign issues. An understanding of the Populist Movement in Alabama is important for two reasons. First, the Movement radically restructured the political pattern of the State, culminating eventually in a far-reaching reform of the dominant forces and principles of the Alabama Democratic Party toward a more liberal viewpoint. This new viewpoint served as the immediate political heritage of B. B. Comer. Second, the political program of Populism provided the Progressives with needed material to formulate an ideology. As will be seen later, the Comer Progressive program was not an identical blueprint of Populism. Nevertheless, Progressive ideas are similar enough to suggest that their political heritage evolved in a large degree, from the Populist Movement. 35

The Populist Movement in Alabama was not a separate political movement; that is, there was no third party involved. Instead it was a struggle within the Democratic Party itself. The origin of this division goes back to pre-Civil War times. The state was bitterly divided
politically between the so-called white counties of North Alabama (sometimes referred to as the Hill Counties) and South Alabama (generally called the Black Belt). Before the Civil War there was some ground for the common assertion that it was a conflict between the farmer in the Hill Counties and the planter of the Black Belt; but even then it became not so much a conflict of economic interest as an intrastate conflict over political power. In the Black Belt, three fifths of the slave population counted toward making up representation in the state government just as it did in the National government. It should not be overlooked, however, that the piney woods counties (the timber region, sometimes referred to as the Wiregrass Counties) were in the Southern part of the state and that the small farmers and livestock growers in the poor-land area, more often than not, voted with the Black Belt rather than with the upstate area in state politics.

After the Civil War, because of the wide-spread use of commercial fertilizer, the pine belt and the up-country also became excellent cotton growing regions. There was then no serious conflict of interest between the
agricultural population of North and South Alabama. Yet the representatives of the Black Belt were denounced bitterly as Bourbon Democrats, or Bourbon aristocrats, with the implication that the old planter aristocracy was in control. On superficial examination this appeared correct, for many of the political leaders were of the old planter aristocracy; but on close examination it turns out that these men were railroad, business, and corporation champions who merely spoke the old-fashioned, Southern-planter language. Wherever the individual planter of the post-Civil War period supported the Bourbon Democrat, he was usually an absentee landlord and primarily a merchant or an industrialist, or his support had been gained on the grounds of the race issue. To a great extent, then, in Alabama the leadership of the Democratic Party had passed into the hands of the New South leaders, who championed the industrialization and the commercial development of the South. They were the Bourbons. The Populists considered them wolves in sheep's clothing. This political alliance has sometimes been referred to as the coalition between the Big Planter and Big Mule factions. Under their rule, the farmer and the little
The primary objective of the Populist Movement was to overthrow the Bourbon rule. But, only a few members were willing to divide the Democratic vote and possibly hasten the return of Republican-Negro rule by the organization of a third party. The Populists would, on the contrary, attempt to mobilize the farmer vote, and thereby seize control of the Democratic Party. This coalition also contained, in addition to farmers, small planters, small businessmen and merchants, a part of the working classes, a significant number of Negroes, and ambitious Republicans who entered the fight for political attacks upon the dominant Democratic organization.  

The "William Jennings Bryan" of Populism in Alabama was Reuben Kolb. He became the hero of the common people. He ran for governor in 1890, 1892, and 1894. In the 1890 and 1892 campaigns he was defeated by the conservative Bourbon, Thomas G. Jones. There was common belief in many parts of the state that Kolb had been cheated from the office, due to illicit activities of the opposition such as vote fraud. Kolb hoped for ultimate victory in 1894.
The scene was set for one of the most exciting, yet hate-filled, campaigns in the history of Alabama. The political tension is made even more significant when placed in perspective with the social and economic conditions existent in Alabama in 1894. Moore states:

All efforts for peace having proved abortive, the progressive and conservative forces of the Democracy put on the armor for Armageddon early in 1894. The Progressives were keyed to a high pitch ... by the hard times attending the panic of 1893. Land, live stock, and farm staples became almost valueless. Cotton sold for four cents a pound ... Labor strikes and riots were frequent ...

Thus poverty, rags, and disease abounded among the people who were attempting to earn their livelihood by the sweat of their brows. Loving parents looked through tear-dimmed eyes at their children, --always numerous, half-starved, and in simple, be-patched garments, growing up without the slightest preparation for life. Those were terrible days and the people out of sheer desperation rose to smite the money kings, corporations, and "corrupt" and reactionary politicians.

In their platform the Populists advocated inflation of the currency; elimination of the control of money by corporations; the protection of labor; a national graduated income tax; better educational facilities for the common people; the debarment of child labor from the mines; and other related issues. The common folk practically worshipped Kolb.
Moore states, "They loved him for the enemies he had made, and no amount of exposure or vilification could shake their confidence in him."\(^{38}\)

The conservative candidate, representing the Bourbon Democrats, was William C. Oates. Most of the newspapers of the state supported Oates. They played upon the fear of change, perhaps even violent revolution, if Kolb won the election. Such slogans as: "A vote for Oates is a vote for peace and good order"; "Ruin stares businessmen in the face if Oates is not elected"; "A vote for Kolb is a vote for unrest, lawlessness, public demoralization and plunder"; and "If civilization is not a wretched farce, then you want to vote against Reuben Kolb," were given wide publicity.\(^{39}\)

In the end the election campaign resolved itself largely into a crusade for justice and popular government on the one hand, and a fight for order and efficiency on the other. The voters apparently answered the latter plea, because Oates gained a majority of approximately 27,000. The Kolb forces were furious. Many advocated that force be used to inaugurate Kolb into the office. In the end,
however, tempers cooled and Oates was peacefully installed into the office. This failure by the Populists virtually killed their political power in Alabama. However, their ideas were not dead. In a few years, just as was the case for the Populists and National Democrats, the Alabama Populists' program was adopted by the majority of Alabama Democrats.

Perkinson sums up the influence of the Populists, and provides valuable thoughts for transition into a discussion of the Progressive Movement, when he asks:

Could this plutocracy be destroyed? For that matter, should it be destroyed, or would its destruction serve to destroy America itself? The Populists had wanted to destroy the plutocracy. They had aimed for a revolution. But the voters had rejected them because of the fear that such a revolution would undermine the very progress and prosperity Americans had enjoyed since the Civil War. Was reform compatible with progress? It was their affirmative answer to this last question that hurled the progressives into political prominence.40

The Rise of the Progressive Movement in the United States

The next significant movement in this survey of political and economic trends is the Progressive Movement. The analysis of Progressivism is important, because it
places in context the theoretical, political, and educational policies and practices of B. B. Comer.

The rise of Progressivism as a national force began during the latter part of the nineteenth century and reached its climax during the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. In order for the Progressive Era to be understood, it should be compared and contrasted with the Populist Movement. First, the Populists gained most of their popular support from the rural areas. As was previously shown, it was a movement of agrarian protest. The Progressives were predominately from the urban areas. They were a loose coalition of influential groups.

One influential force was the "Muckrakers." These social-minded intellectual reformers were influential, because of their popular writings, which resulted in a demand by the public for change and reform of social ills. For example, Upton Sinclair's, The Jungle, probably attributed to the direct passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906. There are many other cases that could be cited to prove the positive influence that was exerted by these intellectual crusaders. Another influential group was the
Middle class. This group joined forces with the labor ranks and embittered farmers. Together, when acting in political concert, such a force could not be ignored. There also was a significant group of businessmen and industrialists who were becoming socially aware of a need for change, and demanded reform within the economic structure. Finally, there arose a dynamic and colorful group of politicians who took advantage of the political situation, acted as political catalysts for the movement, and, consequently, exerted enough leadership to have the progressive theory transferred into national policy, and, subsequently, passed into law by Congress and the various state legislatures. These politicians ranged in character from the idealistic and soft-spoken, such as President Woodrow Wilson or Governor Joseph Johnston of Alabama, to the political pragmatist and dynamic figures such as President Theodore Roosevelt and Governor B. B. Comer. In fact, Comer considered "Teddy" Roosevelt to be the greatest American of his time. He admired his personality and fighting spirit and tried to emulate it in Alabama.

A second difference between Populists and Progres-
sives is economic. The Populists were the "have nots" of the nation in terms of economic power. The inflation of the currency, they thought, would be the cure-all for their economic ills. The Progressives, on the other hand, already had money. In fact, some of them were extremely wealthy. They wanted the money power to be equalized in the United States in an orderly process by means of strong governmental intervention and control.

Third, the Populists, as was seen earlier, did not act from a well planned and structured theory or power base. Instead, many of their activities were spontaneous in nature with a resulting lack of clarity, organization, and aim. However, as will be explained later, the Progressives based their activities upon a well planned course of action, which, in turn, had been deduced from a systematized theory or model for practice in politics. This led ultimately to the evolution of new governmental roles and policies.

A fourth difference was the means the Populists and Progressives used, or hoped to use, in implementing a theory or policy. The Populists had no systematized plan
because they lacked an ideological base. In many cases they simply protested. Hence, they wanted to limit, and perhaps overthrow the government because they feared its power to control their lives. In other words, they felt ostracized in terms of political power. In contrast, the Progressives wanted to turn government "up-side-down." They did not fear increased governmental activity. Instead, such was their course of action because it served as a vehicle for an orderly conciliation between change and progress. When this is coupled with their strong base of systematized theory, reinforcement is given for a well planned program of reform. In short, the Progressives did not fear strong government. They intended to use it to perpetuate their own political programs by means of an orderly and peaceful transition for a better life for all Americans. 41

The Progressives stood for increased regulation and control by government. President Roosevelt called for effective regulation of railroads, for Federal child-labor legislation, direct income and inheritance taxes, curbs on labor injunctions, Federal inspection and regulation of foods
and drugs, and protection of the nation's natural resources. He secured some of his demands, but some had to await the progressive administration of Wilson. His administration expanded and strengthened the power of the government to control the trusts; they also lowered the tariff and reformed the banking credit and currency system.

Roosevelt had to decide if these reforms were fair and compatible for all phases of American society—both labor and business. He sincerely believed that such reforms were fair, and represented true progress for a majority of the American people. He distinguished, for example, between "good trusts" and "bad trusts." In his Autobiography, he said:

Our aim was not to do away with corporations; on the contrary, these big aggregations are an inevitable development of modern industrialism, and the effort to destroy them would have been futile unless accomplished in ways that would have worked the utmost mischief to the entire body politic. . . . We drew the line against misconduct not against wealth. 42

Roosevelt argued that regulation rather than dissolution was the answer. "The government must not interfere to protect labor, to subordinate the big corporation to the public welfare, and to shackle cunning and fraud exactly as
centuries before it had interfered to shackle the physical force which does wrong by violence. . . ." 43

In a special sense, as Richard Hofstadter has shown, the Progressives were the spiritual heirs of the liberal reformers and the Populists. But, as has been noted, they differed from them in several ways, and, in particular, in one respect. The Populists sought to restrict governmental power. Only in this way, they thought, could the unholy alliance between politics and business be destroyed. The Progressives, on the other hand, wanted to expand governmental power. They wanted the government to regulate, control, and restrict the powerful business interests. The Progressives were the first to denounce the doctrine of limited government and laissez faire. In practice few government administrations had successfully adhered to this doctrine, but none had ever rejected the doctrine itself. From the beginning, Americans of all political persuasions had opposed the idea of strong government. They traditionally equated strong government with tyranny. But now at the end of the nineteenth century, the Progressives pointed out that the plutocrats, in fact,
had become the tyrants in America. Moreover, they insisted that the government was the only institution able to resist or eliminate the powerful plutocracy.

Americans, however, would not give up their commitment to weak government without some guarantee that a strong government would not itself become tyrannical. Here we come to the heart of the Progressive Movement, the essence of its political philosophy. If the American democracy became truly a democracy, the Progressives argued—if the people participated more fully in governmental decisions; if they, in short, became the government itself—then the fears of strong government would disappear. The people could not fear government if they were themselves that government. The genius of Progressivism lay in its adoption of a wide variety of strategies to increase public participation in political and governmental decisions. The Progressives did not invent all of these devices. Some they copied from abroad, like the Australian secret ballot; some they borrowed from the Populists, like the direct primary and the initiative and referendum. These devices, used at all levels of government, would permit the people to
participate in direct democracy.\textsuperscript{44}

The progressives'\textsuperscript{45} theory of direct democracy assigned a central role to schools. Americans had long insisted that a democracy required an educated citizenry. Now the progressives hope of creating a direct participant democracy meant an even greater demand for an educated citizenry. The very success of this direct democracy depended on the schools. To fulfill this political function, the schools now required a new progressive theory of education.

\textbf{Progressive Theory of Education}

It is generally acknowledged by most scholars in education that John Dewey gave the progressives a theory of education.\textsuperscript{46} It was a theory that cast the school into the role of model for a truly participant democracy. In the schools, Dewey admitted, the child may acquire technical, specialized ability in specific subject matters. But if this is mere "isolated intellectual learning," then the school contradicts its own aim. Its aim is to educate the child, but unless the child understands "the meaning which things have in life of which he is a part," he is not
educated, he is merely trained. Students, Dewey said, had to acquire the "social sense" or the "social direction" of the "disposition acquired." One way to do this, he suggested, was to engage in joint activities that call these technical abilities into play. Therefore, the problems the teacher confronts his students with should be shared problems that will generate this joint activity. These shared problems must be "real" problems; that is, problems that "reflect the life of the larger society." This makes the school an embryonic community, in which the child is saturated "with the spirit of service," and provided "with the instruments of effective self-direction." In this way, Dewey concludes, "we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is wrothy, lovely, and harmonious." 47

For Dewey, then, the school was to be the model for the larger society precisely because democracy, participant democracy, is nothing more than people engaging in joint activity to solve common or shared problems. For Dewey, progressive political theory was one with progressive educational theory. Democracy for him was more than a form
of government; it was a way of life, and children would learn that way of life in the American schools.

John Dewey's educational theory clearly exposes the epistemological differences between the earlier educational reformers, discussed earlier in this chapter, and the educational progressives. The liberal educational reformers were pessimists. They had lost faith in the ability of the masses to know the truth, much less to use it as a guide to action. So they designed an educational program to produce both an elite who would lead and a disciplined mass that would willingly accept the rational, virtuous leadership of that elite.

The educational progressives, in contrast, were epistemological optimists. They believed that all men could perceive the truth once it was made clear to them. Moreover, they believed that all men would use this truth as a guide to action. The progressives' educational program, that is, Dewey's version of it, envisions a society wherein all citizens are nothing less than scientists, working together and jointly solving common problems.
The Lack of Educational Progress in
Alabama, 1880-1898

One of the gravest problems of the people of Alabama as they struggled to remove themselves from the economic shackles of Reconstruction was the establishment of a sound system of public education. There were two formidable obstacles in the way of educational progress: the poverty of the people and the lack of a genuine appreciation of the value of public education. In too many cases public education was sacrificed for the cause of political expediency and supposedly sound economic practices.

While some progress in education was made in the eighties, the story of public school education for that period is largely one of poverty, inefficiency, and confusion. Due to a lack of interest, the legislatures of this period usually appropriated two to three hundred thousand dollars for the maintenance of the entire state educational system. Another problem was the confusion over the grade level in the various schools. There was no clear understanding of what constituted elementary, secondary, or higher education respectively. Consequently, it was not unusual to see one level carrying on work of one of the
other grade levels.

There were other serious problems such as the lack of well-trained teachers. This was the result, in large part, of the poor system of certification. In many cases, certificates could be obtained for a simple fee. The result was the acquisition of poor teachers. Closely related to this problem was the poor quality of supervision. The lack of supervision proved to be one of the most serious drawbacks to the public school system. Not even the state superintendents were professional trained men, much less the county superintendents. For the most part, these positions were filled by lawyers or politicians rather than educators.

During this period there was tremendous growth in the establishment of city and town schools, governed by local boards and subject to supervision of the state superintendent of education. These independent school districts were unable to levy local school taxes because of constitutional limitations, and ran into financial difficulty. The courts held that under the constitution, the legislature could not delegate to school districts the power to tax.
Such power could be delegated only to municipalities, including the counties. Under the Constitution of 1875, the towns might levy a tax of fifty cents per hundred dollars for total municipal needs. Unfortunately, in the distribution of such revenue, the schools received only a small portion of the money. This constitutional limitation could be removed only through the adoption of a constitutional amendment that provided for individual school districts to tax themselves for improvement of schools. Consequently, this would prove to be one of the prime issues for enactment, when the educational climate presented itself for improvement within a few years.48

The Awakening of Educational Progress in Alabama, 1898-1906

Alabama witnessed a significant breakthrough in educational progress in 1898. From 1898 until 1901 the movement was led by John W. Abercrombie. The tremendous progress, made possible through such strong and exerted leadership, was continued, sustained, and strengthened by Harry C. Gunnels and Isaac W. Hill from 1901 to 1906. These reforms and progressive changes gave the state's
educational forces a renewed strength and optimism for the future—an optimism which would materialize in even greater progress for public education under the dynamic leadership of B. B. Comer, 1907 to 1911.

