

REFORM(ULAT)ING THE REGION: COMPETING DISCOURSES OF REGION
AND REGIONAL CHANGE IN THE DEPRESSION-ERA U.S. SOUTH

by

AMANDA COLEMAN

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of Geography
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2008

"Reform(ulat)ing the Region: Competing Discourses of Region and Regional Change in the Depression-Era U.S. South," a dissertation prepared by Amanda Coleman in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Geography. This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:



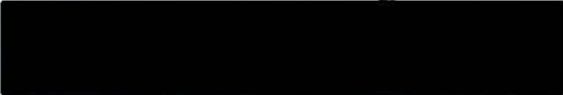
Dr. Alexander Murphy, Chair of the Examining Committee

5-27-08

Date

Committee in Charge: Dr. Alexander Murphy, Chair
 Dr. Shaul Cohen
 Dr. Lise Nelson
 Dr. Joseph Lowndes

Accepted by:



Dean of the Graduate School

An Abstract of the Dissertation of

Amanda Coleman for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of Geography to be taken June 2008

Title: REFORM(ULAT)ING THE REGION: COMPETING DISCOURSES OF
REGION AND REGIONAL CHANGE IN THE DEPRESSION-ERA U.S.
SOUTH

Approved: _____

Dr. Alexander Murphy

How are the actions of parties interested in regional change impacted by particular conceptualizations of the region? This study explores that question through a comparison of two reform organizations in the 1930s South: the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU), a regional labor union, and the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the New Deal agency charged with alleviating rural poverty. Informed theoretically by work in regional geography, the study contends that these organizations held fundamentally different understandings of the South as a regional entity, which prohibited their cooperation in effecting regional reform. Through an analysis of primary materials, including union correspondence and publicity and FSA reports and visual materials, the study shows how both agencies privileged poverty over race, and therefore privileged

whiteness, in their dealings with agrarian southerners. The manner in which each organization dealt with issues of poverty and race reflects larger understandings of the South as a regional entity.

The current conceptualization of southern historiography often gives no critical role of the concept of region. Prior to the 1980s, scholars of the South relied on an essentialist understanding of the region as a backdrop against which historical events occur. Since the 1980s, these scholars have increasingly claimed that 'the South' is a social construction, one largely propagated through narratives of southern difference, which posited that the South was inherently different from the rest of the country. This dichotomy between essentialist and constructivist conceptualizations of the region in southern historiography inhibits scholars from understanding that different actors operating under the same historical circumstances can have different understandings of and approaches to the region. The STFU viewed the South as a structure through which oppressive systems of poverty were reproduced, while the FSA viewed the South as a set of contingent circumstances and engaged in a project in the social construction of the region. By explicating these themes, this study seeks to bridge the extant dichotomy in southern historiography by bringing a more critical discussion of the concept of region to a key period in southern history.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Amanda Coleman

PLACE OF BIRTH: Blytheville, Arkansas

DATE OF BIRTH: January 26, 1975

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography, 2008, University of Oregon
Master of Science in Geography, 2001, Oklahoma State University
Bachelor of Science in Geography, 1999, Oklahoma State University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Political Geography
Cultural Geography

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of Geography, University of Oregon,
2003-2008

Teaching Associate, Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University,
2000-2001

Research Associate, Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University,
1999-2000

GRANTS, AWARDS AND HONORS:

Graduate Student Summer Research Award, Center on Diversity and Community,
University of Oregon, 2007

Outstanding Thesis on Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society, 2002

Alta L. Robertson Dumont Distinguished Graduate Fellowship, Oklahoma State
University, 2000-2001

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Alec Murphy, whose guidance greatly improved the quality of this study. In addition, I wish to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Drs. Shaul Cohen, Lise Nelson and Joseph Lowndes, for their time and thoughtful comments on my research.

I also wish to thank my fellow graduate students, particularly those of my Fall 2003 cohort; most of them have moved on, but I'll always remember the support and camaraderie they provided during my first years at UO. Thanks also go out to others in the UO community who have befriended and supported me during my time here; their names are too numerous to list, but I would be remiss to not recognize them.

Special appreciation goes to Mary Milo and other members of the staff at the UO Geography Department, who were always helpful and fun to be around and who rarely get the public recognition that they deserve.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their never-wavering support during my doctoral program.

