

# **Inaugural Address of Governor Jacob B. Jackson**

**March 4, 1881**

Ladies and Gentlemen, My Fellow Citizens - By the choice of the people, embodied in the will of an intelligent majority, I have been called upon to be the Chief Magistrate of this commonwealth.

As a commonwealth our interests and our duties as one people are the same. It is incumbent upon us as one body of citizens, in a very marked sense to create and perpetuate the prosperity of the State, as a community having a heritage from the past to maintain, and large prospective interests in the future to extend and improve.

Although we were a part of Old Virginia, with many of the ancient and noble associations with its past history, our population was composed of citizens from every part of this great country, and from the older continents of the world; so that we are well prepared to take up all lines of march for improvement, and yet to be conservative of all principles and careful in the adoption of all measures which will keep us in the line of progress, protect our liberties, maintain the honor of the State and secure as far as in us lies the Constitutional integrity of the Union.

## **Continuation of Prosperity**

We are one of a great body of sister republics, and in the joint destiny, which belongs to all these, it is our duty to look to the welfare of all, well knowing, that any principle or measure which strikes down one, threatens the whole. The first duty even to accomplish this is to secure our own prosperity; and to do this to all legitimate extent, we must regard the Constitutional limits of our powers, and we must exercise our powers to their full legitimate Constitutional extent. So we shall promote the welfare of all, and at the same time preserve the integrity and true freedom of that Commonwealth with which we are so intimately connected, and whose laws and methods of legislation so fully enter into and affect our daily life in our homes and at our firesides.

## **Effect of Public Opinion**

The will of that intelligent majority of our people who have imposed on me the responsibilities of office shall be my guide in all my opinions and actions as Chief Magistrate of the State. I make this avowal the more fully and clearly, and with the greater confidence, knowing as I do, that that majority is composed of some of the best elements of the old Whig party of the State, some of the best men who stood by the Government and the Union in the late civil war, formed around the old solid nucleus of the Democratic party which, since the days of Jefferson and Madison, have regarded the Constitution of the United States, in its simplicity and integrity, as the surest guardian of the liberties of the people, and the firmest support of a Union that must rest so broadly on public opinion. Whatever a written Constitution may be, its interpretation and application in legislative acts, in judicial interpretation and in executive construction, depend largely upon public opinion. It is this public opinion that makes all these officers, and to a great extent inspires them, with intent, purpose and policy. If a party shall avow or have a policy of consolidation in a central government, and that this shall be strengthened by measures of the government looking to the accumulation and centralization of wealth for the success of such

policy, then the only alternative to preserve the ancient form of the government, secure the power of the States to promote the daily welfare of the people in their homes and at their firesides and perpetuate their liberties, will be another party of moderate, consistent and patriotic principles, who will resist encroachment on the one side and oppose radicalism on the other, and will be the determined foe of both when they so unite that the strong government party shall seek to use radicalism for the accomplishment of its policy. It is this condition of things which has made that intelligent majority in this State composed of these old line Whigs, these Union men, and this "old solid nucleus of the Democratic party."

In so shaping my opinions and actions as the Chief Magistrate of the State, I am controlled by the clear conviction, that in so representing the will of the majority, I shall be taking care of the interest of all in a manner and upon principles, that will protect the rights of all, promote the largest welfare of all, provide for the freest and fullest enterprise of each citizen of the State, and secure that perpetuity of our institutions, without which all will be a sad and lamentable failure of the Republican form of government.

In a country of so vast an extent as was embraced in the original colonies, covering the whole area north of Florida and east of the Mississippi river, with such diversity of climates, such variety of productions, such great bodies of native and mineral wealth, such variety of origin among the people, such differences in religious faith, and such distinctive features of life, in the habits and modes of thought in the separate colonies, and all looking to the future for harmony of action and fullness of development and wholesome employment, it could not but be that the government which would provide for all this should look to the freedom and welfare of the people and to the distinct preservation of the States.

### **Absurdity of a Strong Government**

Situated alone on this continent, absolutely alone as a question of power, a strong government was neither desirable nor needed. And a strong government today is an absurdity. If it means anything it means a military despotism, with its iron hand upon the throat of the States, and its heel upon the liberties of the people. The late civil war, if it has shown one thing more clearly than another, has demonstrated that the strength of the Union does not depend upon the strength of the general government as a political and military organization, but on its capacity to command the affections of the people and to insure enough of their voluntary strength for its maintenance. Take this away and indeed it is a rope of sand. This has been its strength in the past, it should be its power in the future. And this strength and this power is the result of that frame of government which the circumstances of the times and the wisdom of our progenitors committed to posterity.