John Abercrombie was elected state superintendent of education in 1898. He became superintendent at a time when the forces of change were surging in the field of education. He guided these forces with intelligence. The need for money had been urged by all of his predecessors; and the necessity for a more efficient school supervision and for better teachers had for many years been recognized by the leaders of educational thought. There was some agitation for state certification of teachers on a sounder basis, the grading of schools, uniform textbook laws, and even compulsory school attendance legislation. These and other needed reforms Dr. Abercrombie urged with force. For the first time in Alabama's history, the state superintendency was in the hands of a professional educator. Dr. Abercrombie was educated at Oxford College, under the inspiring instruction of Professor John L. Dodson. He also attended the University of Alabama. He had considerable
teaching experience, knew first hand the needs of the poor for education, and had worked untiringly upon their behalf in the legislature as state senator from Calhoun County. As superintendent, he understood the fundamental needs of the schools and had the courage to tell the whole truth about them and the ability as both a writer and a speaker to put the facts and arguments in a way to stir the consciences of the people. As Weeks says, with perfect justification: "With the administration of Mr. Abercrombie begins the modern era of public education in Alabama." 49

The ablest and most comprehensive source for the study of educational progress during this period is the Department of Education's Biennial Report of September 30, 1900. In this comprehensive document, Abercrombie described and analyzed the pressing educational problems that faced Alabama at that time; reviewed the course of action that had been taken; and offered numerous recommendations for future action. This document is one of the most comprehensive and far-reaching reports ever issued by a state superintendent of education in Alabama. Consequently, a careful and detailed analysis is made, first, to ascertain the
educational progress during the 1898-1901 period; and, second, to identify those problems that needed immediate attention for the next few years. Hopefully, such a close examination will subsequently clarify and place in context those educational problems that would confront the Comer Administration. 50

Under the section titled, "Labor of Superintendent," Abercrombie reviewed his professional activity. His most important objective as state superintendent was "the improvement of the common schools and the promotion of public education in general." To help achieve this, he conducted frequent teachers' institutes throughout the state. Also, he traveled extensively throughout the United States in order to personally acquaint himself with current educational thought and practices in vogue in the country.

Commenting on the change in attitude on the part of the public toward education, and the subsequent improvement in the educational situation, he said:

I flatter myself that during the past two years a great interest in the cause of public education has been aroused among the people. Within that time difficulties have been overcome, hope has taken the place of discouragement, indifference
among the people has vanished. The amount of funds available for common school purposes has been increased more than fifty per cent; the qualifications of teachers have been raised; incompetent teachers have been eliminated; county supervision has been improved; township trustees have been more attentive; school houses have been made better; a demand for a qualified county superintendency has been created; the school enrollment has been largely increased; teachers' institutes have been held more regularly; and a spirit of educational progressiveness has been aroused among the people. The outlook is most encouraging.51

Upon the urgent request of the state superintendent, the legislature of 1898 added $100,000 to the direct appropriations for the public schools and passed an act levying a state tax of one mill for the exclusive use of the public schools. This act, passed February 23, 1899, is a landmark in the history of education in Alabama. No more funds could be derived from the general tax source, for the constitutional limit of seventy-five cents for state tax had been reached. It levied the first state tax for the exclusive use of the schools. These two measures, together with the increase made in the interest upon the land funds, brought the total public school fund up to more than $1,000,000.52

It was noted above that no more state appropriated
funds could be derived from the general tax source, because
the maximum authorized by the constitution had been reached.
Therefore this situation made it imperative that schools be
granted the right to secure funds derived from local taxes.
In support of such a position, Abercrombie noted:

If our funds are not sufficiently large, what shall
we do? Shall we fold our arms and wait until Alabama
doubles in wealth? If so, is she not likely to also
double in population? Shall we look to others for
help, and while looking suffer our children to grow up
in ignorance? No; education, universal education, is
cheap at any cost. What we should do--what other
states have done--what we must do, if we would properly
qualify our people for citizenship, is to give to
counties, township, districts, and municipalities the
power of taxation for educational purposes. . . .

The right of local self-government is a principle for
which the Southern people, and especially the people of
Alabama, have always contended . . . yet, in the
matter of providing for the education of our boys and
girls, it is a right which the fundamental law of the
State denies to us. . . .

There should be no limit, constitutional or statutory,
general or local, to the power of people who own proper-
ty to tax themselves for the purpose of fitting the
children of the State for intelligent and patriotic
citizenship--for success in the performance of life's
everyday duties.53

One of the most serious educational needs was the
lack of a qualified county and state superintendency.

Without competent supervision at all levels, the schools
could not function effectively, regardless of how much reform legislation was enacted by the legislature. It was suggested that the law be changed to require the state superintendent to be a professional educator. The same recommendation was applied to county superintendents. This would help remove these offices from the negative influence of politics. Abercrombie pointedly states, "So long as men are elected to this position who know nothing of school management . . . just so long will we have insufficient supervision."

In addition, he blamed the poor quality of supervision upon the meager salaries received—"The incomes which they receive are in most instances but mere pittances. . . . The country superintendent should be required to devote his entire time to the supervision of the schools of his county, and should be paid a salary sufficiently large to justify him in doing so." Finally, he advocated that some guarantee be given superintendents for continuous and uninterrupted service to their country. This time period—four to six years was the suggested span—would be long enough for the school leader to grow professionally and
accordingly afford him the opportunity to initiate meaningful growth in terms of his own professional status as well as for the welfare of the community.  

The deplorable condition of the vast majority of school buildings was a shameful blight which demanded immediate remedy. This was especially true of the common or township schools. Most of these were located in the rural areas. In fact the common schools were frequently referred to as the country schools. In far too many cases, "the school" consisted of some old log cabin or other dilapidated building without desks, tables, windows, or black-boards. There was, also, insufficient ventilation and heat. The students usually sat on backless benches. "Children are expected to take pleasure in attending school." Abercrombie claimed, "Under such conditions," he continued, "it is no wonder that boys and girls often become disgusted with school-going."

An investigation into the reasons for this condition proves shocking when compared with current conditions. In 1900 the Alabama law made no provision for building or furnishing school houses. Needless to say, all educators
considered this a serious defect in the law. The building of school houses was done by private and voluntary means; usually at the discretion of a small number of public-spirited men of means in a community. If the community lacked the means, as most of them did, then the situation was usually chaotic, as was described earlier. This condition provided further proof for needed legislation, and reinforced the case for the immediate passage of an amendment to provide for local taxation, which would then enable the local people to help themselves. 55

This great leader for the cause of public education was an avid supporter of the free school. Unfortunately, however, many of them were pay schools. In many communities it was the custom for teachers to charge a tuition fee and credit each person with "his prorata" of the public funds. Consequently, many people who were unwilling or unable to pay the fee kept their children at home. This system was evidently against the policy of the law. This self-evident discrimination against the less fortunate angered Abercrombie. He protested against this condition at every opportunity. People were reminded in strong terms that, "The free school
idea and the pay school system are diametrically opposed to each other. They cannot exist together. . . . I trust that the time is near when every common school will be a free school."  

School attendance was purely a voluntary matter in Alabama in 1900. Most progressive educators believed that great advancements in education would prove to be short-lived and hypothetical, unless laws were passed for compulsory education. Abercrombie agreed by stating, "When schools are made free and within reach of all, the General Assembly should enact a law compelling all children between the ages of seven and fourteen to attend." This would guarantee, he asserted, to every child needed instruction that was considered essential for good citizenship. He drew an analogy between moral and civic duty. "Moral duty and the power to perform it always accompany each other, and the same should be true of civic duty," he claimed.

The superintendent presented some evidence in support of his position. First, only approximately one half of the total school population was enrolled in Alabama in
1899. Second, of those who were enrolled, from 25% to 50% did not attend regularly. And, third, Alabama's percentage of illiteracy, when compared with that of the other states, was fearfully high. 57

Another important problem that needed immediate attention was the selection of uniform textbooks for use throughout the state, or at least within a county. There were many problems facing teachers because of the lack of uniformity. No common courses of study were organized and no sequence was established between the grades because teachers used different textbooks, which led to a confused situation. Also, there was the problem of price. A definite difference was noted in the cost of texts in different sections of the state. Abercrombie recommended that the legislature pass special legislation to care for these problems. He particularly urged that a state textbook commission be established. 58

The last point to merit a detailed comment for this discussion is the length of the average school term in 1899. The legislature in 1898 refused to expand the minimum term from three months. Nevertheless, Abercrombie
asked the individual systems to voluntarily extend their terms to four months. Generally speaking, most of them agreed for the school year, 1899-1900. The goal set for 1900-1901 was four and one-half months. Ideally, he believed it should be increased from seven to nine months. 59

Other recommendations made in the report, and a brief resume of their importance were:

1. That funds, after apportionment to the counties, should be disbursed on the basis of average daily attendance.

2. That a state board of examiners should conduct all teachers' examinations.

3. That schools should be classed according to the grade of teachers, and no teacher should be permitted to teach subjects higher than those upon which he had been examined.

4. That a central board should be created to investigate the work of all schools conferring degrees, and no school should be permitted to confer a degree unless its work measured up to the standards fixed.
5. That teacher training be improved.  

In this remarkable document Abercrombie laid down the general lines along which Alabama's public schools have developed. It might be called the charter of the public school system. Some of the principles advocated were written into law during the Abercrombie administration. A textbook commission was created in 1901, "to procure for use in the public free schools a uniform series of textbooks," which helped tremendously in the establishment of a uniform course of study; and in the same year the minimum length of school term, "absolutely free of tuition fee," was fixed at five months. If public funds were insufficient for a five months term, the patrons must supplement them or they could have no school. Not since Reconstruction had all of the schools been even theoretically free to all of the children for a definite period of time. Of even greater importance than either of the reforms of 1901, was the statute of 1899 that placed the examination and certification of teachers in the hands of a state board of examiners within the state department of education. The expenses of the examinations were paid by fees required of those who
applied for teachers' certificates. Under the law, a third-grade certificate was good for two years and was not renewable; a second-grade was valid for four years and could be renewed once. Thus teachers were forced to improve their knowledge or lose certification. This law was of tremendous importance in improving the quality of teachers.61

After having been reelected in 1900, Abercrombie resigned on July 1, 1902, to accept the presidency of the University of Alabama, and his unexpired term was filled out by Harry C. Gunnels, who renewed the recommendations of his predecessor and carried on ably the work started. The constitution of 1901 provided that no state superintendent should be eligible to succeed himself. After serving his term, Gunnels was succeeded by Isaac William Hill, an educator of long experience. During his term the agricultural schools were reorganized and a state textbook commission was created.

The most important act of the legislature during Hill's administration was that of 1903, providing for "re-districting the public schools of the State and for the management and control of the same." From 1876 on separate
or special school districts had been created in increasing numbers. These districts could not, under the old constitution, levy a school tax, but now it was possible to arrange them topographically, making them much more convenient for administration than the old township lines laid out by surveyors in rectangles. County boards of education were authorized to lay out the counties into school districts in accordance with the topography of the country and the location of the people, so that every child would be if possible within two and a half miles of a schoolhouse, and no school would enroll fewer than fifteen children. Districts which provided graded schools for not less than eight months duration could elect five district trustees instead of three and "assume entire control of the public schools, . . . reporting only to the county authorities."

The act did not apply to any county previously districted. Cities and towns which had been made separate school districts before continued as they were. The county was thus made the basis of administration instead of the township. In this way for the first time the whole state was reorganized into districts on the basis of topography, population,
towns and cities—a result of immense importance as the foundation for future development. Hill was succeeded in 1906 by Harry C. Gunnels, who now served a full term of four years under Governor B. B. Comer.\textsuperscript{62}
CHAPTER II

FOOTNOTES


3 Ibid., pp. 110-111.


5 Ibid.


8 Richey, p. 397.

9 Moore concluded the following about the educational provisions of the Constitution of 1868: "The Radicals took hold of the school problems of the State with gusto. There was much talk in the constitutional convention (1867) of redeeming the State from darkness. For this purpose the
constitution provided that one-fifth of the State's revenue should be devoted to the schools, in addition to the income from the school lands, poll tax, and taxes on various enterprises." Albert B. Moore, History of Alabama (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: Alabama Book Store, 1951), p. 514.


11 Moore concluded the following about the educational provisions of the Constitution of 1875: "The Constitution of 1875 restored the ante-bellum school administrative system. Separate schools were ordered, administrative expenses were limited to four per cent of the total school fund, the legislature was authorized to appropriate to the schools at least $100,000 a year, in addition to interest on the trust funds, and poll and license taxes, and Mobile was given its former educational independence." Moore, p. 518.


14 Ibid., pp. 89-90, 253.

15 Andrew Carnegie, Triumphant Democracy or Fifty Years' March of the Republic (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), pp. 231-235.

16 Ibid., pp. 19-22.

18 Ibid., pp. 32-39.


20 Perkinson, p. 168.

21 Cremin, The Transformation of the School, p. 17.

22 Ibid.

23 Perkinson, p. 171.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 172.

26 Cremin, The Transformation of the School, p. 20; Welter, pp. 228-244.

27 Perkinson, pp. 127-130.


30 Cremin, The Transformation of the School, pp. 23-50; Perkinson, pp. 138-144.

31 The analysis of the progressive movement in politics and of progressive theory in education will be made in the next chapter, that will examine the ideology of Comer from a political and educational framework.

32 Moore, pp. 536-537.

33 Ibid., pp. 539-540.


36 Hackney, pp. 88-108.

37 Moore, p. 630.

38 Ibid., p. 631.

39 Ibid., p. 638.

40 Perkinson, p. 182.

41 Hofstadter, pp. 94-130.


43 Ibid., p. 90.

44 For a scholarly analysis of the Progressive Movement with emphasis placed upon the nature of the movement; its primary leaders; its impulse upon American society; and its basic organizational scheme see: Hofstadter, pp. 131-271; George E. Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 1900-1912* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), pp. 85-105. For a discussion of Theodore Roosevelt's domestic program and his progressive influence see: Howland, pp. 73-130; Mowry, pp. 106-144, 197-225; Welter, pp. 245-266.

45 In the foregoing discussion the term, "Progressive" was used as a proper noun to denote a specific political movement. Therefore, it was capitalized. When the term, "progressive" is used as an adjective, it will not be capitalized, since its usage is descriptive in nature—that is, as a modifier of a specific person, place or thing. An example might be "progressive theory" or "progressive educator."
The analysis is made to clarify the social context of education and its role in modern society. No comments are given concerning the general theory of instruction of John Dewey. For the purposes of this discussion only the general theory of education is examined, because it related directly to the social context of this study. For information on those scholars, such as G. Stanley Hall, William James, and Edward Lee Thorndike, who exerted an influence upon the thinking of Dewey see: Cremin, The Transformation of the School, pp. 100-115; Welter, pp. 277-283. Welter notes that the ideas of Herbert Croly could have been used to build a progressive theory of education, also, based upon idealism. Likewise, the ideas of Walter Lippmann could have been used. In this case the theory would have a pragmatic base. See Welter, pp. 267-277.

The direct quotations were cited by Cremin, The Transformation of the School, pp. 110-115 from John Dewey, The School and Society.

An amendment, designed to allow local school district taxation was overwhelmingly defeated in the election of 1894. Worse still, the measure was not given strong support by the teachers themselves. See Moore, pp. 543-546, 551-552; Stephen B. Weeks, History of Public School Education in Alabama (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915), pp. 132-134.


Ibid., pp. 3-4.
The proposed revenues for the year beginning October 1, 1900, when broken down into its parts were as follows:

Direct state appropriation--$450,000
On 16th Section and Other funds--$150,619.40
Poll taxes (estimated)--$155,000
Special school tax--$245,245.48
Total--$1,000,865.18

Ibid., p. 6.

Additional items considered are: The University of Alabama; Alabama Polytechnic Institute; Girls' Industrial School at Montevallo; Institution for the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind at Talladega; the State Normal Colleges; District Agricultural Schools and Experiment Stations; State Institutions for Negroes; Private and Denominational Schools; County Institutes and Summer Normals; School Census; and Peabody Donations.

Moore, pp. 551-555; Weeks, pp. 142-145.

Dabney, pp. 394-396.
CHAPTER III

THE EDUCATIONAL IDEOLOGY OF B. B. COMER

The primary theme of this chapter is the educational ideology of B. B. Comer. These ideas served as an intellectual base for formulation of more specific and concrete acts. Therefore, when Comer became governor of Alabama, he had the opportunity to apply these abstract ideas, attitudes, or concepts into a workable plan, that, subsequently, served as input for educational policy-making. This policy, when feasible, was then implemented in terms of realistic educational situations--that is, as actual educational practices.

The writings (articles, letters, and speeches) of Comer have been carefully read and analyzed in order to ascertain these policies and practices. In addition, this chapter contains a biographical sketch of B. B. Comer, and a summary of his political rise to power from 1904 to 1906. Hopefully, this biographical and political material will
help place the educational discussion in a more meaningful perspective.

A Short History of the Family of
B. B. Comer

The Colonial records of the Comer family began with James Moss, the Emigrant. Born in England, he came to Virginia about 1719 and settled in St. Peter's Parish in New Kent County. He married Rebecca King of Elizabeth City County, Virginia.

According to the register of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, a daughter of James Moss, Elizabeth, was baptized on June 13, 1730. Elizabeth became the wife of Samuel Comer, and from this union came the long line of descendants found in the Southern states today. The Moss family had some distinguished fellow church members. It is believed that the marriage of Martha and George Washington took place at St. Peter's Church. One member of the Moss family, William, was an honorary pallbearer at the funeral of George Washington.

Samuel Comer, the direct ancestor of the Comer family which settled in the South soon after the close of
the American Revolution, was born in Lunenburg County, Virginia. The exact date of his birth has not been established, but available records show that he was living in that country in the early decades of the eighteenth century. He was the son of John Comer, who died in 1767. Samuel died in Halifax County, Virginia, in 1788.

Samuel Comer lived in an area of Virginia where the pioneer spirit was very much in evidence. The Comers were typical frontier people with a spirit of hope for future success, and a desire for hard work and achievement, that was typical of the people of this time and place. Walker notes the following about this period of the Comer family history:

... they wanted a homestead and they were unafraid of the hardships and perils of pioneer life which had to be faced in order to get it. The dangers and burdens of the frontier did not deter them from their purpose to build homes, schools, and churches ... they cleared the forests for farming, and built their solid cabins for permanence, with the confidence of men unafraid, conquerors at heart, who had come to stay. ...  

