

The New Deal



When the Great Depression struck, the South was already reeling from agricultural and industrial miseries. By 1932, the meager financial resources of states and localities had disappeared quickly under the avalanche of unemployment and low crop prices. A few years later, the southern economy was scarcely better, but posters bearing the likeness of President Franklin D. Roosevelt seemed to be tacked to every tobacco barn, county courthouse bulletin board, and filling station in the South. The New Deal gave southerners some work and much hope.

The Roosevelt administration did not intend to change the region's society and traditions. Southern politicians held important committee posts in the U.S. Congress and Senate and were wary of massive federal expenditures and bureaucracies that could short-circuit their economic and political control over some whites and most blacks. Intentions aside, it would have been unusual if the introduction of vast sums of federal money (at least \$4 billion in the major programs) and the farm upheaval caused by low staple prices and the Agricultural Adjustment Act had not generated some changes in the region.

Historians are just now sorting out the extent of those changes and, more particularly, their legacy for the modern South. What did it mean, for example, to receive a paycheck from the federal government instead of from the county, plantation owner, or the local grocer? What did it mean to long-time farm families and to rural traditions to leave the land? How did blacks perceive policies of the Roosevelt administration? Were the 1930s a continuation of critical self-assessment initiated earlier in the century, or did the decade represent a genuine watershed, laying the foundation for fundamental change in the region's society?

DOCUMENTS

When labor responded actively to the economic and policy changes of the 1930s. One of the most famous, and bloody, strikes of the decade occurred in the coal-mining Harlan County, Kentucky, in 1931. Florence Reece, a local balladeer whose husband was a member of the striking National Miners Union, wrote the song "Which Side Are You On?" on the back of a calendar. The song, the first docu-

ment here, became a classic protest song for the American labor movement. The grim conditions on the farms and in the mines and factories played a role in thrusting the author of the second document, Louisiana governor and senator Huey P. Long, into the national spotlight. The "Kingfish," as he was known, was a dyed-in-the-cotton demagogue in a region already famous for the genre, but his deeds matched his rhetoric more closely than others. The selection demonstrates why he generated such loathing and love in the South and elsewhere. The Great Depression muted the brash boosterism of the 1920s and caused even those parts of the South not given to introspection to broach topics heretofore forbidden. The third document, by the Mississippi Department of Education, is a remarkably candid assessment of black education in that state. Note the great reliance on funds from outside the state. The federal government also joined efforts to portray the South in more realistic terms. The federal Farm Security Administration sent photographers, including such noted artists as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, into the South during the late 1930s and 1940s to record the impact of the New Deal and what remained to be accomplished. The photographs in the fourth document reveal that New Deal policies were disruptive in some areas of the South, but traditional agricultural labor patterns prevailed in other parts of the region. Another New Deal program, the Federal Writers' Project, sent interviewers into six southern states and gathered more than four hundred "life histories." W. T. Couch, director of the University of North Carolina Press, headed the project and published some of the accounts in 1939. The fifth document is an excerpt from one of them. The final selection is a candid (and, some said, outrageous) report filed by the President's Emergency Council in 1938 detailing how much the South lagged behind the rest of the country in economic, educational, and social development.

Florence Reece's "Which Side Are You On?", 1931

Come all of you good workers,
Good news to you I'll tell,
Of how the good old union
Has come in here to dwell.

REFRAIN: Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

We've started our good battle,
We know we're sure to win,
Because we've got the gun thugs
A-lookin' very thin.

They say they have to guard us
To educate their child;
Their children live in luxury
Our children's almost wild.

With pistols and with rifles
They take away our bread,
And if you miners hinted it
They'd sock you on the head.

They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there;
You either are a union man
Or a thug for [Sheriff] J. H. Blair.

Oh workers, can you stand it?
Oh tell me how you can.
Will you be a lousy scab
Or will you be a man?

My daddy was a miner,
He is now in the air and sun [blacklisted
and without a job]
He'll be with you fellow workers
Until the battle's won.

Huey Long, "Every Man a King," 1933

ie increasing fury with which I have been, and am to be, assailed by
ason of the fight and growth of support for limiting the size of fortunes
n only be explained by the madness which human nature attaches to the
lders of accumulated wealth.

What I have proposed is:—

The Long Plan

A capital levy tax on the property owned by any one person of 1% of
all over \$1,000,000; 2% of all over \$2,000,000 etc., until, when it reaches
fortunes of over \$100,000,000, the government takes all above that figure;
which means a limit on the size of any one man's fortune to something
like \$50,000,000—the balance to go to the government to spread out in
its work among all the people.

An inheritance tax which does not allow any one person to receive more
than \$5,000,000 in a lifetime without working for it, all over that amount
to go to the government to be spread among the people for its work.

An income tax which does not allow any one man to make more than
\$1,000,000 in one year, exclusive of taxes, the balance to go to the
United States for general work among the people.

The foregoing program means all taxes paid by the fortune holders at
top and none by the people at the bottom; the spreading of wealth
ong all the people and the breaking up of a system of Lords and Slaves
ur economic life. It allows the millionaires to have, however, more than
y can use for any luxury they can enjoy on earth. But, with such limits,
else can survive.

That the public press should regard my plan and effort as a calamity

P. Long, "The Maddened Fortune Holders and Their Infuriated Public Press," in *Every
a King: The Autobiography of Huey P. Long* (New Orleans: National Book Co., 1933),
38–340.

and me as a menace is no more than should be expected, gauged in the
light of past events. According to Ridpath, the eminent historian:

The ruling classes always possess the means of information and the pro-
cesses by which it is distributed. The newspaper of modern times belongs
to the upper man. The under man has no voice; or if, having a voice, he
cries out, his cry is lost like a shout in the desert. Capital, in the places
of power, seizes upon the organs of public utterance, and howls the humble
down the wind. Lying and misrepresentation are the natural weapons of
those who maintain an existing vice and gather the usufruct of crime."

—Ridpath's *History of the World*,
Page 410.

In 1932, the vote for my resolution showed possibly a half dozen other
Senators back of it. It grew in the last Congress to nearly twenty Senators.
Such growth through one other year will mean the success of a venture,
the completion of everything I have undertaken,—the time when I can and
will retire from the stress and fury of my public life, maybe as my forties
begin,—a contemplation so serene as to appear impossible.

That day will reflect credit on the States whose Senators took the early
lead to spread the wealth of the land among all the people.

Then no tear dimmed eyes of a small child will be lifted into the
saddened face of a father or mother unable to give it the necessities required
by its soul and body for life; then the powerful will be rebuked in the sight
of man for holding that which they cannot consume, but which is craved
to sustain humanity; the food of the land will feed, the raiment clothe, and
the houses shelter all the people; the powerful will be elated by the well
being of all, rather than through their greed.

Then, those of us who have pursued that phantom of Jefferson, Jackson,
Webster, Theodore Roosevelt and Bryan may hear wafted from their lips
in Valhalla:

EVERY MAN A KING

The Mississippi Department of Education on Negro Education in Mississippi, 1935

Mississippi, according to the census of 1930, has a population of 2,009,831
people. Of this number 1,009,718, or 50.2% are Negroes. Mississippi, there-
fore, has the largest percentage of Negro population of any state in the
Union, South Carolina being second with 45.6% of its total population
Negro. The latest available figures give Mississippi a total of 463,465 ed-
ucable Negro school children, while only 299,261 are enrolled in our public
schools, thus leaving 164,204 of school age who are not enrolled in school.
Of those enrolled in school only 72% or 217,313, are in average daily
attendance. Less than half of those who are supposed to be in school are

P. H. Easom, "Negro Education," in Mississippi Department of Education, *Biennial Reports
and Recommendations of the State Superintendent of Public Education for the Scholastic
Years 1933–1935*, pp. 40–43. Used with permission of the Mississippi Department of Education.

regular attendance. The teaching force, numbering 5,863 teachers, has average of 50 enrolled pupils each. This average situation is rarely ever met, for teachers in the lower grades frequently have in their charge from twenty-five to one hundred and fifty pupils. In a great many cases these teachers are forced to teach double sessions each day—one group in the forenoon and a totally different group in the afternoon. Small enrollments are found in the upper grammar grades and in the high school grades. By the time the sixth or seventh grades are reached, pupils begin to leave school in large numbers.

ool Buildings

Of the 3,753 Negro schoolhouses in Mississippi, 2,313 are owned by public school authorities. The other 1,440 schools are conducted in churches, stores, old stores, tenant houses, or whatever building is available. Last year, with the aid of the CWA [Civil Works Administration], a considerable number of the best buildings were repaired. Up to the present time there has been only one PWA [Public Works Administration] Negro school project. It is a farm shop building at the Hopewell School in Covington County. One of the great difficulties in getting Federal aid for these buildings is the lack of local funds for meeting the requirements of the government.