Dedicated to my mother and my paternal grandmother, who inspired this research more than they'll ever know.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Sources and Methods	7
Structure of Study	12
II. TELLING ABOUT THE SOUTH	15
A Brief Sketch of Southern Historiography	17
The South: Old and New	19
Southern Historiography, 1950s-1970s	22
Southern Historiography, 1980s-Present	25
Summary	27
The South as a Region: Changing Paradigms	29
The Regionalists	30
'New' Regional Geography	36
The South: A Social Construct?	40
Conclusion	44
III. ARKANSAS: MICROCOSM OF THE DEPRESSION-ERA SOUTH	48
Arkansas: Construction to Reconstruction	50
Constructing Arkansas: Pre-War History	50
War and Reconstruction	55
The Postbellum Era: Growth and Change	57
Economic Recovery and the Rise of Tenancy	57
The Black Experience in Postbellum Arkansas	63
Growth of the Cotton Monoculture	66
The Early Cotton Industry	66
The 1920s: Pre-Depression Disaster and Decline	70
Conclusion	76

Chapter	Page
IV. THE SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS UNION	80
The AAA and the Rise of Agrarian 'Radicalism' in Arkansas	85
The Southern Tenant Farmers Union	88
'Southernness' and the STFU	93
Solidarity Forever? Race and Poverty in the STFU	98
Poverty, Rights and Citizenship in the STFU	106
Conclusion	112
V. THE FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION	116
The Farm Security Administration: Genesis and Evolution	118
Early Incarnates: FERA and the RA	118
The Farm Security Administration	123
The FSA Resettlement Communities of Arkansas	126
The FSA Photographic Project	130
The Historical Section	130
Arkansas Through the FSA Lens	132
The South, the Nation and the New Deal	137
What Economic Nationalism Meant for the South	145
Conclusion	148
VI. CONCLUSION	151
In Retrospect	156
Conclusion	164
REFERENCES	166

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Physiographic Regions of Arkansas	49
2. Slavery in Antebellum Arkansas	54
3. Tenants in the Arkansas Delta, 1880-1930	68
4. The Fluctuating Cotton Market	69
5. Changes in Tenancy, 1925-1930	71
6. White Sharecroppers as Percentage of Total Sharecroppers, 1930	75
7. Reform Organizations in the Arkansas Delta	82
8. STFU Locals, 1937	93
9. Official Seal of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union	94
10. "The Union Makes Us Strong"	105
11. STFU Organization Flyer, 1936	109
12. Resettlement House in Dyess Colony, Arkansas	122
13. The Plum Bayou Project	128
14. Farmers About to Begin Cooperative Cotton Cultivation	129
15. FSA Images of Southern White Poverty	133
16. FSA Images of White Women and Children	134
17. FSA Images of Southern Black Laborers	135
18. FSA Images of Black Children	136
19. Visiting Relationships Between Families, Dyess Colony, May 1936	143
20. FSA Progress in Dyess Colony	144
21. The New Deal's New Democracy	147
22. Administration Building, Dyess, Arkansas	158
23. Southern Tenant Farmers Museum, Tyronza, Arkansas	159
24. Scene from the Missouri Roadside Protest	161

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Theoretical Dichotomy in Scholarly Literature on the South	45
2. Population Growth in Pre-Civil War Arkansas	53
3. Types and Conditions of Tenancy Arrangements	61
4. Cotton Acreage Contracted as Percent of Total	86
5. STFU Decline After UCAPAWA Affiliation	96
6. Allocation of Funding for FERA/RA Communities	126

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Somebody told us Wall Street fell,
But we were so poor that we couldn't tell.
Cotton was short and weeds were tall,
But Mr. Roosevelt's gonna save us all.
"Song of the South" (Alabama)

Alabama's "Song of the South" tells the story of one poor southern family during the Great Depression. Like millions of southerners, the family was enmeshed in the cotton monoculture that typified large portions of the agricultural South in the 1930s. Devastated by poor crop yields and low prices, the family looked to the federal government for hope and help, finding them in the form of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal.