This region of Virginia was located in the Allegheny Mountains. Because of the passes through the mountains, it served as a gateway to the South and Southwest. As a result,
beginning around the nineteenth century, settlers pushed in large numbers down into the Carolinas, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Around 1796, three of the sons of Samuel Comer, James Thomas, John Andersen, and Hugh Moss migrated to Georgia and settled in Jones County. Two of the brothers, James and Hugh Moss, had been in the American Revolution. Due to the lack of financial funds, many Revolutionary veterans were never paid their salaries. To compensate for this, Congress offered them public or Indian lands. In this way the Comer men received part of the Cherokee lands in Georgia.

The direct descendent of Hugh Moss Comer was Braxton Bragg Comer. Hugh Moss married Ann Trippe, daughter of John Trippe III, of Jones County, Georgia. John Trippe was a member of the landed gentry, and was one of the wealthiest plantation owners and largest slaveholder in the area. Hugh Moss eventually became a very successful planter himself. He also was influential in local politics. He was one of the first judges of the Superior Court of Jones County. Hugh Moss and Ann had twelve children, seven of whom lived to maturity. He died in 1836.
One of the children of Samuel Comer was a daughter, Rebecca. She married William Clay of Halifax County, Virginia. From this marriage was to come one of the most famous figures in Alabama history. He was Clement Comer Clay (1798-1866). Descended from Elizabeth and Samuel, he was the first of the Comer family, to set foot on Alabama soil. Walker noted his influence on the state's history when she wrote:

With his saddlebag and his law books, he established himself at Huntsville. . . . The few people on Huntsville's main street one December afternoon in 1811 little thought as they saw a frail, delicate young man, not quite twenty-two years old, ride horse-back into the town, law-books in his saddle-bags, a faithful Negro servant following on another horse, that the future first chief justice of Alabama, and the future drafter of the State's first constitution [as well as state legislator, governor of Alabama, Congressmen, and United States Senator] had come, with all his worldly possessions, to cast his lot with Alabama.

But the young rider, viewing the town with dark and restless eyes, was Clement Comer Clay, destined to become the most popular statesman of his period, and to hold the people's confidence during a singularly long and brilliant public career. 3

Another famous relative (second cousin) of B. B. Comer was the son of Governor Clement Comer Clay. He was Clement Claiborne Clay (1817-1882). He married Virginia Caroline Tunstall on February 1, 1843. Mrs. Clay was
considered one of the most charming ladies in ante-bellum Alabama. In fact, she was acclaimed by Alabama and Washington society as one of the most famous "belles" of the 1850's. Like his father, Clement Claiborne Clay was governor and United States Senator from Alabama. Senator Clay stoutly defended Alabama's honor and the South's prestige in defense of its rights. He was Senator when the Civil War broke out.

Now to return to the Comer family. Hugh Moss and Ann Trippe Comer had seven children. One of them would be the father of B. B. Comer. John Fletcher Comer (1811-1858) inherited his father's plantation and became wealthy at an early age. In 1841 he married into a prominent family of Georgia. His wife was Catharine Lucinda Drewry of Jones County, Georgia. She was raised in comfort and was well educated. Walker notes that, "The first catalogue of Wesleyan College at Macon, Georgia, published in 1839, listed 'Miss Catharine L. Drewry from Jones County, Georgia,' as a member of the second class. She was graduated in 1841 and was well prepared to take her place among the [Alabama] pioneer women of her time."
In 1841 they moved to Alabama. He bought a plantation at Old Spring Hill in Barbour County. By this time cotton had become well established as the principal staple money crop in the area. During this period of rapid physical growth, Alabama's population grew rapidly. Through good management and hard work, John Fletcher became a highly successful planter. In addition to the production of large quantities of cotton and the ownership of large numbers of slaves, he ran a saw mill, grist mill, and a cotton gin. His cotton was shipped directly to Liverpool, England, via Irwington, Alabama, the Chattahooche River, and Appalachicola, Florida. In addition, Comer cared for the religious and educational needs of the people of his area. He built a church and school on his plantation. Fletcher was elected also to the Alabama legislature. He served two terms during the 1850's. He was a member of the legislature of 1854, which passed the first significant educational act for support of Alabama schools. He died after a sudden illness, aged 47, on April 27, 1858.

Catharine was left with six sons, all under fourteen years of age. However, her husband had left her with ample
financial means, since she inherited the land, slaves, and other property of the plantation at Old Spring Hill. According to the Probate Court records (1858) of Barbour County, the estate was valued as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Land</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
<th>Other Property</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>$17,700.00</td>
<td>$39,000.00</td>
<td>$14,000.00</td>
<td>$70,700.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Catharine was able to manage the plantation. In spite of the hardships, she saw that her sons received an education. Several were provided the opportunity to attend college. At times it seemed very discouraging. The Civil War years were particularly trying for plantation owners. It was even worse during Reconstruction, due to the loss of slave labor, and the attendant problems that resulted from this massive social change. Tremendous economic and social adjustments had to be made. Nevertheless, the Comer boys in cooperation with their devoted and dedicated mother saw themselves through this period of trial and became great and successful men. Braxton Bragg Comer contributed his due share to this effort.

A Short Biography of Braxton Bragg Comer

Braxton Bragg Comer was the fourth son of Catherine
Drewry Comer and John Fletcher Comer. He was born at Old Spring Hill on November 7, 1848. Ten years later, as was noted earlier in the discussion, his father died. His schooling had begun when he was eight years old under the tutelage of Prof. E. N. Brown, who conducted a small private school at Warrior Stand, Alabama. He attended this school for six years. It was an education based upon the classical tradition; whereby Comer learned to appreciate Latin and Greek.

In 1864, Braxton Bragg and his older brother, Legaré, entered the University of Alabama. They remained until the spring of 1865. As student cadets, they witnessed the burning of the University by General John T. Croxton of the Union Army. Following the destruction of the University buildings, the cadet corps were disbanded at Marion, and the Comer brothers walked the greater part of the way back to their home.

After a year spent on the Spring Hill plantation, Legargé and Braxton entered the University of Georgia at Athens. Legaré remained to graduate, but Braxton was compelled to withdraw because of ill health and returned to
Spring Hill. However, he later entered and graduated from Emory and Henry College in Virginia in 1869. He was awarded the A. B. and A. M. degrees, and won an award as distinguished scholar in the field of natural science.

After his graduation he returned to Old Spring Hill and to the task and problems of plantation management. Apparently his older brothers did not feel he was ready for plantation management--that is, if the following humorous incident was characteristic of the young man's behavior, as described by Walker:

A tradition persists that when he returned his brothers considered him foppish in his ideas and that he rode over his mother's plantation, wearing kid boots a size too small for him and carrying gloves and an umbrella, and a volume of Shakespeare under his arm.7

By 1872 he must have matured, because at the age of twenty-four, he married Eva Jane Harris of Culthburt, Georgia. The young couple lived for the first few months at Old Spring Hill. They later moved to Comer Station. Here Comer developed one of the largest farming and country store interests in the state. By 1874 he became a member of the Commissioners' Court of Barbour County. In 1885 he moved to Anniston, where under the firm name of Comer and
Trapp, he helped conduct a wholesale grocery and commission business. Five years later he moved to Birmingham, where except for the intervening period as Governor and United States Senator, he resided until his death. His first position in Birmingham was as president of the City National Bank and of the Birmingham corn and flour mills. Later, he liquidated the bank and devoted his time to the manufacture of cotton with the establishment of Avondale Mills; the supervision of his plantation; and the management of a large corn milling plant.

After being in business for several years as a merchant, planter, manufacturer, and shipper, Comer realized that business could not make sufficient gains due to the unreasonable and excessively high railroad rates. He sought lower railroad rates through individual efforts. He was totally unsuccessful. He then made one of the most momentous decisions of his life—namely, to enter politics and, force, by political action and legislation, the railroads to amend their practices in favor of more reasonable rates. Subsequently, in 1904, he ran for the presidency of the Alabama Railroad Commission on a platform for rate reform
and was elected. However, he was constantly frustrated, because he could not get the agreement of the other two members of the commission who sided with the railroads on most of the rulings.

Consequently, he decided that the only way to insure railroad reform was to enter into the governor's race himself. The stage was set for one of the most exciting gubernatorial campaigns and elections in the history of the state. Comer ran primarily on one issue—railroad and rate reform. However, he did not believe other issues were unimportant. He would improve conditions, as will be seen later, in many areas. He simply wanted to constantly keep this most pressing issue before the eyes of the public.

His opponent, Lieutenant Governor Russell M. Cunningham was the conservative candidate. He was ineffective in combatting Comer's attacks upon the railroads. Comer refused to soften his blows against the "monopolists." Speaking of the campaign, Rupert B. Vance in an article entitled, "Braxton Bragg Comer: Alabama's Most Audacious," he states:

It was a spellbinder against the man with a bludgeon of facts. Dr. Cunningham felt at once that new standards of discussion had been set up. His
eloquent tributes to the beauty of Alabama's women and the chivalry of her sons were as fine as heart could wish. Comer stuck to freight rates. Cunningham cried out in polished periods for good roads. Everybody is for good roads, said Comer, but how about the pass evil and the lobby? Cunningham drew tears as he spoke for the 'old veterans.' Comer replies that he was one of them while Cunningham was not, but how about reciprocal demurrage? Then Cunningham came over to Comer's platform and demanded more reform than did Comer. Comer, clinging to his man like a bulldog, replied that this was unconstitutional nonsense. Gradually it dawned on the spellbinder that something was walking remorselessly over him, trampling out his political life and that something was Braxton Bragg Comer, the man who could not make a speech. ... 8

Comer met with massed opposition from men of his own class and rank, industrialists, capitalists, corporation attorneys, and party leaders. Almost without exception, the press called him radical, self-willed, self-seeking, impetuous, and dangerous to property and invested capital. They sounded alarms to the effect that the day of the Populists had returned. Every patriotic Alabamian was called upon to repel the invasion. Cunningham, a medical doctor from Bessemer, was the product of the school of formal oratory. He was an ideal representative of the Bourbons. Comer was thought to be incapable of the ability to meet the public in a tactful and dignified manner and appearance. In some
ways the opposition was correct in their judgment, because Comer did use blunt and coarse-like language in his speeches. He frequently lost his temper. Nevertheless, he was still successful in his campaign, because he "called the issues straight from the hip"; and the people were ready for such straight-forward talk.9

One amusing aspect of the campaign was that while some of Cunningham's supporters were attacking Comer for being too radical, others closer to Cunningham himself were attacking Comer for not being a real Progressive. Comer defended himself by saying that he was not a single-issue man. He supported better education, good roads, local option, and veterans' pensions. But, as he pointed out, did not everybody? What was so unique and new about these issues? Nothing, he contended. It was for this reason that emphasis was placed by Comer on the railroads. After all, even his opponent wanted these former issues to be implemented.

There seemed to be one issue that embarrassed Comer, and the opposition tried to use it effectively against him. This was the child labor issue. Comer declared he was in
favor of strengthening the child labor law, but seemed far from enthusiastic about it. This, as noted, was the one issue that made him morally uneasy. He pointed out that the agitation against child labor was centered in the Northeast and was part of a campaign to make Southern cotton mills uncompetitive with New England. In addition, he attempted to arouse race prejudice against the child labor reformers by inferring that they were friends of Northern liberals who were advocating change in racial relations and financial aid for Negro causes. According to one newspaper, "He said that the same people who were responsible for the child labor agitation were responsible for the private cars that go spinning from Washington to Booker Washington's institute." 10

The child labor debate came to a head in midsummer. It had become centered on the role Comer had played in opposing the child labor law passed in 1903. The Advertiser asked Edgar Gardner Murphy, famous reformer, leader of the child labor reform movement, and rector of St. John Episcopal Church, Montgomery, to settle the dispute and happily printed his letter. After relating the story of the negotiations
with Comer and two other cotton mill men in an effort to achieve a bill that would pass the legislature, Murphy commented: "Mr. Comer has seemed to me the most bitter opponent of child labor legislation that I have ever known. . . ." But however much Cunningham made of the child labor issue and of the need for reform of the convict lease system, he was not able to take away the image of reformism from Comer.

In spite of the charges and counter charges hurled back and forth the results on August 27 were pretty much as had been expected; the "people's candidate" was nominated by a majority of some 20,500 votes. The total votes were 58,033 for Comer and 36,628 for Cunningham. This amounted to 61.4% of the vote for Comer. Cunningham carried only seven counties. The violent anti-Comer faction had to bow to the mandate of the people and make the best of the situation. They hoped that with responsibility, a sense of caution would replace the new governor's "radical" leanings. The Comerites also obtained a sufficient working majority in both houses of the legislature. They also succeeded in capturing a number of executive positions, including the railroad commission.
It must have been a bitter pill for the Advertiser, Comer's staunchest enemy, to swallow when, on the morning of August 28, it had to concede Comer's nomination. Even in the face of the increasing number of votes coming in for Comer, the paper contended that Cunningham still had a bare chance of becoming governor. When the result was absolutely certain, it headlined: "Capitalist Has Won Over Dr. Cunningham by a Small Majority." The Canebrake Herald could not resist having a little fun with both the Atlanta Constitution and the Advertiser by saying, "It must have been a heart-rending sight to have seen the editors of these great (?) dailies sit down to eat their respective dish of crow--the one in Atlanta on Thursday morning, August 23, and the other in Montgomery on Tuesday morning, August 28." The election produced some superficially curious results because of the blurring effect of personalities, but when closely analyzed, the election of 1906 was a resounding endorsement of Comer and Progressivism in Alabama. One of the most important revelations of the election results is that there was no continuity between Populism and Progressivism in Alabama. Comer's movement rested on
a completely different coalition of groups in society. The most obvious difference was that Comer ran up great majorities in the towns and in the Black Belt where Kolb (discussed in an earlier chapter) had performed poorly. In addition, there was no significant relationship between the Populist percentage of the gubernatorial vote by county in 1894, and Comer's support in 1906. 16

On September 10, the State Democratic Convention met in Montgomery and was completely controlled by Comer men. The platform, which was prepared by Comer and his friends and was adopted without a single change, foreshadowed the events of the coming administration. It denounced lobbying, demanded railroad and rate regulation by legislation and prohibition of the operation of freight trains on Sunday. It recommended child labor regulation in mines and factories, abolition of "bucket shops," (illicit gambling establishments), encouragement of immigration to Alabama, increased educational facilities, and a liberal appropriation for Confederate veterans. It also favored an amendment to the National Constitution for the direct election of United States Senators and endorsed the primary system for the
selection of all state and national officers. New forces were radically shaping Alabama politics, and no better evidence of this fact can be found than the action of the convention when it dropped the word, "Conservative," from the party's official title, "The Democratic and Conservative Party of Alabama."  

Governor Comer's inauguration was filled with many social, civic, and patriotic events. Montgomery was full of excitement for the occasion. According to the Montgomery Advertiser, "it was the largest inauguration and greatest popular gathering in Alabama since Jefferson Davis assumed the helm of the Confederacy." Among the events that attracted particular notice, was the massive military parade and the beautiful "governor's dance" that was held the same evening. Governor Comer earnestly began his administration by immediately sending reform messages and legislation for railroad, educational, and other social reforms. His term expired in 1911.

In the election of 1910 the main issue was "Comerism." S. D. Mallory represented the Comer wing of the progressive cause in Alabama. Emmet O'Neal was the conservative
candidate. The major newspapers of the state appealed for a return to conservative government, in order to save the state from bankruptcy or social unrest. The conservatives won and O'Neal became the next governor.

Comer had watched with dismay the submergence of his policies from 1911 to 1914. He resolved to reverse these trends, and, therefore, ran for reelection in 1914. There were four candidates for the governor's chair: B. B. Comer, Charles Henderson, Lieutenant Governor Sneed, and Reuben Kolb. Kolb, by this time a very old and embittered man because of his past political defeats, had been re-admitted into the good grace of the Democratic Party, and was beginning to support the conservative wing. The issues were "Comerism" and prohibition. Most progressives were also prohibitionists. Therefore, the progressive vote was split in the primary between two of the prohibitionist-progressive candidates, B. B. Comer and Walter D. Sneed. The conservative candidate was Charles Henderson. He was a local optionist on the prohibition question. Consequently, in the primary no candidate received a majority, although Comer led the field.
The run-off campaign became very heated. The issue again became Comerism. Speakers implied that the O'Neal Administration had been plagued by graft and embezzlement. When Comer assailed Henderson as the candidate of the last administration, attacking him for "traitorous surrender to the railroads," Governor O'Neal mounted the stump and furiously fought back. In a slashing attack on Comer he said: "From the toil of little children, from the hire of convicts, from special privileges and exemptions, from railroad rebates and pauper wages he builded up his fortune, until today he stands a millionaire, typical representative of his class." Sneed supported Comer for the sake of prohibition but let it be known that personally he preferred Henderson. Strangest of all, Kolb, who had worn himself out fighting for progressive measures, now asked his friends to support Henderson "in battling for the triumph of peace." The conservative press resumed its warnings against a regime of turmoil, with its epithets of "agitator," "destructionist," and "enemy of property." In addition, the conservatives were able to line up the ranks of organized labor, who were angry because Comer had sent the state
militia into Birmingham to put down a coal strike.

Henderson won by 10,000 votes. It was apparent that the strong conservative coalition, backed by the major newspapers of the state, was too strong a force for Comer to overcome.