Negroes themselves, in some cases, are building and repairing their schoolhouses out of their own meager savings and with their own labor. School buildings need to be erected to displace the many little shanties and churches now being used. The Julius Rosenwald Fund, while it was operating in the South, tried to place in every county a good example of a schoolhouse that should be built; but it never intended to help build a schoolhouse everywhere one was needed. Now that this Fund has discontinued its operations, the people are left to their own initiative in meeting this need. In the country, Negro farmers should be encouraged to raise funds for planting and improving school plants by planting crop projects. One community in Neshoba County raised twenty bales of cotton in one year by a farmer planting one acre for his school. In Newton, during the past year the sum of \$493.00 was raised by means of cotton projects for repairing school buildings and for providing school furniture.

There is also dire need for school furniture and teaching materials—adequate seating facilities, stoves, blackboards, erasers, crayon, supplementary reading materials, maps, flash cards, and charts.

In many of the 3,763 colored schools of the State there is not a decent specimen of any one of the above mentioned items. In hundreds of rural schools there are just four blank, unpainted walls, a few old rickety benches, an old stove propped up on brickbats, and two or three boards nailed together and painted black for a blackboard. In many cases, this constitutes the sum total of the furniture and teaching equipment.

The only aid received during the past biennium from the Julius Rosenwald Fund was for the purchase of elementary libraries, for Rosenwald Day Programs, for the School Plant Improvement and Beautification Program, and for a county-wide school Plant Improvement Program in Coahoma county. In the latter instance the Fund is cooperating with the

school authorities of Coahoma county in employing a full-time carpenter who works throughout the year on building, repairing and beautifying school plants and school grounds. This experiment has been under way only a year, but is proving very helpful.

The Anna T. Jeanes Fund

During the past biennium a healthy interest has been manifested in the improvement of Negro rural schools through the agency of Jeanes teachers. Such teachers are employed jointly by the County Superintendent and the State Department of Education. These teachers act as assistants to the County Superintendent, and devote their entire time to Negro schools. Their activities include aiding Negro schools in the improvement of instruction, in the improvement of health work, in promoting home industries, in promoting live-at-home programs, in promoting parent-teacher association work, and in raising money from the private sources for books and other needed school equipment.

The table below summarizes part of their activities for the two years:

	NO. TEACHERS EMPLOYED	NO. SCHOOLS SUPERVISED	NO. SUPERVISORY VISITS MADE	AMOUNT JEANES FUND	AMOUNT RAISED FROM PRIVATE SOURCES
1933-34	28	1685	6416	\$6,886.00	\$48,646.12
1934-35	34	2030	7513	\$8,799.75	\$31,058.78

John F. Slater Fund

Certain sums of money, given annually by the John F. Slater Fund, are used in assisting some schools of the state known as county training schools. These funds are given for the purpose of developing high schools, and for the training of boys and girls along lines of industrial work, such as agriculture, farm shop work, and home economics.

The following summary shows the amount received for the two years of the past biennium:

1933-34	\$6,450.00
1934-35	\$5,760.00

General Education Board

No other agency has rendered a greater service to the southern states than the General Education Board of New York. From time to time this board has paid the salaries of different people in state department of education, given fellowships to outstanding teachers and school administrators, and promoted various and sundry other worthwhile phases of education. This Board has been exceedingly helpful to the Department of Education in Mississippi. On many occasions it has come to the rescue in time of great need.

The General Education Board has for a long time given financial assistance to the training of Negro teachers in summer schools. During the current biennium special instructors for the training of teachers in one, two, and three-teacher schools were employed with funds granted by this Board.

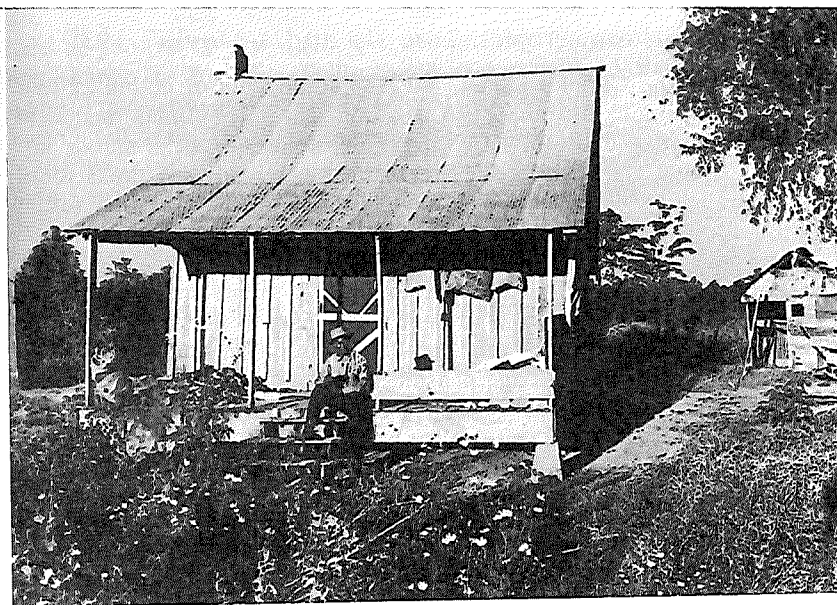
Negro High Schools

The development of Negro accredited high schools has been very slow. In 1932 the first attempt at accrediting such schools was made, at which time three schools were accepted by the State Accrediting Commission on the same basis as white schools are accredited. At the present time there are only fifteen fully accredited Negro high schools in this state. There are only eighty high schools for Negroes of any description in Mississippi at the present time. Many of these are private schools. The present program is to develop at least one accredited high school to each county. Fourteen counties of the State do not have a single high school or a high school grade taught within their boundaries. Curriculum offerings in Negro high schools tend strongly toward vocational subjects. There is also a great need for the establishment of a normal school for the training of rural and elementary teachers.

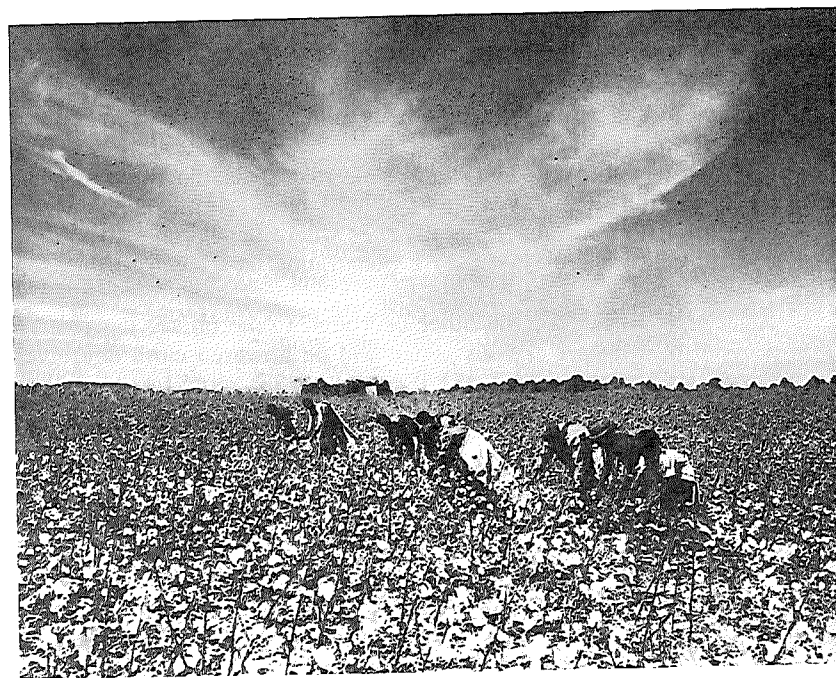
Photographers Record the Rural South, 1937, 1939, 1941



Tractor driver and tractor in front of empty sharecropper cabin, Leland, Mississippi, June 1937



Tenant's shack with cotton and sweet potatoes stacked on porch, Perthshire, Mississippi, October 1939



Picking cotton in Greensboro, Alabama, September 1941

Federal Writers' Project, *Tore Up and a-Movin'*, 1939

"We hain't had no Christmas here, not a apple or a nut or nothin': I told the chil'en not to look for no Santa Claus this year, but to thank their God if they had meat and bread." Gracie Turner folds her arms across her husband's brown shirt which she wears over her worn red dress for a sweater and leaves her wash tub in the back yard to show the way to the cheerless fire-place where green wood smolders.

"Dis here is my father, Sam Horton. He has seen some years. He's ninety-one and in tole'ble good health; except his 'memb'ance ain't strong and he can't eat much grease. I've been takin' care o' him now for seven years, best I could. For the past three months he's been gettin' seven dollars and a half for de old age pension, and dat's been a help here.

