

Dawn of a New Day ^[1]

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"Dawn of a New Day"

by Alex Coffin, 2006



Photograph of governor Charles Brantley Aycock. Image from North Carolina Historic Sites.

^[2]"Dawn of a New Day" was a slogan used by North Carolina [Democrats](#) ^[3] on the eve of the twentieth century in their effort to seize the mantle of reform and innovation from [Republicans](#) ^[4] and [Populists](#) ^[5]. According to [Charles B. Aycock](#) ^[6], elected governor in 1900, this "new day" centered on the promise of universal education and improved schools for all citizens. Despite the [progressive](#) ^[7] tone of Aycock's platform, however, and the educational and other beneficial programs that emerged from his administration, for Democrats this "new day" also represented a return to white supremacy that had been threatened by [Reconstruction](#) ^[8], the enfranchisement of blacks, and the increased political power of Republicans in the late nineteenth century. Aycock was himself an advocate of white supremacy, and his enthusiasm for education was based in part on his desire to create more literate white voters.

With the support of business leaders who believed that Aycock's educational initiatives would improve the state's economy and maintain their own power, Aycock found some success in launching his programs. The period of his governorship saw a sharp rise in state expenditures on public education and an increase in the length of the school year. Although white schools received the lion's share of these new moneys, Aycock also increased spending for black education. But the "new day" did not prevent blacks and poor, illiterate whites from losing ground, [disfranchised](#) ^[9] by a 1900 amendment to the state constitution that required all voters to be literate.

References:

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