Except for intermittent political advice to political friends, such as the progressive governor, Thomas E. Kilby, Comer retired from the political scene in Alabama. He spent his time managing Avondale Mills and as a highly successful planter in Barbour County. However, he did serve for a brief period as United States Senator. Governor Kilby appointed him to serve out the unexpired term of Senator John H. Bankhead who had died in office. In his last appearance on the public scene, Comer served eight months in the United States Senate, rendered a good account of himself, and achieved the respect and friendship of his colleagues. Again, he returned to private life and managed, until his death in 1927, his personal affairs. Immediately after his death, many of the prominent newspapers of the state, who had been his bitter enemy, paid high tributes of praise to the noble, fearless, and progressive warrior who had
borne the brunt of the battle for reform in Alabama during the Progressive Era, 1900-1914.  

The Educational Ideology of B. B. Comer

The following section of this chapter is a discussion and analysis of ideas, concepts, principles, and generalizations of an educational nature found in the writings of B. B. Comer, and others who have interpreted these writings. Taken together, this generalized and abstract material might serve as a theoretical base (or as input data for specific decisions) for the formulation and planning of specific tasks or programs for educational activity. These generalized principles have been arbitrarily classified into four categories.

First, there are those dealing with "the educated man." Comer frequently used this term in his speeches. In current usage he is probably referring to education as a process. That is, the total influence education has had upon the formation of the individual's value system. Formal schooling is only one variable in this process of evolution. Comer referred to those qualities of character,
supposedly derived from the content of specific subject matter, that guide one's moral decisions, help formulate value judgments, and give direction to personal behavior. These, in turn, become the criteria for the formulation of behavior in the real world—that is, the relationship between the individual and those associated with him.

Comer's own personal educational training had been highly disciplined and structured. He received a typical formal and classical education of the nineteenth century—that is, with emphasis placed upon the study of Latin, Greek, the classics, and great literature. It was an education based upon a strong emphasis of memory training and recall of precise factual information. It was not unusual, therefore, for him to have noted the advantages of mental exercise and discipline of the mind, since the training of the mental faculties had been an important segment of his own classical education.

He frequently encouraged students to develop their mind and their mental faculties through serious study, and then to apply this hard earned knowledge to noble tasks. In a speech to the graduating class of Birmingham Southern
College, he noted:

The mind is the laziest part of us, the most difficult to keep on a steady job. With the summit in our eye, we love to walk along the plain. It is easier to see the great things that somebody else has done than to accomplish the success ourselves.\textsuperscript{22}

Comer urged his audience to persevere in their tasks, and determine within their own mind that they would succeed. This is certainly evident in the governor's own policies. He consistently fought for his own beliefs. He said:

Foundations sufficient to carry a mill are all made out of the smallest particles. Just so is the mind to be constructed. A determined resolution, a continuity of effort gets the better of every obstacle. There is nothing impossible to him who is resolved to be patient and untiring in his effort to succeed.\textsuperscript{23}

He believed that teachers should exert similar efforts in helping students train their minds.

You must fit your pupils' minds, not as a tailor would fit a suit of clothes, exactly to every contour, but capable of expansion, capable of adapting itself to expansion, enlarging as the mind should enlarge.\textsuperscript{24}

If the above educational framework served as criteria (as an absolute and constant) for making certain decisions about life, then, it could be logically inferred that one is an educated man.

Second, closely related to the above, was Comer's
strong belief in moral education. As a child he was introduced to the basic tenets of the Protestant ethic. He became a dedicated member of the Methodist Church, and was active in its program (as a Sunday School teacher and steward) throughout his life. Comer believed strongly that it was the personal and professional duty of the teacher to conduct his life in terms of this moral code, and attempt to have the youth follow similar precepts. However, he did not advocate sectarianism. He frequently alluded in his writings to such points as perseverance, dependability, honesty, hard work, and intensive effort. These, and other attributes of the Protestant ethic, were apparently deeply embedded within the character of B. B. Comer.

This belief caused Comer to have a sense of personal responsibility for his life. This is typical behavior for those of his day, who had been influenced by the dominant Protestant teaching of the time. In a speech before his alma mater, Emory and Henry College in Virginia, he said:

The Galilean axiom that should appeal to men of property is that no rich man is safe who is not a benevolent man; that no man of property is safe but in the imitation of that benevolent God who is the possessor and dispenser of all the riches of the
universe; and that no man is safe who does not realize
that the angel that hovers over generous deeds and
heroic virtues, flees away from the world of false
gayety and fashionable excesses.25

In order to be successful, he appealed for people to have
confidence in themselves. This potential for success, he
believed was existent in everyone. It is understandable,
therefore, why Comer wanted even the poorest child in the
state to have his opportunity for an education and a fair
chance for success. Speaking on these points, he urged:

All great leaders have been inspired with a great
belief. In nine cases out of ten failure is wrought
of unbelief. Faith in yourself must be the guiding
star of your success. The very minute you entertain
unbelief in yourself, that minute marks the fall.26

Men are accused of not knowing their own weaknesses,
and yet few men know their own strength. In man, as
in soils, there may be a vein of gold without the
owner's knowledge.27

Third, Comer viewed the principal task of public
school education (that is, its institutionalization in
terms of schooling) in very pragmatic terms. He saw the
school as a vehicle for the economic growth of the in-
dividual and of society. From a political standpoint, he
viewed the school in terms very similar to the Progressive
theory of government, as was described earlier. That is,
the school should act as the vehicle for social mobility and the equalization of opportunity for all citizens in the political and economic sectors of society.

Comer believed strongly in the advancement of democracy. This belief went much further than its simple endorsement in theory. It came down to the individual himself, regardless of his status in society. This type of political activity became the basis for the Progressive Movement of Comer on the state scene and of Theodore Roosevelt for the nation. Speaking along these lines, he notes:

It is written that to one man was given five talents, to another two and to another one. . . . The one-talent man gained nothing. It is easy to write or deal with those who bulk large. These are few and spectacular. The difficulties are with those standing at the bottom. Yet it is these who constitute the majority of our people. It is these who are the greatest care to society . . . who constitute the basis of society, and when all is well with them all is well with our government. . . .

The treatment of the common people is the test of government. If it is wise, if they are protected in every right, if they are given every opportunity to improve their condition materially and mentally, . . . if their share in the government is fully held for them then they will be progressive, going along toward a higher condition. Progress may be ever so slow, yet it will be an advance. When these conditions prevail, then it is well with the nation.28
Government was to encourage the development of these democratic attitudes and grant the needed leadership, legislation, and revenues for their implementation. Only in this way, Comer asserted, could all the people have an equal chance and opportunity for social equality and economic advancement, Comer, like President Roosevelt in his Square Deal, did not fear mass democracy. Therefore, he did not fear drastic change. These potential changes served as legal or institutional vehicles, and, in turn, helped to bring about a more democratic way of life. Subsequently, as will be seen more precisely and in greater detail later, he advocated to the legislature a massive program for the expansion and improvement of public schooling, for Comer knew that the public school was the best institution in society for the perpetuation of these changes and goals into a better life for all the people. This was especially true for the rural schools. Comer insisted upon an educational system which truly "reaches as far back as there are children." 29

Fourth, Governor Comer wanted, more than anything else, to increase and strengthen the economic stability of
Alabama. His strong belief in using education for the economic progress of individuals and society as a whole is understandable, because it is in agreement with the governor's own personal background and practices. Comer did not consider himself to be a philosopher, nor an educational theorist. Neither did he consider himself to be a professional politician. Instead, except for his tenure on the Railroad Commission and his service as governor, he was engaged in various fields of the business world.

As was true of most businessmen of his day, he viewed events in terms of their practicality, workability, potential for success and profit, and usefulness to the consumer. He knew nor cared little about the theory for why something should or should not be done. He was only interested in its outcome. If a policy or practice worked, then it should be continued. If not, then it should be discarded, and something else tried in its place. Comer, therefore, was a realistic pragmatist. By all means his strong-willed and action-centered approach to problem-solving did not imply that one should simply take a haphazard approach to things. Comer certainly insisted that the
action taken should have been preceded by careful planning and thinking. Anything less, he considered foolish, and a waste of time and money. Besides, the yardstick for Comer's successful measurement of an act was: would the means or mode chosen produce action and successful (workable) results. Comer considered planning, then as a prerequisite, a basic assumption, in decision-making.

Therefore, Comer, because of his business background, political pragmatism, and Progressive governmental policies cared little about theory, for the sake of theory itself. Comer was a pragmatist. He preferred to base his decisions upon theories that had worked in the past. Like the New Deal, however, many of his policies were not pre-determined by a fixed model; they simply evolved into being, according to the demands of each given situation. The yardstick for their success or failure, however, was always their workability, based upon active implementation.

This mode of action had its place in the planning of Comer's educational policy. He put his argument for greater financial resources for education on a typical business like basis. He insisted that the education
structure be planned for students to receive more training in how to think, and more skills in how to work. Only in this way would the next generation have greater economic earning power. In a message to the legislature, he put forth arguments, similar to the above, for mass education:

Just as it is the correct policy to take all of the raw physical material of the states and fashion it into finished and higher priced products, just as it is correct to take the agricultural lands, and by proper treatment, intensify and enlarge their production, just so the policy of the state should be to take the crude material in the shape of the youth of the state and, by putting on and putting in education, intensify the value of the citizenship of the state.
CHAPTER III

FOOTNOTES

1 A general summary of the Comer family history was taken from selected portions of Anne Kendrick Walker, Braxton Bragg Comer: His Family Tree from Virginia's Colonial Days (Richmond, Va.: The Dietz Press, Inc., 1947).

2 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

3 Ibid., pp. 47-48.

4 Ibid., p. 72.

5 Ibid., pp. 79-83.

6 The brothers of Braxton Bragg Comer were: Hugh Moss (1844-1900); John Wallace (1845-1919); St. George Legare (1847-1933); John Fletcher (1854-1927); and Edward Trippe (1856-1927).

7 Walker, p. 178.


9 Moore, pp. 664-667.

10 Montgomery Advertiser, April 24, 1906.

11 Ibid., June 29, 1906.


14. The Constitution had bitterly opposed the nomination for Governor of Georgia of Hoke Smith, who like Comer, ran on an anti-railroad platform, and was overwhelmingly nominated on August 23, 1906.

15. Quoted in an editorial in the Mobile Weekly Register, September 8, 1906.

16. Hackney, p. 278.

17. The Montgomery Advertiser, September 11, 1906.

In reference to this study, the following clauses were adopted and are important:

"Twenty-second--That we favor legislation regulating the employment of child labor in the mines and factories of this State, prohibiting the employment of children of tender years in such mines and factories, and requiring children so employed to attend school for a reasonable time during every year."

"Twenty-six--That we favor increased facilities for education among all classes of our people, particularly in the rural districts; and to that end we urge the next Legislature to make as liberal appropriations for all our schools as the finances of the State will allow."


22 *Birmingham News*, May 26, 1925.

23 Ibid.

24 From a speech delivered at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn and found in the Montgomery Advertiser, February 26, 1922.


26 *Birmingham News*, May 26, 1925.

27 From a speech made at the dedication of "Comer Hall," at the University of Alabama on May 28, 1910. Unpublished paper found in the personal collection: The B. B. Comer Papers (#167), Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

29 Thomas M. Owen, p. 386.


CHAPTER IV

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

The primary purpose of this chapter is to examine the educational program of the B. B. Comer administration. This was accomplished by means of an analysis of the official addresses made by Governor Comer to the legislature from 1907 to 1911. Comer recommended in rather precise terms a definite program for legislative consideration and approval. Concurrently, the reaction to these executive proposals by the legislature itself has been noted. The primary sources for examination of legislative reaction were the Official Acts (General Laws of the Legislature of Alabama), the Journals of the House of Representatives and Senate, and newspaper articles. This plan of research was chosen so that the reader might see the success of the
governor's recommended program of educational policy-making (his planning phase) in terms of its legislative passage or defeat (the implementation phase). Therefore, some conclusions could then be drawn about the degree of actual legislative success of the Comer administration for educational progress in Alabama. These legislative accomplishments could then serve as the base for future implementation in actual school situations.

Comer's Theory and Plans

The Comer administration distinguished itself in the expansion of the educational facilities of the state. It has been said that the success of modern public school education in Alabama is based on the Comer administration, and that during his four years as governor the state made more progress in public education than had been made in all its previous history. As was noted earlier, before 1900 the story of public school education in Alabama had been one of poverty, inefficiency, and confusion. But with the three mill tax
provision of the 1901 constitution, the ground work was laid for a progressive school system.² It remained for someone to urge the wise spending and equal distribution of this revenue. The new governor in his 1907 inaugural address defended all branches of the state's educational system and advocated increased appropriations for each with special emphasis on rural and agricultural schools.

In the inaugural address he outlines his position in rather general terms. Concerning his general views on the role of public school education he said:

We have paid too little attention to education. Education is the basis of civilization, and the foundation of success. The state should have no higher or greater asset than educated citizenship. From all sides come the statement of neglected conditions in our educational system. These conditions should be carefully investigated and corrected. . . .

Alabama must move up from its foot position in education and advance among the first; . . . We have one of the very best foundation systems for higher education of any state that I know of; . . . Gentlemen, . . . lets cement the hands of these systems and carry them all to success for the benefit of our people. Let them all be our greatest care, and you should do everything that you can for their success, even to the division of everything that we have, so that we
can take up this inherited work, carrying it from generation to generation of success. Alabama could have no fairer sky in the great future than to set the future with a diadem of education. 3

Comer then makes a strong plea for the rural schools. Throughout his administration he was concerned over the apparent trend of population changes in the state. The cities seemed to be growing in numbers at the expense of the rural areas. Invariably, he contended, this would harm the quality of education in rural areas. Also, Comer was a strong believer in the merits of rural life. Like Jefferson, he associated the country life with a life where certain qualities of character and ethics could be obtained and perpetuated. The city contained the seeds of moral degeneration. He urged the people to remain or move back to the country, so that their children could receive "the high moral condition and the healthy atmosphere of the country in the up-bringing of their children." He promised that these schools would receive ample financial support. He
tried to assure the city schools that they had no reason to fear such a course of action, "because from the country school comes the upbuilding of every other school, and we could give no healthier atmosphere to this state than to place in the midst of every rural community a first class school." ⁴

Comer also made a vigorous defense of the state agricultural high schools. These schools had been under attack for some time, on ground that their graduates had not remained on the farm. Comer contended that this was unfair criticism. If they had to stay in rural areas, then this would be holding back the total economic progress of the state. He proudly states that the Comer family had come from a farm background, but had made a success in manufacturing and related fields. Why not, he insisted, give other rural boys the same chance. He pleaded, "Give your farmer's boys a chance ... and with that chance he can go to
the towns and cities and take hold of the helm of business, . . . can come to your state capitol as a law maker, or governor-elect . . . and criticize him not if he sees proper to depart from the cotton row. . . .

These were some of his generalized promises.

The future would show if Comer truly meant to implement them in more meaningful terms; or whether it was just promised political talk. Although Comer, throughout his campaign, had made the conventional recommendation of increased school facilities, most people were inclined to treat them as typical political promises, made only to be forgotten. But Comer was not a typical politician. Once he had recommended a certain point, he would fight for it to the finish. It so happened that in his educational program the governor had little or no opposition; he was not compelled to do much fighting. Governor Jelks, Comer's predecessor, had left a full
treasury, and Comer could conceive of no better way
to dispose of this surplus than in the advancement
of public education. He spent these dollars and
millions more of new revenue to the end that there
should be schools "as far back in the country as there
were children," high schools in every county, and higher
institutions of learning better prepared and ready to
receive those increased numbers to come up from the
lower schools. 6

Governor Comer undoubtedly understood the nec-
essity of adequate educational facilities for protect-
ing and preserving the democratic ideal of government.
But this practical businessman was not given to expound-
ing theories in elaborate and flowery terms. He rather
preferred to state the facts of a case and then devote
most of his energy to seeing that some action was taken.
Thus, he put his argument for education on a typical
business-like basis. He argued that the more training
in how to think and how to work that one received, 
would produce in the next generation greater earning 
power. 7 In a message to the legislature, he put forth the following argument for mass education:

Just as it is the correct policy to take all of the raw physical material of the state and fashion it into finished and higher priced products, just as it is correct to take the agricultural lands and, by proper treatment, intensify and enlarge their production, just so the policy of the state should be to take the crude materials in the shape of the youth of the state and, by putting on and putting in education, intensify the value of the citizenship of the state. 8

From the general statements favoring education in his inaugural address, Governor Comer proceeded to more specific recommendations in his regular message to the legislature on January 15, 1907. He grouped the various branches of the school system of the state into seven different classes: The rural and common schools, the normal and teachers institute schools, the Alabama School for the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind, the Girls'
Industrial School, the nine agricultural schools, the Polytechnic Institute, and the University. He advocated a fair and equal treatment of all of them "without prejudice or jealousy of one of the other." Although Comer recommended the expenditure of large sums of money for education, an examination of his speeches will show that he was impartial in suggesting its distribution.

**Common Schools**

The basic unit of education in the state was the system of common schools. The governor estimated that tax equalization would mean a $225,000 increase per year for the school fund which supported all common schools. In addition, he recommended a direct appropriation of $300,000 per year from the general fund for these schools. Just six days after this recommendation, the legislators appropriated the $300,000 as suggested, and increased the sum to $350,000 during the last two years.
of Comer's administration, making a total of $1,300,000 for the four years.\textsuperscript{11} When the regular school funds from ad valorem taxes, interest, and poll taxes are added to this amount, the common schools received for the four years a total of $8,435,688, as against $5,050,157 for the four years just preceding 1907.\textsuperscript{12}

This general increase in public school funds met with widespread approval.