"Dat's Ola in de corner." Gracie indicates an attractive mulatto girl who looks almost dainty in spite of her ragged clothes. Her feet are bare. "Ola is twenty-four. Awhile back she married a drinkin' man, but he scrapped so bad she couldn't stay wid him; so she come back home to live. Dis girl is Amy, fourteen years old. She's got bad kidney trouble; her leg swells up big as two sometimes. Dr. Simpson started givin' her treatments in de clinic, but she ain't had none in some weeks now." Amy is also barefooted.

"De littlest boy is Raymond Farmer. Dr. Farmer 'fore he died named him for his brother, Judge Raymond Farmer. Stephen is de oldest boy at home. Sam and Will belongs to my daughters, but I raised 'em. Will, go tote in some wood and stir up dis here fire! Will's mama married de second time, and I didn't know how dat new man would treat de child. Wid my husband, James Turner, and Papa and me, dat makes nine of us to stay in dese two rooms. Come on; I'll show you over de house.

"Most of us sleeps on dese three beds in here where we keeps de fire. In here is de kitchen. Mr. Jake Anderson give me dat range; it's de one Miss Bettie fust cooked on when she was married." The old stove is coated with grease, but the kitchen is orderly and fairly clean. At the table, covered with colorful oilcloth, are two long benches where the Turners sit to dine. The bowl of cold collards gives off a penetrating odor even to the front door.

"Right across de hall is de other bedroom. Come on see dat too. De girls covered dese chairs and dis settie wid de flowered cloth deyselves. Dat victrola ain't no good now. We tries to keep dis room sort o' dressed up for comp'ny, but dey ain't no fire in de heater; so we better set in de fireplace room. Today's a cold day if you ain't about stirrin'.

"Now, 'bout de other chil'en: Hattie May lives on some island down here 'bout Portsmouth—Hattie May Williams she is now. Her husband does public work and seems to be a right good man, but I didn't know where

he'd be good to Hattie May's Will or not. May married Montgomery, and dey sharecraps for Miss Sallie Simpson over toward Benton. Edward's married and farms for Mr. Peter Ellis at Martinsburg. Lillian Turner—now I can't tell you 'bout her, 'cause I hain't heard from her in three years. Marcy works for rich folks in Philadelphia. She sent us a box o' old clothes 'fore Christmas, and dat's de onliest string we've had this fall. De rich folks is always givin' Marcy wrist watches and necklaces and things for presents. Dey sends her down town any time wid a hund'ed dollars to buy things for 'em, and she takes every cent back to 'em it don't cost. Dey has learnt to trust Marcy. I's tried to raise my chil'en to be trusty and mannerable, to mind dey mama and papa, to be honest. 'Show favor to your mother and father,' I tells 'em, 'dat your days may be lengthened on God's earth.' If dey does wrong it shore ain't 'cause I hain't tried to learn 'em right.

"Dey ain't been much schoolin' for none of 'em. Will's in de fif', and Lillian got to de ninth. None de rest got past de fou'th grade. Turner went to school enough to write his name, but he can't do no figgerin' to 'mount to nothin'. I never went a day in my life, can't write my name or add or keep track of our account on de farm. I want dese youngest chil'en to go long enough to do dat much.

"'Tain't no while to say dis is de hardest year we's ever had. Every year's been hard, de forty-nine years I been here. Dat's all dey is to expect—work hard and go hongry part time—long as we lives on de other man's land. Dey ain't nothin' in sharecrappin', not de way it's run. My folks has always sharecrapped. Papa farmed round Gum Springs when I was a girl, and all I learnt was to work in de field. When I married Turner, we lived in Hawley, Virginia, 'bout six months. He done public work, railroadin' and sech dere. From Hawley we moved to a farm near Gum Springs, where we worked by de day for a year. From dere we moved to my brother's and sharecrapped for him five years. Den we moved to Mr. Calep Jones', where we stayed three years. Next we moved to Mr. Hughes Whitehead's and farmed wid him two years. Our next move was to No'th Ca'lina on Mr. Jake Anderson's farm at de Woollen place. We stayed wid him thirteen years. Den last year we moved here to de Willis place, dat Mr. Dick Henry rents from Mr. Bob Willis in Gum Springs, and here we is now. But we got to move somewhere dis next year. Another man's a-comin' here. I don't know where we'll go; houses is sca'ce and hard to find. Mr. Makepeace told Turner he'd help him all he could, but he ain't got no house we can live in. Plenty o' land everywhere, but no house! Turner has been huntin' a place for weeks, and every night when he comes home I runs to de door to hear de news. Every day it's de same tale: 'I hain't found no place yet.' I hates to move; nobody knows how I hates to move!

"Yonder's somebody movin' now," Ola exclaims, looking out the window. All eyes turn toward the road. Over the deep ruts in the sand, wagon wheels grind slowly eastward; two wagons loaded with shabby furnishings wind around the curve out of sight.

Dat's de way we'll be soon—tore up and a-movin'. I wish I could have me one acre o' land dat I could call mine. I'd be willin' to eat dry bread de rest o' my life if I had a place I could settle down on and nobody could tell me I had to move no more. I hates movin' . . .

"When we started farmin' in March for Mr. Dick Henry, he 'lowed us five dollars a week. On de tenth o' June dey took him to de State Horspital, and Miss Annie got her brother, Mr. Bates, to tend to de farm for her. He owned up he didn't know nothin' 'bout farmin'. Fust, dey started out lettin' us have \$3.50 a week; den it dwindled down to two, den to nothin'. Miss Annie said she dreaded for Sad'dys to come 'cause we was lookin' to her for money for rations, and she didn't have it. I couldn't fuss wid her, 'cause I knowed she was tellin' de truth. Mr. Bates brought some hogs here and told us to raise 'em on halves [half for the Turners; half for Mr. Bates]. I toted 'em slops all th'ugh de summer and fed 'em co'n; here dis fall he took 'em away from us, on our debt he claimed. . . .

"Mr. Henry come home 'fore Christmas and 'pears to be all right now. We hain't had no settlement wid him yet, but he told us dey wouldn't be nothin' for us this year, not to look for it. De account on de book 'gainst is is \$300. How it got dat much I can't tell you. We raised 224 bags o' peas and 1800 pounds o' seed cotton on twenty acres. I knowed we couldn't make no crap, wid just twenty-four bags o' plaster 'lowed us to fertilize twenty acres. We was just about to get hongry here, with all de money ut off and no crap comin' in. Long as dey was cotton to pick or peas to make some of us could get a day o' work now and then, enough to buy sack o' flour and a little strip o' meat. Work has been sca'ce dis fall ough. So Turner got him a WP and A [Works Progress Administration] 'bout a-diggin' stumps. He's done had three pay days, \$12.80 at de time, ough he don't get but \$12 'cause eighty cents has to go to Mr. Sickles for 'ulin' him to work. I makes dat twelve dollars do all it will, but dey's ght of us to live out'n it four weeks to de month.

"Turner ought not to be a-workin' wid de WP and A. De gover'ment's got no business a-payin' out relief money and a-givin' WP and A jobs to farmers. De old age pensions is all right for old folks dat's 'flicted and can't . . . Take Papa dere; he can't work in de field now. He knocks up our wood burn in de fireplace, but he's seen too many years to get out and work de day. But able-bodied landers has got no business a-havin' to look de gover'ment for a livin'. Dey ought to live of'n de land. If 'twas fixed ht dey'd make all de livin' dey need from de ground. Dey ain't no sense diggin' stumps for dollars to buy co'n and flour-bread and meat, when 'e's plenty o' land to raise 'em on. Every lander ought to raise his nethin' t' eat de whole year round and some to sell. Everybody's got eat; dat's 'bout all wages comes to anyhow, somethin' t' eat. If I had say half de land would be planted in stuff to eat; nobody would have furnish me and overcharge me when settlement time come. . . ."

Gracie raises her head, but she remains downcast in spirit. "Dis year been so hard we've had to drop our burial insurance. We enrolled wid burial association in Ga'ysburg some years back. All it costs is twenty-

five cents when a member dies. But dey don't come many twenty-five centses in dis house.

"Every night I prays to de Lord: 'Please keep death off till I get out'n dis shape.' Dey ain't a decent rag to bury me if I was to die right now, and I hates for de county to have to put me away."

The President's Council Reports on Southern Economic Conditions, 1938

The President's Letter

To the Members of the Conference on Economic Conditions in the South:

My intimate interest in all that concerns the South is, I believe, known to all of you; but this interest is far more than a sentimental attachment born of a considerable residence in your section and of close personal friendship for so many of your people. It proceeds even more from my feeling of responsibility toward the whole Nation. It is my conviction that the South presents right now the Nation's No. 1 economic problem—the Nation's problem, not merely the South's. For we have an economic unbalance in the Nation as a whole, due to this very condition of the South.