The New Deal era was a critical moment in southern history, but one that has received less scholarly attention than other defining moments in the region's past, namely the Civil War and the Civil Rights movement. Works produced on the topic have tended to focus on the differential impacts of New Deal programming within the South: differential benefits to white and black southerners, to urban and rural areas, and to farm and industrial laborers. Other histories have concerned the intricate politics carried on between Franklin Roosevelt and powerful southern Democrats in effecting New Deal

legislation (see e.g. Cobb and Namorato 1984; Smith 1988; Biles 1994). The lesser attention given to the New Deal and the South is most likely due to the fact that the Depression was a national, not a regional, phenomenon; moreover, as alluded to in the song lyrics, the poverty associated with the Depression was not a novel experience for many southerners. Within southern history, then, the Depression is viewed as a particular moment along the continuum of southern poverty and not regarded as the anomaly it represented for the nation at large.

The South's seemingly endemic poverty was the cornerstone of powerful narratives of 'southern difference' that contrasted the region against the values and norms of the rest of the nation. In the 1920s, H.L. Mencken and other critics excoriated the South's poverty, racism, illiteracy and cultural backwardness; by the time of the Depression, these narratives of 'southern difference' dominated popular understanding of the region. This conception of a different, abnormal South was furthered in the 1930s when federal relief workers and other observers arrived in the region and expressed shock at social conditions, especially in rural areas.

New Deal programmers believed that the cure to southern social ills lay in alleviating southern poverty, particular rural poverty. To that end, the New Deal launched several initiatives aimed at improving rural social conditions, including healthcare programs and electrification projects. The underlying belief was that improvement in social conditions would result in cultural uplift as well. Beyond providing immediate relief, then, the goal of the New Deal's rural programming was to

elevate poor southerners to a more acceptable set of American standards through the eradication of southern difference.

The federal programs enacted in the Depression-era South were intended to incorporate the region into the “new democracy” being created through New Deal economic policies (Ickes 1934). The Depression-New Deal era thus represents a crucial moment in which the relationship between the South and the rest of the nation was being renegotiated. This study examines the renegotiating of the South-nation relationship in the 1930s, arguing that the concept of region was a key element in debates over regional reform during that time. The topics of region and reform are explored through the study of two organizations: the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU), a regionally-based agricultural workers union, and the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the New Deal agency charged with alleviating rural poverty.

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the Farm Security Administration shared the fundamental goal of ameliorating poverty among rural southerners; however, the two organizations rarely worked in concert to achieve this objective. The nature of the relationship between the STFU and the FSA is convoluted. Grubbs (1971) has claimed that the STFU was largely responsible for the creation of the FSA and that the two organizations had an amicable relationship. Holley (1975), on the other hand, maintains that the two organizations were antagonistic, with the FSA regarding the STFU as a ‘squeaky wheel’ and resenting the criticism that the union heaped on federal programs in the South. This study follows the latter characterization, contending that the tensions underlying the STFU-FSA relationship resulted from differing ideas about the causes of

southern poverty, ideas formulated through each organization's broader beliefs about the South as a regional entity.

The Farm Security Administration attributed southern poverty to a host of environmental and economic conditions: soil erosion, low agricultural prices and an oversupply of labor, for instance. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union, in contrast, insisted that the true causes of southern poverty were the oppressive tenancy system that dominated agriculture in the South and the political disempowerment of millions of poor southerners via the poll tax. Thus, two of the most prominent reform organizations active in the Depression-era South had vastly different ideas about poverty within the region. However, disagreement over the causes of poverty provides only a partial explanation for tensions between the STFU and the FSA; a more nuanced analysis acknowledges how conceptions of poverty were influenced by each organization's understanding of the South.

The FSA understood the South as existing in a state of perpetual coloniality. The idea of the South as an internal colony extended back to the decades following the American Revolution, when the South's reliance on slave labor drew comparisons to practices prevalent in parts of the world colonized by European powers (Greeson 1999). By the 1930s, other characteristics had come to mark the South's coloniality: chronic indebtedness, an economy based on the exploitation and extraction of natural resources, and low standards of living among much of the population (Vance 1938). For the FSA, then, southern poverty was a manifestation of the South's enduring coloniality; through

programming enacted in the South, the FSA sought to treat the conditions of coloniality, and not just the conditions of poverty.