If Mr. Comer's friends reflect his views on education, and there seems to be no doubt but that they do, he is going in heavily for the betterment of the educational facilities of the State. It will be recalled that in a recent address, Governor Jelks said that the surplus in the State had been piled up for the schools of Alabama and for no other purpose. It is said that the new Governor has the same views . . . and that the schools are going to get more money than they ever got before. It is further said that the colleges and the University of the State, are going to be treated liberally, as well as the common schools. It will develop that the school legislation will be one of the most interesting subjects before the coming session. . . .\textsuperscript{13}
In addition, the state superintendent of education reported that its wise expenditure had greatly improved the rural school system. In his last annual report to the governor Superintendent Harry G. Gunnels wrote:

It must be a source of much gratification to you in these closing days of your administration to remember that the public school fund three months before you came into office for that school year was $1,150,000, while now we have available for the present school year . . . $1,913,000—an increase of three quarters of a million dollars.14

As a further aid to the public schools of the state, the legislature made a direct appropriation of $67,000 ($1,000 for each county) to aid in the repair and building of rural school houses. Each school district had to match the amount of the state fund with an equal sum.15 The result was an instantaneous interest and awakening; from all over the state came reports of developing interest in schoolhouses.16 Six hundred and sixteen new school houses had been built by the end of 1910 and three hundred and sixty-eight
repaired at a total estimated cost of $500,000. 17

The superintendent reported that during the last two years of the administration valuations in schoolhouses, white and black alike, advanced twenty-five percent each year. 18 In order to finance this worthwhile building program, Comer consented to the transfer of the proceeds accruing from the fertilizer tag tax from Auburn and the agricultural schools to the building fund. 19 Although in his first message he had warned the legislators against diverting any of this tax money from its intended purpose of supporting the Polytechnic Institute and the agricultural schools, he now reversed his position and approved complete maintenance of Auburn and the agricultural schools through direct appropriations. 20

Secondary Schools

Comer's term is best remembered for its aid and encouragement to another phase of education, that
of the secondary schools. In 1907 the only high schools directly supported or controlled by the state were the nine district agricultural schools (one located in each congressional district) provided for by the legislature of 1895. The governor was impressed with the successful work that they were doing and unhesitatingly recommended their continuance and enlargement. He said that in granting the requested increase for each school from $2,500 a year to $5,000 a year, the legislature could not authorize a more "economical and profitable expenditure." The legislature provided for a $2,000 increase per year to each school and stipulated that not less than $150 of this sum should be used in maintaining, cultivating, and improving the farms and making agricultural experiments on them.

A few good four-year public high schools had been established in Mobile, Selma, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Birmingham. For the most part they were locally
controlled and financed. A grave need soon developed for effective standards for high schools in their relationship (in terms of sequence, role, and articulation) to colleges and elementary schools. A properly defined place between the elementary school and the college needed to be made in Alabama for the high school. Only then, could each function effectively in its proper sphere. Before the legislature enacted these needed changes, it was not unusual for elementary schools to teach secondary material; or for "colleges" to teach secondary material and award "diplomas."

In 1905-1906 the General Education Board provided special funds to the University of Alabama, for the specific employment of a Professor of Secondary Education to aid the state in developing a system of secondary schools. President John W. Abercrombie of the University of Alabama and Professor Joel C. DuBose, the Professor of Secondary Education, immediately began to
work for the establishment of high schools throughout the state. DuBose spent much of his time in 1905-1906 and in 1906-1907 making educational addresses in all parts of Alabama, with the intention of arousing a strong interest in high schools.24

The Alabama Education Association at its annual meeting in 1907 provided in its programs for much discussion of high school problems. Resolutions were passed in favor of the state provision of high schools and for the delineation of courses of study for the various divisions in the educational ladder.

Resolved, That the Legislative Committee of the Alabama Education Association is hereby instructed to secure the passage of a bill defining what the course of study in a high school should be, and authorizing the County Boards to establish and maintain one high school or more in their respective counties.

Whereas, Under the present lack of articulation, in the courses of study of the educational instructions supported by the State, there is and will continue to be much
of needless and expensive duplication in the work of instruction; therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Governor and Legislature are hereby petitioned to create and empower a competent board, to be composed of educators, one from each class of institutions, whose duty shall be to determine and outline substantially the academic courses which may be offered by each class of institutions, fixing a minimum for the superior, and a maximum and minimum for the secondary and elementary schools.25

Comer, in his first message to the legislature, did not actually advocate the establishment of these schools but merely recommended for careful study and consideration the propriety of establishing them at some early date.26 During the summer recess, however, he must have become convinced of their necessity. To the reconvened legislators in July, he said, "I would recommend that you make provision for the establishment of high schools in those counties of the state which at present have no state schools."27 Such a provision had been introduced into the Senate during the first session
by W. W. Barbour, and finally passed both houses on August 6 as one of the last measures of the regular session. The new law provided that the governor, auditor, and superintendent of education should constitute a committee to locate one high school in each of the counties of the state where there was not already a similar institution. When the county had constructed a building, which together with the property would be worth $5,000 or more, then the state would appropriate to each school $2,000 annually for teachers' salaries. Each school would be under the administrative control of a special board of trustees located in the respective counties. The teachers had to hold a first grade or life certificate, and the students had to pass a preliminary examination as a prerequisite for admission. The schools were to serve white students primarily. A course of study had to be formally approved.

By 1910 twenty-nine such schools were in active operation,
and school property valued at $435,000 had been added to the state. By 1911 thirty-three high schools had been established with a total enrollment of 2,405 students and buildings worth over $500,000.  

Normal Schools

The primary purpose of the normal schools was to educate future teachers and provide special institute work for those who were already teaching. Comer referred to the normal schools as "one of the greatest forces in motion for the good of the state." These schools benefited from increased appropriations. Their yearly sums from the state were increased by $5,000 each (from $13,000 to $18,000), and provision was made for establishing two new normal schools, one at Moundville in Hale County and one at Daphne in Baldwin County. The four older normal schools were located at Florence, Livingston, Jacksonville, and Troy.
Institutions of Higher Learning

Comer's educational program was equally generous to the institutions of higher learning. A college graduate himself, he realized the advantages of a collegiate education; at the same time he realized how sadly these state supported colleges had been neglected. "No State," he said, "can build higher than its school system, and any state that fails to satisfy the aspirations of its young people for even the highest education, and fails to take such young people into its commensurate care, then that state has failed in its duty." Comer unhesitatingly insisted on additional aid in maintenance and new buildings for all of the state colleges. "He was not afraid to stand for higher learning," wrote the Montgomery Advertiser on the occasion of his death, "and never responded agreeably to the overtures of politicians who were only too eager to capitalize the prejudice of thoughtless people against the university
Comer said to the legislators in reference to the University, the leading institution of the state's educational system:

Alabama has been very negligent of the University. As a result the University stands today as a beggar struggling with inadequate means. . . . As a boy in the spring of 1865, a student of the University, I saw the smoke of the consuming fire, and, as a man, I feel and know the necessity of a home university and cannot too highly recommend to you the care and keep of it as a valuable heritage to last forever devoted to the upbuilding of the youths of the state. . . .

Following the governor's specific recommendations, the legislators increased the regular annual appropriations by $25,000. The further annual sum of $100,000 for the quadrennial period beginning in 1907, was appropriated to the University for the exclusive purpose of making needed improvements in its physical equipment. The building fund was used to repair and restore the old
buildings and to construct three new ones: Smith Biological Building, a mine and mechanical building, and an academic building. The academic building was later dedicated as Morgan Hall and the mechanical building dedicated to the governor himself as Comer Hall. The facilities of the University were also increased with the incorporation of the medical college at Mobile as an integral part of the state school. Appropriations of $5,000 annually were made for its maintenance and $45,000 for repairing its physical equipment.  

Governor Comer's efforts for higher learning were not directed exclusively in favor of his own alma mater. The other two institutions, the Polytechnic Institute, and the Girls' Industrial School at Montevallo, benefited proportionately from his program. Comer requested, and the legislature granted a special building
fund of $56,000 a year to Auburn and a substantial increase in the maintenance funds. Out of this building fund were erected a dormitory, a library, a mechanical and textile building, and an agricultural building. The total building fund amounted to $224,000. The agricultural building was later dedicated to Governor Comer. The governor seems to have been especially interested in the girls' school at Montevallo which had opened its doors in 1895. "In all the systems of schools which Alabama now offers to the citizenship of the State," he asserted, "the design is good and the success should be unmeasurable." The appropriation of $36,000 a year for the next four years for buildings and equipment made possible a rapid expansion of the Montevallo school. As a tribute to Governor Comer and his efforts in behalf of the school, the B. B. Comer Hall was dedicated at Alabama College on April 26, 1940.
Eleemosynary Institutions

In 1907 the state was supporting five eleemosynary institutions, and during the next four years provision was made for two more. All of the existing institutions except the insane asylums at Tuscaloosa and Mt. Vernon were benefited by reorganizations and increased appropriations. In regard to the asylums, there were frequent charges of mistreatment of inmates and misuse of funds during the four years. With this in mind Comer, in his retiring address, suggested that the board of trustees should be nominated by the governor rather than be self-perpetuated, and that the superintendent should not have unchecked access to the state treasury.

Both the Boys' Industrial School at East Lake and the Deaf and Blind Institute at Talladega were improved through increased funds and reorganizations.
The governor wholeheartedly commended the system of separating the youthful offender from the hardened criminal and recommended that the East Lake School be placed entirely in the state's hands, instead of being supported in part by private donations. The passionate personal regard for every person, good or bad, can be noted in this plea by Governor Comer:

I strongly recommend that a sufficiency of the general fund be diverted to the upbuilding and enlarging of facilities for their care, . . . to keep them separate from the adult convict and keep the best influences around these boys at the beginning of their life, giving them every opportunity that the State can furnish for reformation. As long as we recognize the principle that bad company is destructive even in our home life; how much more so must it be in the . . . convict life; and if we in our homes recognize the importance of securing good influences, how much higher is the duty of the State to separate these boys and give them the best influence rather than the worst?44
Its maintenance fund was more than doubled, and an additional $50,000 was granted for buildings, machinery, and other improvements. 45 Badly in need of aid, the school for the deaf and the blind was also reorganized with the trustees appointed directly by the governor. It was given a special appropriation of $50,000 to pay off its indebtedness, and an increasing maintenance fund was continued. 46

Other Enacted Legislation

Besides the increased appropriations to the schools of the state, and the formation of high schools in the counties, the administration was noted for other improvements and changes in the educational field. An act was passed providing for the redistricting of the public schools, with clear guideline for the administrative control of such schools. The county was to be divided into districts (except in a special case where
a county had been given legal exemption. Special
elections were ordered for the selection of three dis-
trict trustees. These trustees were legally respon-
sible for the care of school property, the selection
of teachers, and the general status of education with-
in their area. They, in turn, were responsible to the
county board of education. This body was composed of
four county trustees, chosen from the district trustee
chairmen, and the county superintendent of education.
The county board could upon petition and by majority
vote alter, change, or restructure boundary lines of
separate school districts. Additional districts could
be likewise created. However, these conditions do not
apply to independent school districts, primarily in-
corporated cities, since in most cases these municipali-
ties had their own local boards of education. This sys-
tem of organization of separate school districts with-
in county systems was the accepted and legal pattern of
Legal provision was also made for the city schools. Each city system had a separate board of education. In towns with a population of 6,000 or more, the board would consist of five members. The administrative duties and tasks of local boards were similar in nature to those of the county board. In addition, "it shall be the duty of the city board to present to the city council an estimate of expenses for school maintenance, in order that the city council might make annual appropriations for the support and maintenance of the schools..." This ability to plan fiscal activity on an individual basis was not enjoyed by school districts within the counties. The county districts had to depend mostly upon state financial aid. City systems had the right of local taxation. A change was needed to allow the districts within the county the right to tax themselves. However, this was
legally forbidden by the Alabama Constitution. Only an amendment would give these districts the legal evidence for such initial changes.

Cities and towns were authorized "to convey real or personal property and to make appropriations of money from city funds, and to aid in the location and in the construction of high schools and high school buildings. . . ." 49 This act simply extended the provisions of the August 7, 1907, Act which originally established high schools in the state. It gave cities the same legal rights as the counties had had earlier.

Changes were made in the certification system. The most significant area was that of the life certificate. After 1909, any teacher who had taught for six years under a first grade certificate could apply to the state board of examiners for a life certificate. No examination was required. However, the teacher had to have the local or county superintendent acknowledge
that he "had shown a high degree of proficiency and professional attainment." The teacher forfeited the certificate when he had not taught for a period of five years in continuity. 50

An act was passed in August, 1907, providing for the taking of a school census during the month of July every other year. The district trustees or the various boards of education were made responsible for seeing that this was carried out in their respective districts. 51 This act was badly needed, because the appropriations were based upon these figures. With a more reliable statistic pattern, the money could be fairly and impartially distributed according to the true patterns of population. Another act reorganized the state textbook commission and procured for use in the public schools a uniform series of textbooks. 52
Increased Expenditures

The achievements of the administration are brought graphically in focus when the total expenditures for education and eleemosynary institutions for the years 1903 through 1907 are compared with expenditures for the same purposes between the years 1907 and 1911. During the first period the total was $6,730,678, while the second period showed a total of $11,589,788—an increase of $4,859,109 or seventy-two percent. In his last message to the legislature, Governor Comer gave a detailed statement of these expenditures. This material places in proper context the educational accomplishments of the Comer administration in terms of financial support. This material is included in its complete form:
## EXPENDITURES FOR EDUCATIONAL AND ELEemosynary Institutions

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### EXPENDITURES--Continued

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These increased expenditures, however, brought down as much, if not more, condemnation upon Comer's head than any of his other policies. The people had been accustomed to seeing the treasury reports show a surplus, and the excess disbursements over receipts which showed up at the end of each fiscal year between 1907 and 1911 was strange and disconcerting to them. During the early years this excess was taken up by the surplus left in the treasury from the former administration. But when this sum was exhausted, the auditor's report showed a deficit, and the governor was obliged to borrow up to the constitutional limit of $300,000. Comer was accused of endangering the state's financial standing, and many of his former supporters turned against him. This pattern of deficit spending was typical of Progressive state and Federal practices. Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson believed in heavy spending for public improvement. This was certainly characteristic of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, and has continued for the most part until the present.
New Revenue Measures

In planning the appropriations for education and related services at the beginning of his administration, Governor Comer did not recommend borrowing of any kind, since he believed that the revenues would be sufficient to cover all expenditures. At the same time he realized the unreasonableness of a government which would deprive a state of essential services by conserving its funds merely to show the electorate a surplus on the balance sheet. "A good government," the governor told the legislature, "is not necessarily a cheap government; you can carry your smallness of appropriation and stinginess of method to an extent that would be most hurtful to the very best interests of the people." Comer, of course, realized that the greatly increased expenditures would put an additional strain
on the treasury and would necessitate a proportionate increase in the revenues of the state. He believed that an equalization of taxes, raising the assessed valuation where it was too low, and taxing property that had hitherto escaped altogether, would increase revenues sufficiently to meet all demands. Many thinking people in the state had realized for some time that the government, in numerous instances, was not receiving its just share from ad valorem taxes. Even Governor Jelks, a conservative, had admitted that the efforts of the tax commissioner to increase assessments had shown "pitiful results" and had not affected one person in a hundred whose valuations deserved to be raised.

Comer was more bitter in his denunciation of the existing tax laws, saying that they made possible crude, irregular, and unequal assessments. He pointed
out that it was practically impossible for the tax assessors of the different counties to establish equitable and just values of the properties. To remedy this situation, the governor recommended the creation of a state tax commission to have general supervision of tax assessments and to equalize the values of the property in the state so that the same general relation would be established for assessments on all of the property in all of the counties.

A bill creating such a commission was introduced early in the legislative session and, although defeated once, was finally passed by a vote of sixty-one to twenty-three. It provided for a board of three members, appointed by the governor, with terms of four years and salaries of $3,000 for the chairman and $2,400 for the associates. They were to have general and complete supervision over assessment,
collection, and enforcement of the tax laws of the state and over county tax assessors, collectors, and commissioners. The need for such coordinating work was evidenced by a report of the commission to the governor which stated that ninety per cent of those people who paid taxes on property valued at sixty per cent were farmers and small holders, and that ninety per cent of those who paid on a property value of less than thirty per cent were large owners and corporations. It was, therefore, obvious that the state was unable to offer a maximum program of education and related services to the people, because of its extremely low and biased tax assessment and base. It was also obvious that the burden of taxation rested primarily upon the very people that such reform and educational legislation would serve the most—namely, the common people with meager incomes and small landholdings. This,
according to Comer, was a deplorable situation.

In attempting to correct this injustice, the commissioners encountered many obstacles, chief among which were the lack of cooperation and often actual opposition from the county officials. They reported that at first the county courts of commissioners were almost hostile to their efforts at reform. Nevertheless, the results of the commission's work were encouraging and decidedly beneficial to the state. Three years and a half after its creation its report showed that the taxable values of the state had increased $147,801,809. During the period between 1905 and 1909, this represented the most significant increase, in terms of percentage growth, in the history of the state until 1909. In later administrations, of course, the amount of revenue increased, but the level of percentage growth was not as high as the Comer period
Another method by which Comer hoped to raise additional revenue was the imposition of an intangible franchise tax. Such a measure would subject to taxation the franchises of public service corporations, a type of intangible property which had hitherto escaped. According to the governor, such property was just as much subject to taxation as a "cow, a horse, an acre of land, or a stock of goods," in fact, more so, because it was a "gift from the people." The act providing for such taxation was duly passed by the legislature and was administered by a special board separate from the tax commission.