It is an unbalance that can and must be righted, for the sake of the South and of the Nation.

Without going into the long history of how this situation came to be—the long and ironic history of the despoiling of this truly American section of the country's population—suffice it for the immediate purpose to get a clear perspective of the task that is presented to us. That task embraces the wasted or neglected resources of land and water, the abuses suffered by the soil, the need for cheap fertilizer and cheap power; the problems presented by the population itself—a population still holding the great heritages of King's Mountain and Shiloh—the problems presented by the South's capital resources, and problems growing out of the new industrial era and, again, of absentee ownership of the new industries. There is the problem of labor and employment in the South and the related problem of protecting women and children in this field. There is the problem of farm ownership, of which farm tenantry is a part, and of farm income. There are questions of taxation, of education, of housing, and of health.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Washington, D.C., July 5, 1938.

Report to the President

Population

The population of the South is growing more rapidly by natural increase than that of any other region. Its excess of births over deaths is 10 per

nousand, as compared with the national average of 7 per thousand; and already it has the most thickly populated rural area in the United States. Of the 108,600,000 native-born persons in the country in 1930, 28,700,000 were born in the Southeast, all but 4,600,000 in rural districts.

These rural districts have exported one-fourth of their natural increase in sons and daughters. They have supplied their own growth, much of the growth of southern cities, and still have sent great numbers into other sections. Of these southerners born in rural areas, only 17,500,000 live in the locality where they were born, and 3,800,000 have left the South entirely.

This migration has taken from the South many of its ablest people. Nearly half of the eminent scientists born in the South are now living elsewhere. While some of these have been replaced by scientists from other sections of the country, the movement from the South has been much greater than this replacement. The search for wider opportunities than are available in the overcrowded, economically undeveloped southern communities drains away people from every walk of life. About one child of every eight born and educated in Alabama or Mississippi contributes his or her productivity to some other State.

The expanding southern population likewise has a marked effect on the South's economic standards. There are fewer productive adult workers and more dependents per capita than in other sections of the country. The portrait of population reflects the failure of the South to provide adequate opportunities for its people.

The largely rural States of the South must support nearly one-third of their population in school, while the industrial States support less than one-fourth. Moreover, in their search for jobs the productive middle-age groups leave the South in the greatest numbers, tending to make the South a land of the very old and the very young. A study of one southern community in 1928 showed that about 30 percent of the households were headed by men past middle age. Since 1930 most of these women, formerly able to live by odd jobs and gardening, have gone on relief. Relief studies in the eastern Cotton Belt have shown recently that 15 percent of the relief households were without a male over 16 years of age and 15 percent more, 31 percent altogether, were without any employable male. Even if the southern workers were able, therefore, to secure wages equal to those of the North on a per capita basis dollar for dollar, a great gap would still exist between the living standards of southern families and those of other sections. . . .

State and Public Income

Ever since the War between the States the South has been the poorest section of the Nation. The richest State in the South ranks lower in per capita income than the poorest State outside the region. In 1937 the average

income in the South was \$314; in the rest of the country it was \$604, or nearly twice as much.

Even in "prosperous" 1929 southern farm people received an average gross income of only \$186 a year as compared with \$528 for farmers elsewhere. Out of that \$186 southern farmers had to pay all their operating expenses—tools, fertilizer, seed, taxes, and interest on debt—so that only a fraction of that sum was left for the purchase of food, clothes, and the decencies of life. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that such ordinary items as automobiles, radios, and books are relatively rare in many southern country areas.

For more than half of the South's farm families—the 53 percent who are tenants without land of their own—incomes are far lower. Many thousands of them are living in poverty comparable to that of the poorest peasants in Europe. A recent study of southern cotton plantations indicated that the average tenant family received an income of only \$73 per person for a year's work. Earnings of share croppers ranged from \$38 to \$87 per person, and an income of \$38 annually means only a little more than 10 cents a day.

The South's industrial wages, like its farm income, are the lowest in the United States. In 1937 common labor in 20 important industries got 16 cents an hour less than laborers in other sections received for the same kind of work. Moreover, less than 10 percent of the textile workers are paid more than 52.5 cents an hour, while in the rest of the Nation 25 percent rise above this level. A recent survey of the South disclosed that the average annual wage in industry was only \$865 while in the remaining States it averaged \$1,219. . . .

Since the South's people live so close to the poverty line, its many local political subdivisions have had great difficulty in providing the schools and other public services necessary in any civilized community. In 1935 the assessed value of taxable property in the South averaged only \$463 per person, while in the nine Northeastern States it amounted to \$1,370. In other words, the Northeastern States had three times as much property per person to support their schools and other institutions.

Consequently, the South is not able to bring its schools and many other public services up to national standards, even though it tax the available wealth as heavily as any other section. In 1936 the State and local governments of the South collected only \$28.88 per person while the States and local governments of the Nation as a whole collected \$51.54 per person.

Although the South has 28 percent of the country's population, its Federal income-tax collections in 1934 were less than 12 percent of the national total. These collections averaged only \$1.28 per capita throughout the South, ranging from 24 cents in Mississippi to \$3.53 in Florida.

So much of the profit from southern industries goes to outside financiers, in the form of dividends and interest, that State income taxes would produce a meager yield in comparison with similar levies elsewhere. State taxation

does not reach dividends which flow to corporation stockholders and management in other States; and, as a result, these people do not pay their share of the cost of southern schools and other institutions.

Under these circumstances the South has piled its tax burden on the backs of those least able to pay, in the form of sales taxes. (The poll tax keeps the poorer citizens from voting in eight southern States; thus they have no effective means of protesting against sales taxes.) In every southern State but one, 59 percent of the revenue is raised by sales taxes. In the Northeast, on the other hand, not a single State gets more than 44 percent of its income from this source, and most of them get far less. . . .

Women and Children

Child labor is more common in the South than in any other section of the Nation, and several Southern States are among those which have the largest proportion of their women in gainful work. Moreover, women and children work under fewer legal safeguards than women and children elsewhere in the Nation.

Low industrial wages for men in the South frequently force upon their children as well as their wives a large part of the burden of family support. In agriculture, because of poor land and equipment, entire families must work in order to make their living.

The 1930 census, latest source of comprehensive information on child labor, showed that about three-fourths of all gainfully employed children from 10 to 15 years old worked in the Southern States, although these States contained less than one-third of the country's children between those ages. . . .

In a region where workers generally are exploited, women are subjected to an even more intense form of exploitation. Many women work more than 50 hours a week in cotton and other textile mills, and in the shoe, drug, paper box, and similar factories in certain Southern States.

The South has two of the four states in the entire Nation that have acted no laws whatever to fix maximum hours for women workers. Only one of the Southern States has established an 8-hour day for women in any industry. Only four of the Southern States have applied a week as short as 48 hours for women in any industry.

Reports for a number of industries, including cotton manufacturing, have shown wage earners receiving wages well below those estimated by the Works Progress Administration as the lowest which would maintain a worker's family.

Women's wages ordinarily amount to less than men's. However, only one of the Southern States have enacted a law providing a minimum wage for women, though several others are attempting to pass such legislation. Recent pay-roll figures show women textile workers in an important southern textile State receiving average wages 10 percent below the average for the South. Other figures show that a week's wage of less than \$10

was received by more than half the women in one State's cotton mills, and by a large part of the women in the seamless hosiery plants of three States and in the men's work-clothes factories of two States.

Many women, even though employed full time, must receive public aid because their wages are insufficient to care for themselves and their children. The community thus carries part of the burden of these low wages and, in effect, subsidizes the employer.

One condition tending to lower women's wages is the system by which factories "farm out" work to be done in homes. Women have been found at extremely low pay doing such work as making artificial flowers, sewing buttons on cards, clocking hosiery, embroidering children's clothing, stuffing and stitching baseballs. Although this is a relatively recent tendency in the South, there are indications that such work is increasing. Usually the pay is far below that paid in the factory. A study of industrial home work on infants' wear disclosed that the women worked much longer hours than in the factory, though half of them received less than \$2.73 for their week's work.

A low wage scale means low living standards, insufficient food for many, a great amount of illness, and, in general, unhealthful and undesirable conditions of life.

✚ E S S A Y S

Numan V. Bartley, professor of history at the University of Georgia, argues that the New Deal represented a major turning point in southern history, with the breakdown of the plantation as a major event. Pete Daniel of the Smithsonian Institution analyzes that major event, detailing the dislocation, the consolidation of landholding, and, above all, the missed opportunities of New Deal agricultural policy to provide land for tenants and sharecroppers. Gavin Wright, an economics professor at the University of Michigan, effectively demonstrates how New Deal legislation, in this case an industrial minimum wage, produced change in the region but not at the expense of more fundamental cultural patterns, particularly race relations.