The STFU, in contrast, could not draw upon traditional narratives to frame its understanding of the South. Internal narratives about the South were predicated on the absence of poverty. As discussed in the following chapter, until the mid-twentieth century, much of southern history centered on a set of regional myths intended to create a vaunted southern past. The “Old South” myth constructed the antebellum period as a rural idyll that epitomized the height of southern prosperity, while the “New South” creed of the early twentieth century preached the gospel of urban, industrial prosperity; both of these historical characterizations excluded poor southerners. Externally constructed narratives of the South were equally unappealing; for example, as discussed in Chapter Five, the FSA’s notion of the South as a perpetual colony did not cast a positive light on the southern poor.

The STFU, then, had to conceptualize the South in a way that rejected traditional narratives (both intra-regional and extra-regional) about the South and the southern poor, but that was still rooted in the characteristics that marked the South as a distinct regional entity. To that end, the STFU created a less mythological, more structural view of the South, one in which the South was the product of interrelated systems of oppression. These systems, primarily agricultural tenancy and the poll tax, became entrenched during a period in which racial segregation was codified. The entrenchment and codification of oppressive systems served to create the South as a structure – as a specific set of relations that came to govern and reproduce everyday life within the region. Thus, over time, the

region itself, rather than the individual systems of oppression, became the source of disempowerment of the southern poor.

These differing conceptualizations of the South meant that the STFU and the FSA took different approaches to regional reform. The STFU believed that reform could occur only through altering or disbanding the systems that maintained the South as a structural entity. The FSA, on the other hand, believed that 'rehabilitating' the South's land and economy (i.e. ridding the South of its enduring coloniality) would lead to the eradication of poverty. The FSA thus expressed little interest in directly engaging the systems that the STFU insisted were the true source of southern impoverishment. This disagreement over poverty, predicated on different understandings of the South as a regional entity, precluded cooperation between the FSA and the STFU.

Moreover, relations between the STFU and the FSA were also underlain by disagreements about the purpose of regional reform. The STFU viewed regional reform as the union's end goal; the union's leaders did not give much consideration to broader issues of the South-nation relationship. This circumscribed, regional outlook placed the union at ideological odds with the FSA. For the FSA, reform in the South was part of a larger plan to bring about national prosperity through regional planning and integration. New Deal programming was based in the philosophy of economic nationalism, which advocated prosperity through the creation of a unified consumer class; integrating the poor and problematic South into this new national agenda was deemed vital to the success of the New Deal. Thus, for the FSA regional reform in the South was just one part of an ambitious plan to remake the region-nation relationship. These themes of

region and reform in the Depression-era South are discussed through an examination of STFU and FSA activities in Arkansas, particularly in the eastern portion of the state known as the Delta (see Figure 1, page 49), where the tenancy system and cotton monoculture predominated. The STFU was founded in the northern Arkansas Delta in 1934 in response to early Roosevelt agricultural reform initiatives. As a result of STFU agitation, the FSA invested heavily in the Delta region, constructing nearly a dozen farm communities in eastern Arkansas (see Figure 7, page 82). This study focuses primarily on the years 1934-1938; this time period is marked by the founding of the STFU and the union's rapid decline following a disastrous affiliation with the national United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of American union (discussed in Chapter Four), after which the STFU ceased to be a significant advocate for regional change.

Sources and Methods

This study employs primary and secondary materials in elucidating themes of region within the STFU and the FSA. Primary materials include correspondence, publicity and other materials found within the official collection of STFU papers. Other union-related primary materials include written accounts by union members, particularly those of H.L. Mitchell, who was instrumental in the establishment of the union. Unless otherwise specified in the text, union materials are located in the official collection of STFU Papers, available on microfilm and accessed by the researcher at Arkansas State University. Articles, monographs and reports produced by FSA workers are also

analyzed as primary sources, as are photographs taken by employees of the FSA's Historical Section.

Secondary sources used in this study include a set of oral histories of union leaders collected and published by *Southern Exposure* magazine (see Wise and Thrasher 1980). Secondary accounts of the union are also used, but the majority of analysis is based on material contained in the oral history collection and the union papers. Secondary accounts of FSA activities in Arkansas are used extensively. Unfortunately, the majority of papers relating to individual FSA communities constructed in eastern Arkansas were destroyed by fire prior to archiving; thus, secondary reports provide the only readily available information on these communities.