It was a government well defined in its powers, limited to the exercise of these powers, with the necessary flexibility for including the whole continent on the same reciprocal terms which belonged to the original States constituting the General Government, and making provision for new States. The history of the government, has shown that it is strong enough to take care of itself against all internal dissention and division.

This is the great Republic embodied in the Constitution of the United States. Properly understood every State Constitution is a part of that Constitution. Whatever gives undue power and influence to the general government detracts just so much from what is due and just to the States, as any unlawful assumption of power by the States would affect the true and legitimate power of the general government.

### **Obedience to the Constitution**

It is therefore of the highest necessity to the people that the Constitution, so seen in its whole integrity as providing for these two great classes of powers, should be preserved. There is no immediate danger, I trust, that a military chieftain or armed power of any kind can at once, by an arbitrary movement, concentrate these powers and wipe the States out of existence, or materially affect their functions, or that it is possible to dismember the States and dissolve the sisterhood of republics. What cannot be done at once by violence or *coup de main*, history teaches us may be done by pernicious and gradual encroachment.

It is in this last aspect of principles and measures that all the parties known to the history of the country have had their origin and their continuance. In our politics there has been a continual blending of principles and measures, involving more or less consideration of questions, the effect of which, decided one way, would be to increase the powers of the general government, and of so weakening the rights and liberties of the people; and decided another way, would simply leave the people to seek their own interests and pursue their own enterprises on the broad platform of political equality and general law. It is, therefore, not a matter of surprise that the intelligent majority of which I have spoken should be composed of the best elements of those other parties, who have felt themselves compelled to stand by the Constitution as it is, by the States as integral parts of that Constitution, and by the liberties of the people which can only survive as these others survive.

### **Necessity of Railroads**

Nations as known to us are only prosperous in the large accumulations of individual wealth. Railroads are the great civilizing agencies of this age of the world. As a nation we have more than any other nation; and as a State we would be greatly benefited by more of the. They develop all the industrial pursuits of the people, open up unbroken forest, excavate the mountains for their minerals, build immense establishments, and keep the world busy. As a result our manufacturing system, in proportion to our population, is the largest and most flourishing in the world; our agricultural interests cover a larger area of successful cultivation than any other space belonging to one people on the globe. Along with these we have a corresponding increase of that population whose sole or main capital is their daily labor. No other people of the world have the same amount of population, with the same amount of intelligence and skill, and work of brain and hand so devoted to all the pursuits of life. Thanks to our free government, and our system of common schools. It is for the welfare of all these people that our government is in existence, and to perpetuate that form of government which has produced all these results in so short a period of history, and conferred these blessings on such numbers it is vastly important that our principles should be clearly stated, our measures well matured by looking to all interests, and that our

energies be fairly and fully directed, and above all that the government of which these are the legitimate fruits should be preserved in that form and spirit which has produced such fruits.

### **Taxes Should be Light**

Believing that these views are characteristic of the majority of the people of West Virginia, I am gratified in having been called to hold the most prominent official position as the State's representative. I speak for those who have no capital but their labor. I speak for the capitalists who employ their means to give occupation support to those men. I speak for that great class of our farmer population who must unite their labor and their moderate capital for the support of their families, and in the production of food and textile materials (wool, flax and hemp), and who contribute so largely to all other industries by the consumption of the products of the mechanics and the manufacturers of all kinds; that taxation shall be kept as near possible to the minimum; that no one class of our people shall be sacrificed to another, and that all shall bear the burthens of government in just proportions.

Although I speak of minimum taxation, I do not mean a niggardly system, that will sacrifice great interests, whether connected with material prosperity or our intellectual and moral standing among our sister commonwealths.

As the subject of the currency entered somewhat into the late canvass, I may be pardoned for referring to it here.

### **Money and Tariff**

In the National Constitution provision was made for a solid and substantial money. Currency comes from ingenious devices to evade and so far nullify the Constitution and supplant money by paper, which can be contracted and expended in volume to suit the designs and purposes of capitalists, who have their own ends of amassing wealth in view, or to suit the more dangerous designs of an ambitious and unscrupulous administration, by contraction, withholding bread from the laborer and teaching him subservience, and by expansion teaching him venality; by contraction sacrificing all men who have incurred debts to capital and who in a depleted currency are not able to pay; and by expansion or inflation (filling with wind) again increasing prices and enabling the same capitalists to sell at high prices, what they had taken from their miserable victims by the contraction. So this contraction and inflation affects the tariff, until it is a very grave question whether with this and other causes, protection does protect.