The New Deal as a Turning Point

NUMAN V. BARTLEY

While it would not be entirely appropriate to insist that nothing very important happened in the 1860s and the 1890s, those decades no longer seem, at least to me, to be the great watersheds that they have often been depicted.

From "The Era of the New Deal as a Turning Point in Southern History" by Numan V. Bartley, in James C. Cobb and Michael Naborato, eds., *The New Deal and the South*, pp. 138-143. Copyright © 1984 by University Press of Mississippi. Reprinted with permission.

instead, contemporary scholarship increasingly suggests that far more fundamental changes occurred during the middle years of the twentieth century, with perhaps 1935 to 1945 best qualifying as the latest crucial decade of New South historiography. Developments set in motion during these years produced massive changes in southern life.

Among the most fundamental was the breakdown of plantation agriculture. Despite Civil War and emancipation, the plantation was the South's basic economic and social institution and essentially remained so until the 1940s. Pete Daniel entitled a recent article not "The End of Slavery" but "The Metamorphosis of Slavery." Gilbert C. Fite concluded: "Farming throughout much of the South in the 1930s was little different than in the 1700s." Jack T. Kirby noted that the planters who "organized and dominated much of the flatland and hill South" transformed their plantations during the 1930s and 1940s into capitalist "neoplantations." . . . New Deal farm programs, mechanization, and other factors precipitated an upheaval in regional life. No longer was a country philosopher apt to observe that as soon as a farmer begins to keep books, he'll go broke shore as hell." Neoplantations kept books, and machines too, but they did not keep very many people.

The vast migration off the southern land was a fundamental demographic fact of the postdepression era. Between 1935 and 1970 more than thirteen million people left southern farms. During just the period from 1930 to 1945, more than 20 percent of the South's farm population abandoned agriculture. Both Daniel and Kirby have specifically, and in my opinion correctly, alluded to this massive exodus as a southern enclosure movement. In a traumatic kind of way, the process did more or less conform to contemporary theories of modernization. By 1930, the South had developed a dual economy of sorts, with the cities far more affluent and more "modern" than the poverty-stricken, "traditionalist" countryside, and new ideas" did "spread outward" from the advanced "islands" to the backward areas. The process, however, was hardly benign; it uprooted a large number of people from the land and cast them into the nation's cities.

The upheaval disrupted the foundations of the southern social order. Slavery and the furnishing system, race and sex, clan and class, and related arrangements defined proper social behavior. Labor relations were usually paternal and often paternal as well as being exploitive and often coercive. These patterns carried over into other areas of southern enterprise, most notably in the case of the mill villages but also in mining villages, lumber turpentine camps, and elsewhere. This system of labor relations appeared in such odd areas as shrimp fishing, where shrimpers sometimes lived in company houses, sailed company boats, received company credit, and fished on shares. "Crewmen gets everything furnished and the factory a share of the shrimp," a shrimper explained to a WPA [Works Progress Administration] interviewer. "Working on a factory boat is like being a share cropper."

The network of dependency relationships was a basic feature of the southern work place. In the 1890s Edward Atkinson, a Boston textile mag-

nate, observed that southern industrial promoters thought in terms of a large textile factory constructed largely with imported capital and operated in part by skilled workmen enticed from Massachusetts. Actually, Atkinson explained, healthy industrial growth was "a single great factory surrounded by a hundred little work shops." The lack of the "hundred little work shops" was a severe impediment to economic growth, and Atkinson's explanation for this absence was that the "idea of caste and class still prevails" in the region. With regard to capitalist development, Atkinson was precisely accurate. The "single great factory" did not threaten social stability and the patriarchal order; the "hundred little work shops" suggested a free-labor capitalism and a more dynamic social system that might threaten the "idea of caste and class." Although buttressed by a paternalistic ideology that encompassed the cult of the Lost Cause and other mythologies, the system ultimately rested on the bedrock of white supremacy, which helps to explain why virtually all establishment spokesmen placed defense of white supremacy above all other public and political virtues.

The South was by no means static, of course, and by the 1920s the growing cities nurtured an increasingly self-confident "business-oriented middle class" anxious to encourage what Blaine A. Brownell has called "the urban ethos in the South." Numerous other town and city dwellers and yeomen farmers did not live in company houses or shop on credit at company stores. Nevertheless, southerners generally were caught up in the web of marketing and credit arrangements that were a part of the South's colonial dependence on the North and were influenced by the prevailing regional commitment to social stability and a hierarchical order. W. J. Cash had a definite point when he described the southern factory as "a plantation, essentially indistinguishable in organization from the familiar plantation of the cotton fields." At any rate, New Deal wage and hours legislation, World War II economic expansion, and changing social conditions consigned factory communities to approximately the same fate as tenant farmers.

The enclosure movement in agriculture and the passing of the relatively self-contained workers' villages along with the decline of isolation and provincialism generally freed southern labor to flow unhindered in response to market forces. The result was not free labor, at least not as that term has been defined by Eric Foner and others. Instead, the collapse of paternal forms of labor control—and the word collapse is fitting despite the fact that the change extended over several decades—spurred the creation of what might best be termed commodity labor. . . . The southern work place became depersonalized and possibly dehumanized while at the same time it became less coercive and possibly less exploitive. The behavior of southern working people changed, and so too did southern society's attitudes toward work.

The decline of ideological paternalism encouraged an expanding commitment to economic growth. The urban boosterism of the 1920s gained momentum after the depression of the 1930s had exposed the bankruptcy of southern agriculture. The state planning agencies funded by the New

... quickly evolved into industrial promotion boards, and in 1936 Mississippi established its Balance Agriculture With Industry program. Thereafter, all of the southern states created industrial development commissions and, as James C. Cobb has demonstrated, competed vigorously with a variety of programs and policies designed to offer favors and services to national and international corporations that chose to expand into the South. Southern assistance to corporate enterprise was sufficiently generous to perhaps justify a wag's remark that the South believed in "socialism for the rich and free enterprise for the poor." By 1964 Leslie W. Dunbar of the Southern Regional Council could appropriately muse: "Southern governors have become the de facto executive directors of the state chambers of commerce, and spend their time competing with each other as supplicants for new plants. We have talked of state socialism and state capitalism, but what do we call governments whose chief affair it is to entice and propitiate business?"

Whatever the answer to Dunbar's question, the economic growth ethos came to dominate the formulation of southern state policy. Changes within southern society and most directly the black civil rights movement made institutionalized white supremacy no longer compatible with social order and led prevailing elites to identify social harmony with more factory payrolls and office parks. As the locus of southern political and economic power shifted from plantation-oriented county seats to corporation-oriented metropolitan areas, economic expansion came to be championed as the panacea for southern public problems.

This outlook, incidentally, coincided with the changing views of northern elites. In 1938 the Roosevelt administration released its *Report on Economic Conditions of the South*, which was a sound summary of the region's economic disasters. The *Report* associated virtually all of these ills with the South's colonial dependency relationship with the North. President Roosevelt's covering letter declared the region to be "the Nation's number one economic problem—the Nation's problem, not merely the South's." The document symbolized shifts in federal policies that made the national government a significant sponsor of southern economic growth. Northern liberal journals, one study has reported, tended to agree with this assessment and to favor federal aid to the South. Although the *Report* for a time made national liberals suspicious of private economic penetration of a colonized region, the dominant view soon came to be that northern corporate expansion into the region was the best solution to southern "backwardness." Thus, for much of the post-World War II era, southern elites and northern liberals were in essential agreement that northern corporate enterprise would solve southern problems.

The expansion of northern enterprise into the South and the growth of federal programs supporting southern "progress" contributed to the depopulation of rural areas and the growth of cities and factories. Commodity production replaced the more personal labor relations of an earlier era and a metropolitan elite replaced a county-seat elite committed to traditional social stability. Such upheavals led to profound and as yet

ill-understood changes in social structures, ideology, and personal interrelationships.

Federal Farm Policy and the End of an Agrarian Way of Life

PETE DANIEL

At last there is a New South. Its most obvious manifestations are the gleaming towers of Atlanta, the burgeoning sunbelt culture of neocarpetbaggers, and puffing factories. Yet the rural traveler sees constant reminders of the agricultural system that once characterized the South—vacant and decaying tenant houses, sagging barns, and empty mule lots. These museum pieces stand juxtaposed with brick houses and mobile homes, bulk tobacco curers, irrigation equipment, tractors, and picking machines. The revolution in southern agriculture happened so quickly that artifacts of the old days linger on; indeed, the change has come in little more than a generation. What forces shook the rural South that since the Civil War had wallowed in an almost feudal agricultural system? What caused an evolution from a labor-intensive mode of production to one that was capital-intensive? What drove both mule and man from those primitive communities dominated by a crossroads store and a scattering of churches and schools?