These sources are analyzed using methods of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis has roots in linguistics and psychology and is now widely used among social scientists. Based on the belief that texts organize and construct social reality, discourse analysis examines the production of meaning through texts. Discourse analysts are concerned with the role of texts in the formation of social meanings and social identity and the ways in which texts are used to create different 'pictures' of reality (Tonkiss 1999). Initially concerned only with language, discourse analysis has expanded to include visual culture; as such, discourse analysis is intertextual, interested in how different types of texts are woven together to produce a particular discourse (Rose 2001).

This study applies discourse analysis to illuminate the strategies used by the STFU and the FSA in their efforts at regional reform. Specifically, the study shows how both organizations deliberately chose to emphasize poverty over race in discussions of

reform. Each organization thus constructed its own particular discourse about southern poverty.

The STFU, concerned with engendering unity among its racially integrated membership, emphasized members' common status as poor agricultural laborers and minimized concerns of racial discrimination and inequality. This led to the creation of a particular discourse about poverty and rights: the lack of political and economic rights among poor southerners was reframed as a result of poverty, not of racism. This reframing of the terms of disempowerment allowed the STFU to then draw upon connections between labor and rights contained within traditional narratives of citizenship in the United States. Thus, the union's leaders could quell racial discontent by claiming that the union was fighting for the common rights that should accrue to all union members based on their status as working people.

The FSA created a discourse that also elevated poverty over race. In particular, FSA photographs portrayed southern poverty as a predominantly white phenomenon. FSA images depict poor white southerners as destitute and in need of help, while depicting black southerners as farm workers (and therefore, presumably, not impoverished and not in need of aid). These portraits of poor whites are the visual component of an intertextual discourse of southern poverty crafted by the FSA. Written materials produced by the agency habitually referred to the South as problematic and in need of rehabilitation, a reflection of the FSA's belief that the region existed in a state of perpetual coloniality. Together, the textual and visual materials reveal the cultural reformation project that underpinned New Deal rural programming in the South. For

example, materials described residents of FSA farming communities as “colonists” and “settlers” and FSA images depicted these residents in ways that conformed to expected, accepted white middle-class values. The materials, then, demonstrate the transformation of program participants from culturally backward southerners into proper Americans.

Discourse analysis is a fluid, interpretive process that entails the close reading of texts. Given that analysis is data driven, there is no standardized methodology in discourse analysis (Tonkiss 1999). The present work does employ content analysis, a more formalized and quantitative method, in conjunction with discourse analysis. Content analysis codes textual material, looking for commonalities and correlations within a text or collection of texts. Content analysis within discourse analysis is not to be confused with semiotics, a sub-branch of discourse analysis. Semiotics is “...a tool for analyzing the signs of a particular culture and how meaning is produced within a particular cultural context” (Sturken and Cartwright 2000, 366). That is, semiotics assigns meaning to particular objects based on commonly understood meanings within a given culture.

By way of further explanation, content analysis was performed on nearly 170 images taken by FSA workers in Arkansas during 1935. Images and caption material were coded for basic content including: gender, race, age, whether subjects were portrayed indoors or outdoors, whether subjects were engaged in farm work, household work, or no work at all. For instance, an image of a woman washing dishes at the kitchen sink would be coded for gender, race, age, indoors, and household work. No additional meaning was assigned to these codes. A semiotic analysis of the same image would have

gone a bit further explaining how, for instance, the indoor plumbing that made washing dishes at the kitchen sink possible was a 'sign' of modernity or how the placement of the woman in the kitchen was a sign of the feminization of the domestic sphere. The content analysis performed here revealed very strong correlations between whiteness and poverty and blackness and labor; these correlations provide the basis for the discourse analysis of FSA materials.

The use of images in geographic work deserves some elucidation as well, since this is a fairly new arena of analysis for geographers. Prior to the theoretical turn in the social sciences in the 1980s, geographers generally used photographs of landscapes or other scenes as illustrative or supporting material. More recently, images have become a site for investigation as "...cultural documents offering evidence of historically, culturally, and socially specific ways of seeing the world" (Rose 2000, 556). Rose (2000) contends that photographs (re)produce the "imagined geographies" in which they were originally created. In contrast to art historians who examine cultural context in order to better understand a particular image, geographers use images to better understand cultural context (Schwartz 2003).