Altogether, the total tax assessment in 1910 was $508,568,616, while in 1906 it had been $374,850,032. This remarkable increase in assessed valuation naturally resulted in a proportionately large increase in the
state's revenues. The increase, however, was not sufficient to cover entirely the unprecedented rise in appropriations. Thus the state showed a constantly increasing deficit because of its excess of expenditures over receipts. Comer himself admitted that in December, 1906, there was $1,382,806 more available cash in the state treasury than at the same time in 1910. This proved to be one of the most vulnerable points of Comer's administration, and his critics were not slow in taking advantage of it. Even some of his former supporters became critical of the situation which the Mobile Item described as Alabama's "financial cramp brought about through Governor Comer's injudicious and unwise administration." Comer, of course, was not unaware of the situation. He had expected a larger increase in tax values from the work of the tax commission, but the
state had lost revenue when the prohibition law became operative. This rather large excise tax was now lost to the treasury. In his mind the only question concerning the state funds was, had they been wisely expended. Comer stoutly defended his actions, when he said:

When the "watch-dogs" of the treasury protested against the amazing increase in appropriations for education, I remained undisturbed and declared that I was considering future citizenship as well as contemporary tax payers; that with more training in how to think and how to work, posterity would have a proportionately greater earning capacity and I would rest my case with posterity who would help pay the debt.\textsuperscript{72}

And to further and more specifically prove that they had, he listed in detail the many worthwhile institutions and projects which had benefited from the increased appropriations.\textsuperscript{73}
Proposed Legislation

There was other legislation that was proposed to the legislature by Governor Comer. However, for various reasons it never was enacted into law, due to opposition from certain pressure groups among the lawmakers. Nevertheless, an examination of this material shows clearly what issues of an educational nature were controversial. It also identified future problems that Alabama must solve in terms of educational change, progress, and reform.

Comer was unsuccessful, however, in accomplishing one of his most earnestly desired educational reforms, compulsory education. Although he did not mention it in his first message to the legislature, a compulsory education bill was introduced into the Senate by H. E. Reynolds and passed by a vote of thirteen to twelve on February 5, 1907. The bill provided that
children of both races must attend public schools for
a minimum of two months per year. The committee on
education in the House, however, reported adversely on
a similar measure introduced by N. M. Rowe. Thus
during the regular session, the two houses were unable
to agree on the necessity of any action in regard to
compulsory education. The Montgomery Advertiser gave
full support to the governor in this struggle. They
noted:

It is argued that it is not worth while for
the State to spend the amount which will go
to the public schools under the new law un-
less it is so arranged that the children of
the State will take at least a part of the
facilities afforded. The bill is very mild
to begin with and it does not seem that it
can work a hardship on anyone.

The governor again recommended this reform to
the special session assembled in November, 1907. He
said that from his recent visits throughout the state
a deep and widespread appreciation of the increased
appropriations and an accompanying sentiment that the future well-being of the state required a compulsory education law. He then stated:

... that the State should exercise its power to see that every child is given some benefit from the State bounty. I, therefore, recommend the consideration and passage of a law requiring attendance of the schools of the State and suggest that the provisions thereof should be fair and reasonable, but adequate to accomplish the important end in view.77

The bill proposed in the special session of 1907 would have provided only a minimum of two months compulsory education for white children. The language requiring "compulsory attendance for Negro children was very ambiguous in wording; and, consequently, deliberate legal loopholes would keep Negroes away from the schools. The editor of the Montgomery Advertiser acknowledged that there would likely be problems if compulsory education applied to Negroes, but, nevertheless, tried to calm the fears of the opponents of the measure. He
reasoned:

In his call the Governor words his proclamation so that the next measure introduced that provided for compulsory education would include not only white children, but also negroes. This will undoubtedly cause considerable opposition to develop from the fact that it will take the harvesters in the black belt away from the fields, and seriously cripple the business of the cotton planters in that district.

However, the bill being considered is so safeguarded under its provisions that the negroes will not be forced to attend school in any counties. This removes the chief objection which has been held against a measure of this sort. Governor Comer has repeatedly endorsed the measure. 78

Despite these efforts the bill was defeated in the Senate by a vote of seventeen to fourteen. 79

Comer, however, never gave up hope for this progressive measure. Again, he included it in the call for the special session of 1909 and suggested to that group that they not hesitate in the matter. "No parent,"
he said, "in a state with such educational advantages as Alabama offers has the right to rear his family in ignorance." This bill provided that white children must attend a public school for two consecutive months. The age range for compliance was from years eight to fourteen. Unlike the two former measures, there was no mention whatsoever about the Negro attendance. It was strictly a measure for white children. The proponents of the bill hoped that this would remove the opposition to it. However, the legislature rejected this measure also. Comer was ahead of his day; not even the mildest type of compulsory education requirement was put into effect until 1915.

Other important legislation was introduced that failed to become law. One bill provided for the increase of the school term to six months, except in certain agricultural counties where the terms would be five
The school districts of the county needed special financial assistance. A bill was introduced in the House that called for an amendment to the state constitution that would allow these districts to place a voluntary three mill tax upon themselves when approved by local special elections. This bill was supported by State Superintendent Gunnels, the Alabama Education Association, and many interested teachers throughout the state. The Advertiser gave its full support to the proposal. They argued:

The money appropriated for rural school districts at the last session of the Legislature is all eaten up for the first year. The terms under which this money was appropriated were that any district could obtain an amount not less than $100, nor more than $200, provided the district applying raised a corresponding sum. This has been done in nearly every instance by popular subscription and the people themselves have evidenced a desire to have a tax for this purpose, it is said, in order that the popular subscription plan may be abolished.
The measure failed to pass the House by the three-fifths majority required for proposed constitutional amendments. Therefore, under the law of 1907, only the counties had the privilege of local taxation for support of public schools. In an editorial, the Advertiser severely criticized Governor Comer for his failure to support the efforts for local school district taxation. They noted:

The Governor's proclamation convening an extra session of the legislature is full of eccentricities. The Governor asks the Legislature, for example, to pass a compulsory education bill, and yet he neglects to ask it to submit a constitutional amendment empowering the school districts by local taxation to provide additional accommodations for a doubled number of pupils.  

A proposed amendment was defeated to make the poll tax mandatory. The measure would have brought in an estimated $175,000 annually in school revenues.  

State Superintendent Gunnels vigorously supported a measure to reform and improve the qualifications and
training required for county superintendents, particularly those duties or functions that related to educational supervision. The State Department of Education, since the time of Superintendent Abercrombie, had constantly complained to the governor and legislature about the poor quality of leadership and the lack of qualified county superintendents. Most county school leaders were not professionally trained educators. In fact, some of them considered the position as "a second job." This deplorable situation seemed to be due to politics, since the office of county superintendent was an elected position. Subsequently, due to the political opposition of certain legislators who might have lost favor in their home counties for their support of the bill, the legislation failed to pass. Comer did not support the measure either. Undoubtedly, he considered it too great of a political risk. 87
Other Reforms and Accomplishments

Related to Education

Governor Comer and his legislature are usually remembered for their major reforms in the fields of education, railroad regulation, prohibition, and tax assessments. There were, nevertheless, other outstanding achievements in widely different fields. The governor himself can be given exclusive credit for some of them, while others came about without his recommendation and in a few instances over his opposition. It is undoubtedly true that the administration's general approval of the policy of governmental expansion influenced these other reforms. Comer's crusading spirit encouraged other reformers to advocate more arduently than ever the various causes closest to their respective motives and desires.

Child Labor

During the first part of the twentieth century,
the question of child labor became a dominant issue in state and national politics. Advocates of legislation for the benefit of working children, increased, and many states fell in line behind the reform movement. A child labor bill had been introduced into the Alabama legislature in 1901 but had failed to pass because of the powerful opposition of manufacturers. As a mill owner, Comer naturally had an interest in this question, and he played an important part in the adoption of Alabama's first child labor law. He and two other manufacturers meeting with Edgar Gardner Murphy, Chairman of the Alabama Child Labor Committee, reached an agreement on the terms of the 1903 compromise measure. This law was less drastic than the one proposed to the legislature two years earlier; the minimum age for employment was ten instead of twelve, the maximum hours a child could work were sixty-six a week instead of sixty, and no provisions were included for compulsory
education or adequate enforcement. 89

Comer's role in lessening the severity of the 1903 law made excellent campaign material for his opponents in 1906, and they did not fail to use it, as was noted in an earlier chapter. Murphy said that the Birmingham mill owner had opposed legislation in any form and had made concessions with the greatest reluctance. At the same time he pointed out that he meant to cast no reflections on the Comer mills themselves which were above the average in providing reasonable working conditions for employees.

However, Comer's child labor policies were severely criticized by A. J. McKelway, a northern lobbyist for the National Child Labor Commission. In order to show an unbiased opinion of the review of the literature, excerpts from a letter written by McKelway, concerning the working conditions at Avondale Mills, are
presented. He noted:

I paid a visit to Mr. Comer's mill last week in February, 1906, not attempting to enter the mill for purpose of investigation, as I regard that as rather a breach of hospitality. I personally saw a large number of children evidently under twelve, the legal age, and some who did not appear to be more than eight or ten, coming out of the mill at the noon hour and entering it when the mill began running again. . . .

The school attendance is very small compared with the number of children of school age employed. . . . [There was a school maintained on the mill property. He was to have talked with children] who said they were ten years of age who worked regularly in the mill. A constant complaint with the school management [was made] about children withdrawing from school to work in the mill. . . . Relatively speaking I should say that, with the exception that no night work is done, Avondale Mills are next to the worst I have ever investigated. . . .90

Comer believed that the manufacturers themselves were capable of regulating the child labor question.

However, he had never denounced child labor laws, although from a business standpoint he could not afford...
to recommend the most drastic measures. The Democratic platform of 1906 declared that children of "tender years" should be prohibited from employment, and that those allowed to work should be required to attend school for a certain length of time each year.\textsuperscript{91} In his first regular message to the legislature, Comer, recognizing the general demand for such legislation, recommended a graduated limitation of age and a short compulsory education period. At the same time he warned the reformers to proceed carefully for fear of upsetting an established source of income. Apparently, Comer believed that the economic assets outweighed other benefits. He cautioned the legislators in the following appeal:

\begin{quote}
I will caution you that a great many people have gone to the mills to work because they have found by experience that they can earn more money . . . and it is a very serious matter for the State to assume the guardianship as to how and when these people shall work and direct and dictate to them by methods of law as to whether they shall or shall not work
where they think to their best interest.

In the rural districts and in towns and cities there are many poor families, . . . with children, and any one familiar with the conditions of such things would know that many of them could do better in the mill than elsewhere. 92

The January legislature of 1907 saw the introduction of two child labor bills, that of the Alabama Child Labor Committee, introduced by William L. Pitts of Perry, and that of the manufacturers by A. D. Kirby of Madison. 93

The chief difference between them was in the power of enforcement although there were some differences in hours. The legislators took no action during the winter session, and critics were quick to point out that the responsibility lay on administration leaders because of their lack of interest. One of them pointed out in a critical editorial:

Is it possible that this Legislature is not going to pass a child labor law, that will protect the young and helpless from the pitiful slavery many of them have been submitted to. It is a platform declaration that a child labor law shall be passed, and we take it that such a declaration would not have been made if the existing statute had not been regarded as an abortion, a fraud, and a sham. Are cotton mills so pure in the eyes of the Legislature that their owners and managers are to be allowed to take children of any and all ages, and work them many and all hours? 94
However, a bill for the inspection of jails and almshouses, which did pass, included a provision for the inspection of cotton mills.\textsuperscript{95} The child labor reformers considered this measure a defeat, inasmuch as they had hoped to create a special office or commission to enforce the child labor law.\textsuperscript{96}

During the summer recess the reformers carried on a vigorous campaign; Murphy wrote all the legislators an open letter on the child labor question in Alabama, urging them to take immediate action.\textsuperscript{96} In June, Governor Comer received a report from Dr. Shirley Bragg, first inspector of cotton mills, which showed that the child labor law was being flagrantly violated. The chief executive, recognizing the gravity of such a situation, said in his message to the reconvened legislature in July:

\textit{It is just and right that you should provide an effective method for enforcing the child labor law. This could easily be done by empowering the inspector of cotton mills to discharge any boy or girl from the mill who in his judgment is under age, or not in fit condition to work, at the same time providing a penalty for the punishment of the mill owner and the parent for re-employing or re-hiring such parties so discharged without first getting permission of your inspector.}\textsuperscript{97}
However, in the same message Comer urges the legislators not to be extreme in their controls, and not to be unreasonably influenced by overzealous activists in this field. He still contended that the common people stood to lose more economically than was justified, if the state restricted private business severely. Undoubtedly, Comer's loyalty to the reform of child labor was not very zealous. As governor, however, and perhaps also due to political expediency, he did support moderate reform. Nevertheless, it must still be noted that his background as a businessman in the textile industry allegedly did influence his thinking on the matter.

On July 16 the House recommitted the Pitts bill on motion of Sam W. John of Jefferson, an ardent administration supporter. The bill came up again as a special order on July 23, and Mr. John reported a substitute which relaxed some of the more drastic provisions. In spite of the efforts of Mr. Pitts and A. M. Tunstall to amend the substitute, it passed the House sixty-eight to two, and a week later by the Senate twenty-three to one. The new law provided that no child under twelve should be
permitted to work in any mill, factory, or manufacturing establishment in the state. A child between twelve and sixteen must attend school eight weeks for every year of employment, and a child under fourteen must not work more than sixty hours per week. No one under sixteen could work at night, and no one between sixteen and eighteen for more than eight hours at night. Additional provisions stipulated methods of enforcement and inspection.\(^{102}\)

Although these provisions seem very lenient when judged by present-day standards, they were similar to child labor regulation in other states. Even the Southern secretary for the National Child Labor Committee reported to his organization that the results of the Alabama legislature's work appeared to be satisfactory.\(^{103}\) For the first time, an Alabama child labor law provided some means of enforcement. The power of the inspector was extended in 1909 to include more industries, but he was still overburdened and unable to do a complete job. While Comer did not fight so strongly for a stricter child labor law as he did for certain other measures, he certainly did nothing actually to block its passage.
Juvenile Court Reform

A major court reform of the general juvenile court law must have gained Comer's approval and support, because of his interest in the principle of segregating the youthful offender from the hardened criminal. "If we in our homes," he said, "recognize the importance of securing good influences, how much higher is the duty of the state to separate these boys and give them the best influence rather than the worst." 104 Prior to 1907 both Birmingham and Mobile had a special juvenile court caring for delinquent children, but the other counties of the state had no similar facilities. 105 On January 10, 1907, Sam Will John introduced a measure providing for juvenile courts in the other sixty-five counties, and the House passed it by a unanimous vote on January 30. 106 During the special session in November of the same year, however, A. M. Tunstall introduced a measure calling for the repeal of the John bill. This also passed, forty-seven to eleven. 107 The state supreme court in 1909 stepped into the picture and declared the Tunstall repealing bill unconstitutional because technically it had been reported
incorrectly before passage. Thus when the special legislature assembled in 1909, the juvenile court law was theoretically on the books although no one had heeded its provisions. This session left the original 1907 act intact, except for amending and modifying certain of its minor provisions as set forth in the 1907 code. The general juvenile court bill remained on the books but received little attention until 1919 when the child welfare department was established. The Comer legislature, however, must be given credit for first enacting a general juvenile court law for the entire state.

Temperance Legislation

During the Comer term prohibition was one of the key issues. The legislature passed the Carmichael-Fuller law which contained one of the most drastic anti-liquor codes in the country. It is not the purpose of this discussion to examine the prohibition controversy in detail. However, there were two areas which related directly to the educational situation in the state. One dealt with revenue. The excise taxes had provided the school funds of the state and a number of individual counties with
revenue, in cases such as Mobile in substantial sums. As a result of the adoption of the prohibition bill, this source of revenue was, of course, cut off. Some educational leaders, such as Superintendent Murphy of Mobile County, had opposed prohibition fearing its impact in financial terms upon the schools. In fact, after the passage of the measure Mobile and other counties were given special permission by the legislature to enact new school taxes to replace replenished funds. As part of the prohibition legislation, a bill was passed which made it compulsory for the schools to educate Alabama children on the evils of intemperance.

The Attitude of Alabama Educational Leaders toward the Comer Educational Policy

The following section is an analysis of the attitudes, of the state's educational leaders toward the educational policies of the Comer administration and legislature. This examination shows what the leaders, in the educational field itself, thought were the accomplishments of the period from 1907 to 1911. Concurrently, the
analysis of the literature also points out the shortcomings in education for this period, and the subsequent problems that would need immediate attention and approval for the future.

The primary material used for this investigation was The Educational Exchange (the official news periodical of the State Department of Education and of the Alabama Educational Association), the Proceedings of the Annual Sessions of the Alabama Educational Association, and the Reports of the Department of Education. This analysis of attitudes, positive and negative, deals primarily with policy, not with actual school practices, of the Comer period. The available statistical data, found in the Reports of the Department of Education, covered only a four-year sequence of time for this study's purposes. Consequently, it would be difficult to deduce valid inferences from such a small sampling of data. These statistical tables presented unreliable information, a complaint often noted by the State Superintendents in their reports, because the state law did not require an accurate collection of such data. Consequently, a sound
systematic system of reporting data was virtually impossible to achieve.