In material measures the South, characterized today by huge farms, small factories, retirement villages, and even some labor unions, is prosperous beyond the dreams of the sharecroppers who used to sit on the galleries of those crossroads stores. A culture of rural poverty disappeared, one that now attracts itinerant antique dealers looking for farm bells or discarded and rusting plowpoints and anthropologists poking for cultural clues in sagging architecture, remnants of folklore, and songs.

The rural transformation has been memorialized more by novelists and autobiographers than by historians. As materially successful as the South is, such writers approach it not with praises of accomplishment but rather with a sense of loss tempered with the realization that the old ways were in themselves enervating. Whether one reads in William Faulkner of the destruction of the big woods and their traditions paralleled by the steady progress of the ruthless Snopeses, in Erskine Caldwell of the destruction of Jeeter Lester, in James Agee's text and Walker Evans's photographs of the courage and simplicity of "famous men," in Nate Shaw of the love for mule and work, in H. L. Mitchell of the failure of agrarian unionism, or in Harry Crews of the profound sense of place and suffering, there is a common element that binds this literature—reverence for the land and the constant struggle of man and often mule against nature. Since the founding of Jamestown, the southerner has been firmly planted in the soil, has strug-

grow to produce from the land the elements of survival. Institutions sprang from the necessities of people struggling with nature, and tensions that fueled that culture have supplied the dynamics that still give the South its distinctiveness.

The rural tradition that evolved over three hundred years was threatened with extinction in a generation. Challenged by depression, war, federal agricultural policy, and technological change, the old structure crumbled. Millions of people were sacrificed to modernization, whether they were the inhabitants of the valleys flooded by the Tennessee Valley Authority or the hapless croppers forfeited to the prosperity of their landlords. That country music in its various manifestations has become a national nostalgia industry only underscores the extent of change.

Literary sources and the letters and documents that make up the agricultural records of the National Archives reveal that rural life in the South, characterized by sharecropping, tenancy, and at times peonage, cannot be measured by the material standards that generally measure prosperity. For example, a sharecropper was legally a wage hand, selling his labor to a landlord, receiving his wage in a share of the crop, and likely as not moving on to another nearby farm at the first of the year to experience the same routine. The legal definition does not explain, as do the human sources that survive, that even sharecropping retained some of the traditional paternalistic protections that evolved from slavery, and a man, a family, not only took the accepted "furnish" but also chopped wood from the forest, cultivated an occasional garden, had hunting rights, and often picked up odd jobs at logging, ginning, or other manual labor. All of this added up to a meager but, for some, a satisfactory existence.

Paternalism and the customs generated by the southern agricultural system did not lead to an idyllic life. Perhaps Harry Crews puts the harsh life of tenants as graphically as anyone. "Whether on shares or on standing rent, they were still tenant farmers and survival was a day-to-day crisis as real as the rickets in the bones of their children or the worms that would sometimes rise out of their children's stomachs and nest in their throats that they had to be pulled out by hand to keep the children from choking." Yet, farmers continued to till the land through the seasons and years, and this created a rural population that was both tough and endurable. "It was a world in which survival depended on raw courage," Crews observes, "a courage born out of desperation and sustained by a lack of alternatives."

This grim existence was made bearable by church services, family visits, tools, conversations at the crossroads store, and any number of singings, drinkings, marryings, and, if the literature is any guide, fornications and alteries. At the center of this life was a natural harmony—the seasonal wing, planting, hoeing, harvesting, and settlement. It was a primitive way of life, a struggle for survival, as Harry Crews observed, but the humane has often found grim satisfaction in living as close to the margin of absolute failure as possible.

The legal definition aside, a sharecropper extracted more from landlords

than a yearly settlement. The rules were so dictated by custom that when the Agricultural Adjustment Administration [AAA] tried to reform the system in the late 1930s both the landlords and the tenants refused to adopt the model contracts; they trusted custom more than the law. When the New Deal acreage reduction forced them off the land, sharecroppers did not ask for reform. They wanted to continue sharecropping; they wanted to stay on the land.

This rural southern culture that existed when the Great Depression struck in 1929 evolved from the Civil War labor settlement. During those years, many yeomen lost their land and became first tenants and then sharecroppers. Ever fewer owners controlled the land, and small farms rented or sharecropped typified southern agriculture. For over sixty years sharecroppers held to a status that in their minds was a cut above being a wage hand. Significantly, landlords made most of the business decisions, and the cropper tilled the leached-out soil with another man's mule, implements, and fertilizer. In this mechanically backward region, a man could farm cotton with a mule, a fertilizer distributor, a plow with a few sets of points, a few hoes, a bag to pull among the stalks at picking time, and scales to weigh-up. Tobacco culture added to this sleds, curing barns, a packhouse, and some sticks on which to hang the tobacco in the barns. Rice culture, taking a cue from midwestern wheat growers, mechanized earlier, and by the time of the depression was using binders and tractors to do much of the work and sophisticated canal networks to furnish water.

Yet there were too many people on the land, and the soil was unable to support them, at least in the traditional one-crop manner. In many areas the forest, the big woods, had been cut over, depriving croppers of fuel for their stoves, game for their tables, and winter jobs in the logwoods or at the sawmills. Simultaneously, the depression swept through the South, and odd jobs at the cotton gins or local businesses also disappeared. The old system had been able to withstand an occasional bad year, low prices, and even the boll weevil, but when depression continued and other options disappeared at the same time, poor farmers had nowhere to turn.

There had been relief experiments earlier with short-term disasters. The 1927 Mississippi River flood immersed 16.5 million acres and sent a million people scudding across the water in search of high ground. The Red Cross stepped in to feed them, and landlords feared that their hands were being spoiled. Yet planters learned that it was preferable to have their workers fed by outside agencies, and laborers discovered that being a refugee was in many ways preferable to being a sharecropper. The drought that came three years later reiterated the lesson. The Red Cross fed millions of people throughout the South, and landlords greedily accepted the aid—after the picking season was over.

The question was, of course, what role would the federal government play in relief. Under Herbert Hoover, relief proved to be piecemeal and insufficient. As the New Deal began, propaganda led farmers to believe that a new day was dawning when settlements would be fair, crop prices would soar, and a nice home would be available to all. At this point, the

beginning of the New Deal, numerous forces emerged simultaneously to complicate the South's modernization. The collapse of the old plantation system was imminent, but whether the ensuing changes would be gradual or revolutionary hung in the balance.

The millions of letters that poured into Washington outlined the dreams of people faced with extinction. Most humbly asked for aid—for a cow, pigs, chickens, a small home, a loan to get started. They asked for opportunity not alms. The AAA, various alphabetical agencies of rural hope, and the president implied that there would be a new start, a New Deal. Perhaps both Congress and the president believed that the prescribed legislation would lead to such a deal, but in practice and implementation other actors intervened.

Despite the legal protection guaranteed to croppers by the AAA, many were evicted, lost whatever protection sharecropping provided, and became wage hands. In many ways this revolutionary transition paralleled the enclosure movement that centuries earlier had run some of their forebears off the land in England and in Europe. Robbed of their cropper status, they possessed only their labor to sell, and there were few buyers in the depression years. Even as they were driven off the land, the payments that went to the landlords were often used to purchase tractors or other labor-saving machines. The AAA gave protection to the landowners by price supports in the form of rental and parity payments. Using labor only at peak seasons, landlords could save the costly furnish. As mechanization increased, the demand for labor dropped off even more, and instead of landlords supplying air workers, ultimately the federal government took the place of the landlord, disbursing relief as stingily as any Snopes ever dispensed furnish. In some cases the landlords followed their croppers off the land as low prices and hard times conspired to bankrupt them. Land concentrated into fewer hands, and machinery allowed farmers to become more specialized. The rural work force dropped drastically, beginning a trend that continues.

New Deal agricultural policy must be measured by its stated goals, which were, primarily, to raise commodity prices and purchasing power, to reduce output, to prevent a parallel reduction of tenants and sharecroppers, and to provide a new start for farmers threatened with failure. The most obvious and most researched aspect of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's [USDA] failure was its inability to solve the problems connected with the collapse of cotton tenancy. There were other manifestations of how the USDA failed to aid poor farmers while propping up commercial farmers. The examples below raise the question of whether the USDA and AAA were attempting to save those most threatened by the forces of change or attempting to revolutionize agriculture by clearing off the old order at any cost and establishing a new structure of agriculture.