The use of photographs and other visual works to shed light on specific historical-cultural contexts implicates these images in the construction of place and identity. As Cameron (2003) has stated, stories of place and identity are most often formulated through systems of difference. This study argues that the images produced by the FSA created a system of difference by depicting poor southerners, and especially poor white southerners, in ways that violated accepted middle-class, white cultural norms. Through

publication in mass media, these images came to dominate the public conception of both southerners and the South; thus, the FSA's visual imagery provided a means through which the viewing public could map the border between the seemingly 'deviant' region and the rest of the nation.

Structure of Study

This study has four major chapters. The second chapter provides an overview of the pertinent literature, situating the present study at the nexus of work on southern historiography and regional geography. The chapter argues that prior to the 1980s, most studies of the South operated on an essentialist conception of the region as a stage on which social relations and historical events were enacted. Since the 1980s, this essentialist view has been increasingly supplanted by a constructivist view in which regions are treated as social constructs. Chapter Two argues that this theoretical shift created a dichotomy within southern historiography that has inhibited scholars from fully understanding the ways in which discourses about material conditions within the South and conceptualizations of the South as a regional entity have been mutually constituted.

Chapter Three provides the historical context, describing the settlement in the study area, the Arkansas Delta. This chapter details the establishment of a slavery regime in the Delta during the decades preceding the Civil War and the increasing discrimination endured by black Arkansans after the Reconstruction era. The chapter also discusses the entrenchment of racial segregation and the oppressive tenancy system in the Delta, and how the tenancy system grew in the years leading up to the Great Depression. The

chapter lays the groundwork for explaining the emergence of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in the Delta in the early 1930s.

Chapter Four reviews the origins and founding of the STFU and explicates the STFU's understanding of the South as a regional entity. The chapter asserts that 'southernness' was a dominant theme within the union and helped to maintain the union's strong regional connection. The chapter also analyzes the union's treatment of poverty, particularly how the union elevated poverty over race and therefore privileged the goals of the union's white leadership. This particular treatment of poverty was one component of a larger strategy in which the union deployed the concept of citizenship to recruit and retain members. The use of national narratives of citizenship to resist regional disempowerment provides a window through which to examine how the STFU viewed the South as a region and the region-nation relationship.

The fifth chapter reviews the origins and founding of the FSA and explains how, like the STFU, the FSA privileged whiteness in its relations with the South and southerners. This privileging of whiteness also reveals something of how the FSA understood the South as a regional entity. The FSA certainly viewed the South in essentialist terms, as a problematic region in need of rehabilitation. However, in attempting to illustrate the need for regional rehabilitation, the FSA engaged in the social construction of the region. Chapter Five employs textual and visual materials produced by the agency to illustrate how the FSA constructed a particular discourse of southern poverty and 'redemption' as part of a larger nation-building strategy.

The concluding chapter summarizes the main points from the analysis of STFU and FSA activities in the Delta and provides some assessment of the long-term impacts of the two organizations. The chapter also outlines avenues for future work, noting the need for analyses that examine more critically the intersections of race and gender within both STFU and FSA operations in the South. The chapter also argues the importance of studies that treat region critically, arguing that region needs to be restored as a framework for analysis in studies of southern difference.

CHAPTER II

TELLING ABOUT THE SOUTH

In *A Sphinx on the American Land*, Peter Kolchin (2003) proffers his thoughts on differing conceptualizations of the U.S. South. On the one hand, the South is a regional entity that has been largely defined in contrast to 'America;' southern characteristics draw their significance from "...the implied understanding that these characteristics somehow differentiate the South from the rest of the country" (Kolchin 2003, 4). On the other hand, Kolchin contends that "...there has never been one South or one archetypal southerner: internal variations – whether geographic, class, religious, racial – complicate the picture and ultimately raise the question of whether one can properly speak of 'the' South at all" (Kolchin 2003, 4). This idea that the South has been (or is or can be) so internally diverse while simultaneously so different from the country at large makes the South a puzzle, an enigma, a sphinx to use Kolchin's phrase.