The reaction of the educational leaders was most favorable toward the legislative measures passed during the regular session of 1907. This was particularly true for the acts that increased educational appropriations; that provided for improvement and expansion of schoolhouses; that established county high schools; and that reformed the textbook commission. In speaking to the Alabama Educational Association in 1907, State Superintendent Gunnels proudly referred to these accomplishments. He noted:

There has never been in the history of Alabama a time when the people were so determined to build up in this great State an educational system commensurate with its advancement along industrial and commercial lines. Perhaps no governor of the State has ever taken so broad, so liberal, and so comprehensive a view of the question of education in Alabama as has our present chief executive . . . he has given his energies, his indomitable perseverance, and his masterful influence to measures which had for their object the building up of all the schools in the State, from the greatest university down to the schools of the masses. 112

He concluded that the schools had received the money that was needed, and in some cases more than had been asked for
or expected by the educational leaders themselves.

In 1908, Superintendent Gunnels expressed similar sentiments about the educational progress that had been made. He noted that it had been a great period of "educational uplift" within the state. He contended that it had become popular for the politicians to run for office on a platform promising to improve the schools; something, Gunnels claimed, that had been unheard of a few years earlier. In terms of the most specific accomplishment for the 1907-1908 year, he pointed out: "Perhaps the greatest single movement of the last year, . . . was the movement enacted into law by the Legislature, encouraged by our Governor, providing for the establishment of a County High School in each county of the State."^113

In 1907 the Alabama Educational Association expressed their official gratitude to Governor Comer and the legislature in a special resolution. They considered the passed legislation as "advanced steps" needed by the state to bring educational conditions up to the level of other states. They noted, "We cannot commend them too highly for their patriotism in thus advancing Alabama to
her rightful place in educational opportunity. The resolution closed with the following words of praise:

"In the name of those we represent, we extend them a vote of thanks and express this belief: that they will be known long and well as 'The Educational Governor and Legislature.'"

In an editorial in The Educational Exchange, the editor, J. B. Cunningham, outlined the legislative program for education and expressed sentiments similar to those described for the Alabama Educational Association. "Not a state in the Union has ever in history done, comparatively," he asserted, "so much for its schools at one sitting of its Legislature."

More specifically, significant achievements were noted in the September, 1907 paper. First, Cunningham had much praise for the larger educational appropriations. It was an unprecedented sum. Second, there were needed changes in the textbook laws. The books were to be adopted by a single commission, staffed in part by professional educators, who had the power to exclude books from the schools "found non-worthy."
Third, a tremendous step toward advancement was made with the establishment of county high schools. The editor particularly favored the provision that the county, and, consequently the local people, had to donate five acres of their land for the building. The building and land must have been valued for at least $5,000 according to the law. "This local effort feature," he noted, "will prove the chief good in the law; for when the people find they can have high schools, the problem of local interest and support is solved."117

Fourth, the school building law allotting $1,000 to each county as a stimulus to incite local effort for the erection of common schools was considered a wise measure. The editor saw no injustice in the provision that required the cities to be taxed for the aid of educational conditions in rural areas, because the cities could well afford the extra expense. He claimed that such a policy would pay off in the future in increased educational dividends. It was claimed, "it will come back at compound interest in a few years when the needs of culture begin to satisfy themselves. The ignorant neither care nor are
able to buy; the educated manifold their wants and multiply their powers to acquire."\textsuperscript{118}

Finally, this spirit of awakening and appreciation for the governor's leadership was evident by comments made in the \textit{Report} by Superintendent Gunnels to the chief executive. He gives Governor Comer ample credit for the educational breakthrough, when he declares:

It should be a source of gratification to you as Governor, as it is to me as Superintendent of Education, that never before in the history of the State has there been such an awakening of the people along all lines of educational endeavor. To you largely should be given the credit for the many long strides which have been taken in matters educational.\textsuperscript{119}

Gunnels was especially satisfied with the work accomplished for the rural schools. He declared that with the establishment of county high schools, it would be easier to systematically classify the grading of the public schools and thereby plan their curriculum.\textsuperscript{120} In the 1910 \textit{Report} he concluded that the building of schoolhouses throughout the state had been the most impressive and significant feature of educational progress during his tenure in office.\textsuperscript{121} It seemed, therefore, that the educational leaders were relatively well satisfied about the educational
conditions in Alabama from 1907 to 1911.

The former conclusions concerning the accomplishments of Comer's educational policy must be placed in perspective if a misrepresentation of the literature is to be avoided. This is not asserted to unduly downgrade or criticize his educational achievements, because it has already been established and substantiated by secondary and primary sources that Comer's contributions were significant and far-reaching in the educational history and development of Alabama.

However, since Comer was a politician and had to deal in realistic terms with the legislature and the body politic, quite naturally he offended or disappointed certain groups because he did not support, or was openly opposed to their respective requests for legislative or executive action. Some educational leaders, no less than any other special interest group, at times became alienated about the administration's priority of issues and selection of movements worthy for strong support and embodiment. Comer, however, had to place his approval upon those issues or problems that he believed that the people were ready to
accept. Concomitantly, the governor could only go as far as his legislature was willing and at times they refused to concur with his suggestions for educational progress. Therefore, the following is not construed to be hyper-critical of Comer as a policy maker. It is only to show that some educators did not believe that the utopia had arrived. There were still many problems for future zealous educational reformers to attack.

The three most serious problems that needed attention were competent supervision of the rural (county) schools, local district taxation, and compulsory education. These measures were mentioned frequently in the literature. Most educators urged the governor and the legislature to enact measures for the relief of these needs.

State Superintendent Gunnels, the Alabama Educational Association, and The Educational Exchange supported measures for the reform of county supervision. There was a bitter fight for needed changes that dealt with the appointment and duties of county superintendents. Subsequently, Gunnels offered to the legislature a bill to radically reform this position in order to improve the
quality of personnel, the teaching within the schools, and the professional image of the office. He insisted that the county superintendents should be professionally trained schoolmen, who were removed from the direct pressure of politics. Only in this way could the office exert strong leadership and remain independent from the whims of every desire of even the slightest pressure group. The most important part of the proposed bill was Section Two. It said:

Sec. 2. That the county board of education shall . . . elect a teacher holding a first grade or life grade Alabama certificate, as county superintendent of education, whose entire time shall be devoted to supervising the schools of the county, and to the performing of all such other duties as may be required under the laws of the State, and the rules and regulations of the county board of education.122

Gunnels presented his case ably to the legislature and to the people. He informed the Alabama Educational Association that, "in the great majority of instances . . . the county superintendents . . . have had absolutely no training for school work and are absolutely unqualified for supervising the schools."123 He contended that the people were "served" by officials untrained to intelligently
handle and economically use the large sums of money appropriated to the rural schools of the state by the legislature of 1907.

The bill had strong opposition from most of the county superintendents, since they stood to lose the most from its adoption. Consequently, a majority of the legislators were pressured into voting against the bill. They feared the negative reaction that a positive vote might provoke in the home county. Also, Governor Comer did not throw his full support behind the bill. He did not necessarily oppose it; instead he let it die in the legislature. 124

With the defeat of the Gunnels Bill, it might have seemed that the progressive leaders would have given up in disgust. However, such was not the case. The educational leaders then submitted their second major proposal to the legislature. This was a proposed amendment to the constitution for local district taxation for support of local educational needs. Unfortunately, the measure failed to receive the necessary three-fifths majority needed for its submittal to the public for acceptance by means of a special
election. In 1909 the Alabama Educational Association published a lengthy essay in which it noted that three "obstacles" had to be overcome before the legislature would likely pass such a measure. First, due to the geographical isolation of the people caused by the sparse population patterns, it was difficult to get the message to the rural public that conditions needed improvement. Second, in general there was "a lack of general sentiment favoring educational progress" in many counties, particularly when it involved higher taxes. The educational leaders planned to overcome these troubles by means of a massive public relations campaign. Its aim would be to change public opinion, and convince the people that further taxation was profitable to them, because it would bring the advantages of a higher quality educational system to their respective communities. Third, the Negro problem hindered the progress of the adoption of local taxation. J. M. Pratt speaking about this point, as it related to the local taxation movement, claimed:

It is a question which none but the patriotic people of the South can solve. The negro is going to be educated. No race can live in this great Republic
without being educated, and it is only a question as to whether his education shall be directed by men who know of the condition of the negro of the south or by the wisdom of Southern statesmen. It is a thoughtless man who refuses to pay additional school tax because the negro children would receive a portion of the benefit. The argument is too shallow. You might as well advance the proposition to destroy all the food in the world in order to starve another, though by the operation you would have to die yourself. I do not mean that the negro should share equally with the whites, but that as we develop our own school, the negro school should receive in proportion to what he already gets.125

Superintendent Gunnels advised Governor Comer that he considered the local taxation issue to be the most important immediate educational need facing the state at that time. He urged the legislature to approve the amendment and submit it to the people for their consideration. He urged:

It seems that the State has almost reached the limit of educational growth under existing constitutional and statutory limitations. Very little more in the shape of funds, if any, can be expended from the State, as a state, towards the support of the public schools. If advancement is made . . . , the people of any district should have the right to tax themselves for the purpose of educating their own children. When it is known that 81 per cent of our school children . . . live outside of incorporated towns . . . the importance of a measure of this nature is obvious.126

In 1909 local citizens interested in such an amend-
ment began a movement to have the issue brought before the legislature. This was known as the "Whirlwind Campaign." During Comer's term it did not reach its zenith of influence. However, during the administration of Superintendent Feagin and Governor Henderson their efforts bore fruit, because the legislature submitted to the people a proposed amendment for local district taxation, which after a massive campaign for its adoption was subsequently approved in a special election. 127

The third major problem facing educational leaders that remained unsolved was the lack of a compulsory education law. In this case the education forces had many friends in the legislature and a strong ally in Governor Comer. The governor supported compulsory education and urged the legislature to enact a law to compel children between the ages of seven and fourteen to attend a public school for a minimum of two months annually. However, due to the fear that Negroes would be forced to attend school, the bill was defeated.

Superintendent Gunnels continued his efforts for this much needed reform. He told the Alabama Educational Association in 1907:

I fail to see how anyone objects to a law for compulsory education. Someone has said, "Illiteracy has no rights; it is contrary to our national ideal. Every illiterate citizen makes popular government less certain." The theory that no child must be permitted to grow up in ignorance is eminently a correct one, for ignorance is
the ally of crime and poverty. It is the purpose of the school to attract away from crime and thriftlessness towards morality and thrift. . . . Alabama has reached the point in her public school system in her march towards material progress and governmental glory that she can afford to require the education of every child. 128

As if to prove his point more specifically, the State Superintendent noted in the 1910 Annual Report that only sixty-three percent of white pupils actually enrolled constituted the average daily attendance for the schools throughout the state in 1909-1910. Concerning Negro attendance, sixty-two percent of those enrolled constituted the average daily attendance for the same period. This was proof enough, he asserted, that compulsory education was needed if Alabama's standard of citizenship were to be raised. 129

There were other problems that related to school practices. However, the three principal problems, that have been discussed previously, needed legislative approval to become policy for future school practices. They remained the key issues for educational consideration for the next two gubernatorial administrations.

Thus, no period in the history of Alabama before 1907, experienced as significant advancements in public education, as did the Comer administration. B. B. Comer and the legislature enacted numerous measures that substantially increased
expenditures for public schools, expanded the breadth of public education to greater numbers of clients, and improved the curriculum and instruction. All levels were liberally cared for—the common schools, agricultural high schools, secondary schools, normal colleges, and institutions of higher learning. Governor Comer was especially proud of the law that provided for the county high schools. This helped to accomplish his goal, namely, that schools "be established as far back as there were children." Also, the Comer administration enacted the first significant and regulatory child labor act into law. It provided for compulsory education of children working in mills. In addition, needed changes were enacted improving the state textbook laws, administration of the county schools, and teacher certification. However, certain reforms requested by the state educational leaders failed in the legislature. These were the compulsory education law, local rights for district taxation, and means for improvement of supervision in rural schools. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged, by Comer's contemporaries and by Alabama historians, that Comer deserved the distinguished title of being "Alabama's Educational Governor."
CHAPTER IV

FOOTNOTES

1 Moore, p. 672.

2 Ibid., pp. 543, 728-729.


4 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

5 Ibid., p. 7.

6 Donald Comer, "Governor Comer, His Life and Work," p. 9.

7 Marie B. Owen, Our State: Alabama, p. 370.


10 Ibid., p. 33.
11. Mobile Register, January 26, 1907; Act 201


13. Montgomery Advertiser, January 4, 1907. Also see: Birmingham Ledger, January 2, 3, 1907; Mobile Register, February 20, 1907.


17. B. B. Comer, Message, January 10, 1911, p. 2.


19. Mobile Register, February 16, 1907.

20. B. B. Comer, Message, January 15, 1907, pp. 36-37.


22. B. B. Comer, Message, January 15, 1907, p. 35.

24 Hyatt, pp. 102-104; Moore, pp. 330-332; Weeks, pp. 184-185.


26 B. B. Comer, Message, January 15, 1907, p. 36.

27 Ibid., July 9, 1907, p. 16.


31 B. B. Comer, Message, January 10, 1911, p. 22; Weeks, p. 185. According to the Annual Report of the Department of Education, 1909 (Montgomery, Ala.: Brown Printing Co., 1909), pp. 139-140, the following county high schools had been established:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>TOWN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Scottsboro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choctaw</td>
<td>Butler</td>
<td>Lamar</td>
<td>Vernon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleburne</td>
<td>Heflin</td>
<td>Lowndes</td>
<td>Ft. Deposit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Enterprise</td>
<td>Macon</td>
<td>Notasulga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cullman</td>
<td>Cullman</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Gurley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>Plantersville</td>
<td>Marengo</td>
<td>Thomaston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb</td>
<td>Ft. Payne</td>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Hartselle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escambia</td>
<td>Atmore</td>
<td>St.Clair</td>
<td>Odenville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>Russellville</td>
<td>Winston</td>
<td>Double Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>Etowah</td>
<td>Attalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>Tallapoosa</td>
<td>Dadeville</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the Annual Report of the Department of Education, 1910, the following high schools for counties were added. See pp. 190-191.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>TOWN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autauga</td>
<td>Prattville</td>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>Ozark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbour</td>
<td>Clio</td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>Moulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibb</td>
<td>Centerville</td>
<td>Pickens</td>
<td>Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>Ashland</td>
<td>Randolph</td>
<td>Wedowee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colbert</td>
<td>Leighton</td>
<td>Walker</td>
<td>Jasper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wilcox</td>
<td>Camden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following is an officially approved Course of Study for the County High Schools of Alabama. It is a pamphlet published by the State Department of Education, and was bound as a supplement of the Annual Report of the Department of Education, 1910. See pp. 10-13. It is included as follows:

**FIRST YEAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of recitation periods per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH--Grammar reviewed, Rhetoric and Composition and Classics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS--Arithmetic reviewed, two recitations per week in first half of year and one recitation per week last half year. Algebra, three recitations per week first half year and four recitations per week last half year</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISTORY--English</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEELLING--Common Words Commonly Misspelled; two recitations per week, no credit given.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIENCE--Physical Geography, three periods per week for first half year, and three periods per week for second half year until March when Agriculture is taken up. Agriculture, three periods per week, during March, April and May.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIRST YEAR—Continued

No. of recitation periods per week

MANUAL TRAINING AND DRAWING—Geometrical
  Drawing---------------------------------------------------------------2
ELECTIVE—Latin or German-----------------------------------------------5
LATIN—First Year--------------------------------------------------------5
GERMAN—Grammar and Composition, easy reading--------------------------5
SCHOOL GARDEN WORK—(Duggar's Agriculture as a Basis.)

Required periods--------------------------------------------------------23

SECOND YEAR

No. of recitation periods per week

ENGLISH—Rhetoric and Composition, and
  Classics---------------------------------------------------------------5
MATHEMATICS—Plane Geometry---------------------------------------------5
HISTORY—Ancient----------------------------------------------------------3
SCIENCE—Biology, three periods per week during
  first half year; Botany three periods per week
  during last half year; Agriculture one period
  per week during whole year--------------------------------------------4
MANUAL TRAINING AND DRAWING—Mechanical
  Drawing or Linear Drawing----------------------------------------------2
ELECTIVE—(One of the following)----------------------------------------5
LATIN—Caesar, four books; Grammar and Prose
  Composition-------------------------------------------------------------5
GERMAN—Grammar and Composition, reading of
  Intermediate texts------------------------------------------------------5
COMMERCIAL ARITHMETIC--------------------------------------------------5
SCHOOL GARDEN WORK

Required periods--------------------------------------------------------24
### THIRD YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>No. of recitation periods per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH--History of English Literature,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition and Classics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHMATICS--Advanced Algebra</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISTORY--Medieval and Modern</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELECTIVE--(Two of the following)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LATIN--Cicero, six orations; or Cicero's Letters and four orations. Grammar</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRENCH--Grammar and Composition, reading of easy texts</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERMAN--Same as in first year</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOOKKEEPING</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYSICS AND AGRICULTURE--Physics four periods per week, and Agriculture two periods per week during entire year</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL GARDEN WORK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required periods</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### FOURTH YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>No. of recitation periods per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH--American Literature, Composition and Classics and Advanced Grammar</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHMATICS--Solid Geometry, first half year; arithmetic, second half year</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISTORY--United States History and Civics, Alabama History</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELECTIVE--(Two of the following)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIENCE--Chemistry and Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Chemistry 5 periods per week during first half year and three periods during second half year; Agriculture two periods per week during second half year)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOURTH YEAR--Continued

LATIN--Vergil, six books; or 1500 lines
    of Ovid's Metamorphoses and four
    books of Vergil---------------------------5
FRENCH--Grammar and Composition,
    reading of intermediate texts------------5
GERMAN--Same as in second year-------------5
BOOKKEEPING AND COMMERCIAL LAW-----------5
SCHOOL GARDEN WORK

Required periods--------------------------24

32 B. B. Comer, Message, January 10, 1911, p. 23.
    1907, pp. 187, 565, 327.
34 B. B. Comer, Message, January 15, 1907, p. 38.
35 Montgomery Advertiser, quoted in Vance, p. 257.