More than any other program, the Resettlement Administration and its successors the Farm Security Administration [FSA] and the Farmers' Home Administration [FHA] sought to provide relief for those families disrupted by the reduced acreage formulas of the AAA. Numerous books and articles

have evaluated these programs and the political mechanics that existed within them. In a simple evaluation, however, statistics show the failure of these schemes.

In its first decade of operation, from 1937 to 1947, the FSA and its successor the FHA made tenant purchase loans totaling nearly \$294 million to over 47,000 families. Since in 1945 there were still 1.9 million tenants, one historian figured that it would take the tenant purchase program "nearly 400 years to make them all owners at the rate that has prevailed so far." The FSA did not cater to those who were displaced, for it gave preference to farmers who could make down payments and had their own stock and equipment. The loan program saved those who could not obtain credit from traditional sources, usually a bank. The FSA thus helped farmers who were a cut below owners, got them started, and then closely supervised them.

Of all the farmers helped, 17.1 percent were sharecroppers and 0.6 percent were wage hands. Share renters, farmers who furnished their own workstock, tools, and fertilizer, got nearly 60 percent of the loans, and cash or standing renters, even higher up the prosperity scale, received almost 22 percent. Those aided were hardly those on the bottom rung. In essence the FSA tenant loan program did not correct the problems created by acreage reduction and eviction. Within the bounds of survival (which meant satisfying Congress that it was a financial success and safe from ideological radicalism), the FSA did stabilize the best risks left on the land.

Landlords manipulated the AAA parity and rental payments, and croppers suffered rather than prospered from this program. In the cotton program, especially, landlords took not only the rental payment, to which they were entitled, but a portion of the parity payment and in some cases all of it. When the AAA began investigations into this, landlords quickly evaded the legal obligations by forcing croppers off the farms or making them wage hands who had no claim to government money. Comparatively little of the money trickled down to the croppers.

Lawrence J. Nelson's recent article on Oscar Johnston suggests where the money went and why it went where it did. Not only did Johnston, finance director of the AAA, establish the payment rules, but also in 1934 the company that he managed received \$124,000 in government payments. From 1933 to 1935 the Delta Pine and Land Company, the English corporation that Johnston managed, received \$318,000 in government subsidies and a smaller plantation also managed by Johnston received nearly \$78,000. Only in 1939 did the government set a cap of \$10,000 in soil conservation payments to a single recipient but not until 1970 did it place a ceiling on cotton price adjustment payments—\$55,000.

Many individuals and firms had multiple farms under contract, and in 1936 a published Senate Document revealed that insurance companies held large amounts of farmland and reaped significant amounts of federal money. For example, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York held contracts on 1,141 cotton farms and 232 tobacco farms, John Hancock on 1,580 cotton and 7 tobacco farms, Prudential on 999 cotton and 206 tobacco farms, Union Central on 509 cotton and 58 tobacco farms, and Phoenix

mutual on 517 cotton and 54 tobacco farms. There were 55 multiple landowners each reporting 150 or more farms under AAA contract. These 55 concerns held almost 11,000 cotton farms and over 1,000 tobacco farms, but unfortunately the report did not reveal landowners who held less than 50 farms or received less than \$10,000 in payments.

Although these large landholders received only 2 percent of cotton and 75 percent of tobacco payments, when coupled with checks to other sizable landlords it can be seen that the AAA program provided a large subsidy to people and institutions not directly connected to the land. Agricultural wage hands, conversely, did not receive any AAA money, croppers and share tenants received only the percentage of parity payment that as their share of the crop, while managing share tenants and renters received the entire parity payment. No matter how one analyzes the statistics, landowners, in many cases large corporations far removed from the land, received the bulk of the federal money, and they often found ways to ensure that even a greater share would go to them.

Changes in lending patterns also supported large institutions at the expense of the poorer farmers. The redistribution of farm credit between 1929 and 1934 shows a radical shift from the private to the public sector. In 1929 individuals held 44 percent of new mortgages—in 1934, 14 percent; insurance companies held 14 percent in 1929 and 3 percent five years later; banks 23 percent to 8 percent, while federal land banks increased their mortgages from 5 percent in 1929 to 68 percent five years later.

This drastic redistribution of farm credit, however, did not destroy private lending agencies; indeed, the opposite was true. As a study of the Farm Credit Administration showed, land banks moved in to fill the void left by private lending sources. From 1933 to 1939 land banks lent \$2.5 billion, and 71 percent went to refinance mortgages originally held by other credit agencies, particularly banks and insurance companies. "In addition to strengthening the assets of banks and insurance companies," the report concluded, "this government lending had the effect of easing the breakdown of the private credit structure and restraining demands for its reconstruction." Thus, federal lending programs saved the private lending agencies strengthened them through the worst of the depression. Fortunately, many struggling owners held on to their land.

After weathering the worst of the depression, private agencies again strengthened themselves and by 1939 new mortgages by federal land banks had risen to 11 percent while individuals had advanced from the 1934 figure of 14 percent to 31 percent; insurance companies from 3 to 19 and banks from 8 to 30 percent. In effect the federal loan program had financed not so many farmers so much as the private lending agencies.

This readjustment was more subtle than the statistics reveal. Insurance companies, for example, had foreclosed on many mortgages and taken control of the land. They often rented land to tenants and, as discussed elsewhere, complied with the AAA programs, taking the landlord's share of payments. By the mid 1930s they began to sell the land, again taking mortgages on it. A study by the Land Tenure Section of the Bureau of

Agricultural Economics (BAE) showed that farmers who bought land found themselves again in debt to the insurance companies, and insurance companies found themselves holding mortgages that in hard times could default to them. The depression, then, destroyed the assets of millions of indebted farmers. In 1932, for example, the twenty-six largest insurance companies acquired almost 15,000 farm properties.

The question follows, then: who owned the land in the South? There were people on the land, but they were in effect only squatting there. "Even more alarming than the high rate of tenancy," a 1935 BAE report notes, "is the small equity that the farmers of the South have in the land they operate. In addition to the tenant class, who have no equity in the farms they operate, owner-operators have no equity in the land which they rent, and due to heavy mortgage indebtedness only partial equity in the land they own." Not only did southern farmers possess little equity in the land they held but most land was held by people who were not directly connected with farming. "In all seven of that block of Cotton Belt States that included South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas," the report continues, "between 60 and 70 percent of the value of the farm real-estate belonged to persons or agencies other than the farm operator." One economist calculated that "more than 84 percent of the land in the Old Plantation Piedmont section of Georgia is owned by credit companies, banks, and mortgage corporations." Such concentration also occurred in South Carolina and Alabama and no doubt throughout the South. . . .

During the first seven years of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's acreage reduction policies, the thirteen cotton states lost over 30 percent of their sharecroppers, 12 percent of other tenants, and 9 percent of the farm owners. Georgia lost 40 percent of its sharecroppers, Alabama and Arkansas both lost 32 percent. Increasingly, tractors replaced those cut from the land.

The war siphoned off unemployed farmers into either the military or into defense industries. The havoc created by New Deal policies had in some respects been ameliorated by the war. During the war, when labor was scarcer and more expensive, farmers bought even more machinery. Those who had the foresight to invest before the war were in a good position to utilize machinery, and others, even in the restricted implements market of the war, bought what they could. Land prices, the price of farm goods, and labor prices increased, and generally farmers prospered, as can be measured by the decreasing debt during those years.

Land became increasingly concentrated into fewer hands. The BAE made numerous studies of this trend and offered suggestions, but the forces of change ground on. "In a competitive system," the BAE concluded, "family-size farms are no match for efficient large-scale operators, and 'the irresistible march of invention and machinery must foretell the doom of the small farmer just as it destroyed the small craftsman.'" Farmers discovered that the pot at the end of the rainbow contained better seeds, more fertilizer, and larger machines. The message was clear: sharecropping,

... a laborer all year and in many ways cared for him, had become outdated.

The trend begun during the New Deal has continued, and price supports give stability to the larger operators while acreage reduction and increasing costs drive small farmers from the land. Whether this came about because of the executive planning of Franklin Roosevelt, the execution of it by the USDA, the successful commercial agricultural lobby, the persistent congressional revisions, or the inevitable working out of the forces of capitalism, the U.S. farm count dropped from 6.8 million in 1935 to 2.3 million in 1979. In the eleven southern states, farms declined from 2.4 million in 1940 to 723,000 in 1974, while the average size grew from 86 to 235 acres. Commercial farms dominate agriculture, for the smallest 50 percent of farms, a recent Government Accounting Office report notes, "have less than 5 percent of the sales, while at the other end of the size spectrum the situation is almost reversed, the largest 5 percent grabbing nearly 50 percent of the market."