If a tariff is laid when there is a contraction of currency, and the price of materials down, and labor is cheap, and an inflation of the paper currency is made or takes place, a new tariff becomes absolutely necessary.

We can so see that those who have control of the paper currency, have the whole issues of life and death as it were not only to the industries of the country, but of the contractions which place the property of millions of our fellow citizens at the mercy of these men. We can so see that with a greenback currency there never can be a protective tariff any six months together, and that all these other evils will be intensely aggravated by such power over the currency. The Constitution provides for money, not currency. Money, like the waters of the ocean, seeks a common level

over the whole world, and to the extent that any nation furnishes currency as a substitute for money, the money so displaced from circulation will seek its level in some other country where it is needed, and where there is no currency to exclude it. The country with the largest amount of enterprise and industries of all kinds, with the least proportional amount of currency will have the largest amount of solid money, the least fluctuation in business, and the most permanent prosperity. And this is in the very spirit of the Constitution, and comes the nearest to representing the Democratic idea of a Republican Government. With the Democratic party money - money as the solid and permanent basis of all of our great operations is a principle. With the Republican party it is a measure only, but it is a measure by which they can move all those springs of actions and make whom it will and destroy whom it pleases of those who commit their business and their lives to its contractions and inflations.

### **Necessity of Education**

Republics are only safe with an educated people. Instruction as distinguished from education, which is so largely given by some of the European Empires makes but machine men for the uses of the government. In such governments they will be mere instruments of its power, or in the contrast and opposition which will sooner or later come to the human mind placed in such conditions, they will be those agents of destruction which we know are now undermining the whole fabric of society in Europe. The education of the people should be left to the jurisdiction of the States; and if there were no other reasons for preserving their identities and maintaining their constitutional fullness of power, this one alone would be sufficient to control our judgments and command our sympathies. In the variety of systems of education which each State will institute for itself, and each striving to have the best, in the diversities of their interests and pursuits, there will be an Education of the people, a self power to seek the best and do the best. A stereotyped instruction by the general government, so emanating from one source of power, would be to the people in their national affairs like a State religion. It would be molded to one type, for one purpose, and the talent and ability which would appear, would be selected by the government to maintain its autocracy, consolidate its power and limit that competition of talent, and character which now in the States, tends to bring our best men to the front, and which will increase as our systems of education shall have time to demonstrate their good results and to perfect their systems of education. We propose to keep the education of our own people in our own hands, because it is meet and right that by such education they should have the competent intelligence to understand these questions of government, those relations of capital and labor, those mutations of tariffs and currencies, those characters of men whom they must select for their public agents and comprehend the great destiny of our country, in which it is becoming the civilizing power of the world. We do not want to see this country become, under any system of stereotyped or governmental instruction, a pallid and decayed representative of dying liberties, nor a co-conspirator with the governments of the Old World against the freedom of mankind.

I desire to keep the administration of the finances of the State in Democratic hands, because we have given evidence of our ability to administer them fairly and honestly, take proper care of the fund for building the school houses, make an honest use of any lands or funds which may come from the general Government for the purposes of education, and so administer all the affairs of

State, that its continued prosperity shall make the same favorable contrast, which the census gives us for the ten years ending with 1880 as compared with the ten years ending with 1870.

### **Education and Enlightenment**

I maintain that in representing the intelligence of this Democratic majority in the State, I will be best employed in constructing the edifice of our prosperity, will best take care of the common interests and secure the common welfare of the people, will preserve the autonomy of the State, will insure to the people the largest liberty with the least danger of degenerating into license, will increase their intelligence, and make them alive to the responsibilities by giving them the means, through our system of education, of seeing their dangers, and how they are affected by the measures of government and by the fluctuations of currency and trade, and that they will have the moral self reliance to take care of themselves.

I know there is intelligence and virtue among my Republican brethren, and I trust that I shall have enough deliberate judgment to accept their fair and candid criticism, and to consider impartially any suggestion of detail or measures of improvement which they may offer for the benefit of our whole body politic. Of any captious and caviling spirit I have had enough to know its value, and to know that, while it may disturb it, cannot arrest the march of events.