Comer's interest in higher education was a lasting one.
In 1922, long after the expiration of his term as governor,
he made an outright donation of $10,000 to Alabama Poly-
technic Institute. Montgomery Advertiser, February 26,
1922. He also gave a gift of $10,000 to the University of
Alabama, and of $5,000 to Emory and Henry College,
Virginia. In addition he aided the two schools at Old
Spring Hill Plantation: the Catherine Comer School for
white children and the Becky Comer School for Negro
children. He was awarded honorary doctorates from the
University of Alabama and Emory and Henry College. Found
in personal letters of the B. B. Comer Papers and Collec-
tion, Southern Historical Collection (#168), University
of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
41 Ibid.
43 B. B. Comer, Message, January 10, 1911, p. 8.
44 Ibid., January 15, 1907, p. 19.
53 B. B. Comer, Message, January 10, 1911, p. 15.
54 For a detailed statement of these expenditures see p. 170.

56 *Mobile Daily Item*, November 1, 1907.


64 *Mobile Register*, July 10, 1907.


71 Mobile Daily Item, November 1, 1907.


73 See list of expenditures on p. 170.

74 Senate Journal Reg. Sess. 1907, pp. 163, 750.


76 Montgomery Advertiser, July 26, 1907.


78 Montgomery Advertiser, November 15, 1907.

79 Mobile Register, November 20, 1907.


81 Montgomery Advertiser, July 29, 1909.


83 Montgomery Advertiser, July 13, 1907.

84 Ibid., July 14, 1907; July 31, 1907; August 3, 1907.

85 Ibid., July 18, 1909.

86 Ibid., August 15, 1909.
87 Ibid., July 7, 1907.


90 Letter found in Montgomery Advertiser, August 10, 1906.

91 Alabama Official and Statistical Register, 1907.

92 B. B. Comer, Message, January 15, 1907, p. 21.


94 Montgomery Advertiser, February 26, 1907. Also see Birmingham Ledger, March 8, 1907.


96 For the manuscript see B. B. Comer Papers, Archives Department, Alabama State Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

97 B. B. Comer, Message, July 9, 1907, p. 16.


99 Ibid., pp. 3426-3430.

100 Ibid., p. 3433.


103 Davidson, p. 223.
104 B. B. Comer, Message, January 15, 1907, p. 19.


109 For an account of the history of the Alabama juvenile courts see Alabama Childhood (April-June, 1921), I.

110 Montgomery Advertiser, August 5, 1909; Montgomery Advertiser, November 19, 1907.


113 Ibid., 1908, p. 68.

114 Ibid., 1907, p. 75.

115 Ibid.

116 The Educational Exchange, July, 1907; April, 1907.

117 Ibid., September, 1907.

118 Ibid., September, 1907; November, 1907; March, 1908; November, 1908; June, 1910.


Ibid., 1910, p. 13.

The Educational Exchange, March, 1907.

Ibid., July, 1907.


For a detailed account of this campaign for local taxation see Illiteracy Bulletins, 1909-1918 (Montgomery: Alabama State Department of Education, 1919). A bound periodical found in the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

Proceedings of the Alabama Educational Association, 1907, p. 29.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Rationale

The rationale of this study was based upon the premise that education is a process of enculturation. This process involves an interaction between the individual and his total environment. Since it involves his total environment, all the major institutions of society (schools, churches, government, business, youth groups and others) have their respective influence upon "the enculturation process." This new thesis in educational historiography had led to a revisionism in the writing of American educational history. The writings of Lawrence Cremin and Bernard Bailyn have been frequently cited as source material by those interested in the new educational historiography.
Once it is acknowledged that several institutions in society have influenced the educative process, it becomes necessary to define more distinctly the role of the school. Consequently, the school as an institution is the focal point of investigation. This is important because the school is the only institution established by society to serve the unique function of providing children with knowledge and skills for successful living through teaching. When it is recognized that education as schooling has been influenced by varied and complex institutions of the social order, it becomes necessary to consider the revisionist's viewpoint about the study of any particular educative process. For this study the problem selected for analysis is the contributions of Governor B. B. Comer to public education in Alabama, 1907-1911.

This rationale provides the intellectual framework for the interpretation of a more specific subject or sequence of time. Hence, in this study, the administration of Governor B. B. Comer was selected with the objective of ascertaining his contributions to public education in Alabama. A variety of data, indirectly and directly related
to institutionalized education (schooling), has been used. Political, economic, and intellectual data was used to clarify the educative process—that is, the role between the school and society. The secondary material of the Comer period deals more precisely with the educational policies of B. B. Comer. These policies, in turn, became the focal point of importance since they served as frames of reference for schooling practices. Such a rationale provides a framework for the systematic study of conditions or movements in Alabama that influenced the educative process and, consequently, influenced the formulation of school policies during the Comer administration.

The historical background was discussed. Pertinent economic, political, intellectual, and educational data were considered. The primary aim was to place the Comer period in its historical context.

The changing role of the school was examined. After the Civil War it was believed that social mobility and economic opportunity existed for all in American society. The public expected the school to enhance this optimistic belief in democracy and equal economic opportunity.
In the 1870's these conditions changed rapidly. Big business controlled the economy. The money-power was vested in the hands of a few wealthy capitalists. The National Government encouraged the continuation of this system with its political policies and laissez faire practices. The intellectual community supported this movement toward the rule of "the able" as a natural phenomena, and called it Social Darwinism.

The school reacted to this changed situation. Schoolmen, such as William T. Harris, admitted that economic opportunity was difficult to achieve. Without radical curriculum change, it was an unrealistic objective to expect youth to take advantage of economic mobility, because the course of study did not provide for comprehensive training in technical and work skill areas. To make social mobility and economic opportunity a realistic ambition for youth, he urged that schools become departmentalized with "built-in ladders of opportunity." Subsequently, the vocational-technical-trades movement began. Closely related to this economic educational innovation was the establishment of high schools in many sections of the country. Now the
school had become the vehicle for the economic advancement of its clients.

However, as was soon discovered, many youth did not (or could not) take advantage of these opportunities. Also, the general public realized that until certain fundamental changes were made in the economic structure, prosperity and the good life would be denied to the masses. They realized that the "American Dream" was a myth. The nation was socially polarized into two dominant classes, the rich and the poor. The common people demanded immediate and radical change. The Populists heard their cry and became the party for the "have-nots" of America. However, they lacked the organization and political support for success.

By 1900, the Progressive Movement had begun. It became a powerful force for change. Progressives used the government to perpetuate needed reforms. They believed in increased governmental powers. These powers were used to overthrow the special interest groups that had taken advantage of the people. Progressive politicians called this period of reform and its subsequent increase in governmental
activity for the people, "participant democracy." The Progressives caused economic opportunity and social mobility to become a possibility again. The polarization of society was removed, and a strong middle class rose as the dominant class. It was a middle class revolution. The most noted national Progressive leaders were Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. In Alabama, B. B. Comer led the movement.

The political and economic reforms directly affected the school's role. The school became more liberal and democratic in its practices. The most famous advocate of educational progressivism was John Dewey. Dewey asserted that the school was society's vehicle for perpetuating democratic views. Schooling should, thereby, reflect the total society. For instance, if participant democracy was a value in society, then it should be practiced in the schools.

A general historical survey of the political and educational conditions were presented for Alabama, 1865-1906. The educational awakening in Alabama gained impetus during the 1890's under the leadership of State Superintendent John W. Abercrombie.
A survey of Comer's political rise to power was noted. His role in the campaign of 1906 for the governorship was described. His platform consisted of four progressive planks: (1) educational progress, (2) railroad reform, (3) child-labor reform, and (4) prohibition.

A sketch of the family history and a short biography of Braxton Bragg Comer was presented. Comer claimed a family of distinction in the history of Alabama.

The speeches of the governor were examined to determine his educational ideology. Comer supported the classical tradition for general education. He frequently spoke of "the educated man." A close analysis of his usage of this term, showed that he was referring to a system of values that prepared the learner for successful living. He also advocated a strict moral education. In terms of public schooling, Comer urged that the school structure its curriculum whereby the people could prosper economically with social dignity. He was a typical Progressive. He supported economic opportunity and social mobility.
Conclusion

Assessment of B. B. Comer as a Progressive in the Reform Movement

B. B. Comer's four years as governor were indeed eventful years in the history of Alabama. He set a new course for Alabama, introducing and stirring up sentiment for reforms that continued to influence the state's history. To be sure, he suffered political reverses, and more conservative leaders later checked the rate of change; but the Comer tradition persisted. "Comerism" in its broadest sense has truly had a far-reaching and compelling effect on the life of the people of Alabama. His influence in the history of the state is comparable to that of his great contemporary, in the history of the nation, Theodore Roosevelt.

Comer was one of those leaders whom people were either for or against. He was too positive and dynamic, too assertive and aggressive for people to view with indifference. Thus the people of Alabama divided themselves into pro-Comer and anti-Comer camps, praising and condemning in turn the governor and his administration. His
supporters pointed out that the state under Comer had made more progress in a greater variety of fields than had been made in the whole history of the state. Opponents, on the other hand, referred to him as an impetuous radical who kept the state in constant agitation, spending the state's revenues recklessly with no thought for the future.

Governor Comer really enjoyed fighting for the governmental reforms which he considered "just causes." In his endeavors he never went out of his way to cover up his real intentions or to appease his enemies. He was a man of action and not a conciliator. These qualities were conducive to friction and antagonisms. Whatever his habits and methods, it cannot be doubted that the governor was fundamentally and zealously interested in the welfare of the people and the state. In his last official public address he said, "I have done what I could to promote advancement and prosperity of our state and to build it for a higher and better citizenship." ¹

Governor Comer was noted for a variety of reforms. His railroad legislation probably won for him the most immediate praise by the common people of the state.
However, educational advancements made during his administration were the most noted permanent contribution. The Montgomery Advertiser, Comer's most bitter political enemy, noted his contributions, particularly those of an educational nature, in a special editorial at the time of the governor's death.

Braxton Bragg Comer, who died yesterday, was entirely different from any other man who had been Governor of Alabama. He was a maker of precedents rather than a devotee of precedents. What had been done before did not interest him so much as what could be done now to affect the situation immediately at hand. He was an iron-handed, resolute man who could not yield. This quality in a public man makes him a dramatic and colorful figure, but it requires a capacity for rapid and original thought, the faculty for prompt decision and energetic action to carry him through successfully. It greatly magnifies one's responsibilities and if it simplifies the problem of achieving notable ends it also involves no slight hazards to one's fortune.

Mr. Comer was pugnacious and courageous. He always fought to the end—fought hard and savagely and in turn was himself fought hard and savagely. But he could take punishment as well as give it. He gave no quarter and asked none. He found joy in battle and conquest, and was never weak.

We think that his name will long be remembered, but mainly because of his service to education rather than because of his fight on the railroads and his relation to the history of prohibition in the State. He greatly advanced the cause of common school education and threw the weight of his influence behind the university and the colleges. He was
not afraid to stand for the higher learning and never responded agreeably to the overtures of politicians who then, as well as now, were only too eager to capitalize on the prejudices of thoughtless people against the university and the colleges.²

Thus, B. B. Comer stimulated an interest in public questions, a new vision of the obligations of government in a democratic society, and a zeal for the finer things of life. Alabama was on its way to the making of a truly modern state.

Assessment of B. B. Comer's Educational Policies

The historical material presented and interpreted in this study suggest the following conclusions respecting educational policy in Alabama under the administration of Governor B. B. Comer.

1. The common schools received a significant increase in appropriations from the legislature.

2. The legislature provided for an extensive building and repair program for the common schools. This improvement in the physical condition of school buildings was a significant accomplishment.
3. The agricultural high schools were given continued support and needed money.

4. The foundation for a modern secondary education program resulted from the policy of Governor Comer and his legislature.

5. The provision for the establishment of a high school in each county of the state was a great impetus for creating and arousing important high school activities in Alabama between 1907 and 1911.

6. A systematized course of study was developed for the county high schools by the State Department of Education and the High School Commission.

7. The Alabama Educational Association, and other interested organizations in the state, were powerful forces in the development of secondary schools in Alabama.

8. The establishment of high schools made it possible to systematically grade the public schools into elementary and secondary divisions.
9. The establishment of high schools delineated a clearer articulation relationship between secondary and higher education in terms of the role each division offered and of the structure of the respective curricula.

10. Local interest was secured by requiring donations for buildings and equipment for the location of the county high schools.

11. The facilities were improved at the four established normal schools. Legislation was passed establishing two additional normal schools.

12. Governor Comer reacted favorably toward the institutions of higher learning. The University of Alabama, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, and Girls' Industrial School received substantial gubernatorial support, increased revenues, and enlarged physical facilities.

13. The eleemosynary institutions that dealt with youth and their education were cared for by the Comer administration. The two that were given
special aid were the Boys' Industrial School and the Deaf and Blind Institute.

14. Acts were passed to improve the administrative system of county schools; to define and locate the boundaries of school districts; to systematically classify the role of the district trustees and county boards of education; to establish a uniform textbook commission; and, to reform the teacher certification system.

15. The legislature passed several measures to reform the tax structure and expand the base for tax assessment purposes. Consequently, the revenues for education and other related reforms rose to a marked degree.

16. The first significant breakthrough in child labor regulation was enacted by the Comer legislature.

17. The first significant improvement in juvenile court reform was passed during the Comer period.
The success of the Comer administration was substantiated, not only by contemporary newspapers, but by professional historians as well. It was noted earlier that such writers as Marie B. Owens, Thomas M. Owens, and Charles Summersell gave Comer credit for the progressive policies of his administration. However, a personal tribute to his leadership came from A. B. Moore, author of History of Alabama.

When Professor Moore was preparing his original manuscript, he sent a letter to Governor Comer, dated May 10, 1926. In this letter he requested that the governor give his reactions to the manuscript dealing with Comer's life and administration. Moore included some pertinent personal remarks about his work as governor during the Progressive Era. These evaluative remarks were:

Great emphasis will be placed on your administration, which I regard, after much study, the best administration in the state's history since the War between the States. In your administration the hopes and aspirations of the people for a generation began to bear fruit; and Alabama began
to catch step with the national progressive movements and with the most advanced states of the Union. To my mind your administration was to the state what Roosevelt's and Wilson's were to the nation. The march of progressive democracy, . . . is based upon the foundations laid in your administration. . . .

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that studies should be based upon a revisionist rationale structured, for example, according to Cremin's and Bailyn's thesis of "education as enculturation."

2. It is recommended that other gubernatorial administrations should be researched using the procedures that were applied for this study.

3. It is recommended that a study should be made of county high school practices in Alabama using the procedures that were applied for this study.

4. It is recommended that a study should be made of the educational contributions of State Superintendent John Abercrombie, using procedures that were applied for this study.
CHAPTER V

FOOTNOTES


APPENDIX
AN ACT

No. 757

To provide for the establishment of high schools in this State, and to make appropriations for said schools.

Be it enacted by the legislature of Alabama:

Section 1. The governor, auditor and superintendent of education be and they are hereby constituted a commission to locate as hereinafter provided one high school in each of the counties of this State, provided that a high school shall not be established under the provisions of this act in any county in which there are already established an agricultural school, normal school for white people, the Polytechnic Institute, the University of Alabama, the Industrial School for White Girls or a high school free to all the children of the county, until after a high school has been established in all the other counties.
Section 3.* That any county, where the citizens thereof shall secure a suitable site which shall consist of not less than five acres of land the title of the surface of which shall be in fee but the land need not include mineral rights and erect thereon a good and substantial building with all the necessary equipments for a high school, the cost of said land, building and equipments to be not less than five thousand dollars, and making a deed to the State of Alabama of said land, building and equipments, there shall be appropriated out of any moneys in the treasury not otherwise appropriated the sum of two thousand dollars for the payment of the teachers in said high school, or high schools complying with the provisions of this act, and this appropriation is hereby made to continue annually, provided further that none of said two thousand dollars shall be devoted to any other purpose whatever than the payment of teachers' salaries, and provided further that the same shall be paid quarterly upon warrants drawn by the county board of education in the county in which said high school is located, said warrant or warrants to be subject to the approval of the commission
hereinbefore created.

Section 4. Said school or schools as hereinbefore established shall be under the direction and control of the said commission as a board of trustees in connection with the board of education in the county in which said high school is located; provided further that nothing in this act shall be so construed as to abolish any free school in any district, or the office of trustees in any district in which said high school may be located.

Section 5. No teacher will be eligible to teach in any high school established under the provisions of this act, unless holding a first grade or life certificate. Nor will any student be eligible to entrance into said high school unless said student can pass a satisfactory examination in the branches of free public instruction in the elementary schools of his or her county.

Section 6. The said high school or schools shall be open to students of the white race regardless of age who have complied with the provisions of section five of this act.

Section 7. A course of study for such school or
schools shall be provided and required by the superintendent of education; provided however, that said course of study shall consist of secondary branches of study.

Section 8. A marticulation fee of one dollar may be charged to each student to defray necessary expenses during each term.

Section 9. That this act shall not go into effect until the governor shall decide that the condition of the treasury will admit of the appropriation herein made.

Approved August 7, 1907.

*There was no "Section 2" in the bill. To make sure that this assertion was correct, the writer cross checked by examining the original bill itself. The original bill is identical to the one quoted; and was signed by the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate. Governor Comer signed the act; and it was authorized by the Secretary of State.
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