The old cotton belt of the Carolinas and the Black Belt purged itself of tenants and the old cotton culture. Arkansas, the Mississippi Delta, and Texas continued to grow cotton, utilizing machinery, heavier fertilizer, and better seeds to increase production on fewer farms of larger acreage. Soybeans moved in to replace cotton in many areas of the South. . . .

The tobacco culture endured, in part because the AAA tobacco section moved less ruthlessly than the cotton section and also because mechanization came slower to tobacco. The reduction in tobacco farms has come recently, in 1954 there were 136,000 tobacco farms in North Carolina, more than in 1934, but increasing mechanization cut tobacco farms by 90,000 in two decades. Yet North Carolina grew 300,000 pounds more tobacco in 1974 than it had in 1934.

Mechanization in the tobacco belt continues rapidly. Early tobacco harvesters in the 1950s, resembling spindly-legged birds, were inefficient. With automatic stringers, bulk barns, and finally efficient mechanical harvesters, the old fashioned hand-cropping, stringing, and wood-fired barns have all but disappeared.

Rice fared quite differently from cotton and tobacco. Rice had migrated, from the Carolinas to Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, and then California. There was a steady demand for rice, and because growers' millers were highly organized, the AAA did not cut into the acreage. Since rice farmers owned a substantial amount of machinery, the AAA allotments to producers—not just to landlords. Although rice farms decreased by 3,500 in Louisiana since 1934, farmers till 287,000 more acres there. In Arkansas, a booming rice area, the number of farms has increased by over 2,100 and the acreage by over 500,000.

Until the mid 1950s, the rice industry had been quite stable and had not during the war due to a high international demand for rice. More important, rice farmers had used machines much earlier than did cotton or soybean farmers. By the 1930s, rice farmers used tractors and binders, and during the war combines and dryers became common. Until the 1950s,

tenants had protection from the policies of eviction characteristic of tobacco and cotton because of the producer allotments. Tenants in the early years could even take their "hip pocket" allotment and move from farm to farm or state to state, driving the best bargain they could with their allotment. When rice acreage was reduced in the mid 1950s, farmers urged the government to reduce the acreage progressively, like the income tax, but the USDA argued that such a plan would be unworkable. At any rate, the rice culture was less disrupted by government policies, mostly because of a consistent and then increasing demand and in no small part because of the producer allotments and earlier mechanization.

Rice, the most technologically advanced crop, and tobacco, the most retarded, have suffered least from government policies. In the early years, these programs stabilized prices and gave some security to growers. Although the tobacco culture is still characterized by small farms, federal policies since the mid 1950s and increasing mechanization have encouraged large-scale operations and forced consolidation. The depression caught cotton growers at just the wrong point between feudalism and modernization, and the Cotton Section of the AAA did not ease the transition. One disaster after another—boll weevil, flood, drought, the AAA program, tractors, war, and picking machines—swept croppers, wage hands, and small owners from the land.

In the transition from labor-intensive to capital-intensive operations, the USDA did little to protect the victims of displacement. Producer allotments in rice and minimum acreage holdings in tobacco helped some, but overall USDA policy encouraged a change in structure. Whether one looks at the size and management of farm units, the landowners, the manner of production, the ease of entry, the inheritance laws, or the credit structure, nearly all policies favored large versus small farmers. In the face of mechanization and the other dynamics of change, perhaps there was no option. Farming as a culture was superseded by large-scale farming as a commercial enterprise.

Once the forces of commercialization began, no check on them seemed possible. For the southern farmer to survive meant that he had to turn from cotton to soybeans, from mules to tractors, from stoop labor to harvesters, from prayers for rain to irrigation systems, from the almanac to the science of growing, from harmony with nature to a war against it.

In the century since the Reconstruction labor settlement set up the sharecropping system, the South has at last succumbed to the forces of capitalism. A vast enclosure movement swept millions of rural workers from the land. Who can judge or even find the statistics, the facts, to judge whether the erstwhile croppers who now inhabit urban areas North and South are better or worse off than their forebears who walked behind the plow? Does television substitute for the gallery of Will Varner's store at Frenchman's Bend? Is any pavement as solid as the soil?

By material standards the South today is prosperous. While no one would mourn the improvement in race relations or federal programs that combat hunger, the road not taken—stabilizing and upgrading

sharecroppers and tenants—was the one that could have both preserved the rural culture and absorbed integration and welfare. The weeds continue to encroach on the old shacks and barns, and the decaying material remains of the plantation South are constant reminders of the death of the old culture. The agrarian values of the South are fading, just as the Vanderbilt Fugitives prophesied, buried beneath federal policy and machines.

How New Deal Wage Policy Influenced Southern Industry

GAVIN WRIGHT

The National Recovery Administration (NRA) raised the wage level for many other southern industries besides textiles. This tumultuous program was so short-lived (less than two years) and so chaotic in its operation, and is so far removed from present-day conceptions of sound economic policy, that historians have assumed it was merely a fiasco with little lasting influence. But this is not so for the South. The idea behind the NIRA (the act that created the NRA) was that recovery would be encouraged by allowing industries to prohibit unsavory forms of "cutthroat competition," thereby stabilizing both company profits and the purchasing power of labor. When the early industry response was slow (after cotton textiles), President Roosevelt announced the President's Re-employment Agreement (PRA), the so-called blanket code, in July 1933. The PRA established a limit of thirty-five hours per week per employee for industrial workers, and a forty-cent per hour minimum wage. Under this sort of pressure, codes were hastily approved in over 450 industries covering 23 million workers, or more than 90 percent of all industrial workers in the country. It was, in effect, a national minimum wage, more drastic and universal in its coverage than any that have since been passed.

The effects of the NRA were far greater on low-wage than on high-wage industries, hence far greater on the South than on the North. . . . The overnight increases in the southern hourly wage ranged from 21.5 percent in paints and varnishes to more than 70 percent in lumber [for example]. . . .

Wages did begin to slip in some industries with the demise of NRA in 1935. Plans to continue the NRA standards voluntarily were announced by some businesses, such as Dan River Mills, the Virginia-Carolina Chemical Corporation, and the American Tobacco Company. By contrast, most firms in the lumber and furniture beat a quick retreat. But the retreats were limited for several reasons. Wage increases are often difficult to reverse for firms with experienced employees. In this instance, the federal government supported higher southern wages in another way, through the policies of the work-relief programs, especially the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Originally mandated to pay local "prevailing wages," the WPA minimum rates in the southern states were only half the levels for the northern states. But between 1935 and 1939, the southern rates steadily increased while the northern rates were unchanged (in some cases they actually fell). By 1939, WPA minimums in the South were up to 80 percent of northern minimums. These rates were often more than double the farm wage, perhaps more cash money than southern workers had seen before. The WPA certainly did not employ all people who might have wanted to work at these wages. Indeed, there were cases in which whole classes of workers were dismissed from WPA jobs to work on the cotton or sugar harvest, even at lower pay. But the work-relief wage set a standard that workers could hope to get if they waited their turn; this must surely have affected wage rates in other jobs.

A second way that the federal government raised southern wages in the 1930s was through the encouragement to unionization and liberal labor legislation. The unionization rate was still far lower than that of the rest of the nation in 1940 (10.7 percent compared to 21.5 percent), but even this figure was a significant increase, and in some industries, the effect was important. Though the textile strike of 1934 was decisively defeated, when the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935 put the federal government firmly on the side of organizing, some millowners simply accepted their legal obligation to bargain and desist from "union busting." In other cases, such as where unions would have had no chance given the balance of local power in depressed conditions, unionization was achieved only with the support of federal authorities. National unions like those of the steel and rubber workers were important forces in bringing about the full equalization of industry wages in subsequent decades. For the most part, the South remained nonunion, but the organizational efforts focused national attention on southern conditions, and the state labor departments established under New Deal pressure were a continuing presence.

In the 1930s, however, the most direct federal effect on southern wage levels came through the minimum wage provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938. Though southern industries may have been of incidental concern to the drafters of the NIRA and the NLRA, the FLSA was clearly passed by Congress with its eye on the South. The act provided for an initial floor of twenty-five cents an hour, to be increased by steps of five cents a year to a limit of forty cents. Few employers outside the South were affected by these rates. Of the 690,000 workers earning less than thirty cents an hour in the spring of 1939, fully 54 percent were southern. The thirty-two and one-half cent law which went into effect in October 1939 affected 44 percent of textile workers in the South, but only 6 percent in the North. The average percentage wage increase in the southern seamless hosiery industry between 1938 and 1940 was three times as large as that in the North. The hourly wage of black workers for independent leaf-tobacco dealers actually doubled between 1935 and 1940. Certainly most of the opposition was southern and was spearheaded by the Southern Pine Association, which considered the bill "by far the most important