Kolchin's conceptualizations hint at the evolution of scholarly thinking on the South in the twentieth century. In the early decades of the century, and indeed until the Civil Rights movement of mid-century, the preponderance of scholarship on the South was concerned, on a basic level, with elucidating 'southern difference' – the historical experiences and cultural features that marked the region as somehow apart from, yet a

part of, the American nation. By the end of the century, however, scholars were increasingly explaining the South through the language of social constructivism, contending that the South was not fundamentally different from the rest of the country, but had only been created, and thus, imagined to be so.

The changing view of the South paralleled, more or less, a changing view of the concept of region, particularly within the subfield of regional geography, which embraced the notion of regions as social constructs. Inexplicably, however, the 'new' scholarship on the South failed to connect with the 'new' theoretical literature on region (the converse also being true). Thus, while explaining southern difference was still a concern of scholars near the end of the twentieth century, other frameworks increasingly supplanted region as the medium for examinations of the regional difference of the South.

This chapter begins with a summary of the major eras of southern history writing in the twentieth century, based on the belief that in order to comprehend contemporary conceptualizations and implications of the South as a regional entity it is necessary to examine how prior generations of scholars have understood and written about the South. This summary is not meant to be all-inclusive (were such a feat even possible, given the voluminous literature on the South), but to illustrate the major themes that have surfaced in the evolution of southern history as an academic field over the last 100 years. The chapter then moves on to the concept of region, discussing first how southern scholars of the early-to-mid-century critically engaged (or, largely, did not engage) with the idea of region. This is followed by a discussion of the 'new' constructivist regional geography that coalesced in the 1980s, coincident with – but generally separate from – a 'new'

literature that treated the South as a social construct. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the need for critical engagement of the concept of region in regard to contemporary understandings of the U.S. South.

A Brief Sketch of Southern Historiography

Southern history, as a written enterprise, is very much a product of the twentieth century. While there is debate about the origins and evolution of the South as a distinct entity, the scholarly consensus is that an identifiable, cohesive southern identity did not solidify until the decades immediately preceding the Civil War. Prior to this time, residents of the South were more likely to identify with their home states than with their region – more likely to identify as Georgians or Virginians than as southerners (Ayers 1996; Cobb 2005).

One result of this late-forming regional identity is that little southern history was produced prior to the Civil War. In fact, no history of the South as a region was published before the war; the earliest written histories focused on individual states and leaders. Coulter (1964) has argued that the dearth of early works on southern history is attributable to the timing and geography of Anglo settlement in the region. Much of what would come to be known as the South was not settled by Anglo-Americans until after 1800. Thus, in contrast to New England, with roots extending back to the colonial era, there was much less time for a coherent regional narrative to develop in the South. Moreover, the predominance of agrarian-based small communities in the southern states

inspired residents to identify most closely with their local surroundings, thereby inhibiting the growth of a sense of unity and shared history at the regional scale.

The first works on southern history, that is works which identified the South as a cohesive region with a singular historical experience, were produced during the postbellum period. Particularly influential were the writings of Edward Pollard, a journalist and secessionist whose treatise *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* appeared just two years after the end of the Civil War. In this work, Pollard provided a clear definition of the South, mapping the borders of the region to those of the defunct Confederacy; this association has been the enduring conception of the South in both academic and popular discourse. Just as significant, Pollard's work introduced the idea of the Lost Cause, the southern interpretation of the reasons behind the war and the South's defeat.

Pollard's explanation of the Civil War propelled the evolution of a series of myths about the South's role in the conflict. This project in myth construction idealized the chivalry of Confederate soldiers and elevated General Robert E. Lee to near god-like status. But beyond mere romanticizing of a war that ended badly, the Lost Cause served as a foundation for the rebuilding of post-war southern identity and society, providing a heroic past on which to draw amidst the humiliating experience of Reconstruction (Osterweis 1973). A task primarily undertaken by journalists, autobiographers (generally war veterans) and amateur authors, explicating the Lost Cause dominated writing about the South during the latter decades of the 1800s. After the turn of the century, when

southern history began to emerge as an academic subfield, attention shifted slightly, from the Lost Cause to the antebellum experience.

The South: Old and New

In the early twentieth century, the romanticizing of the Civil War that was part and parcel of the Lost Cause canon was displaced onto the antebellum period, giving rise to the plantation myth, a sanguine view of pre-war life that would thenceforth be known as the Old South. Born amidst the drastic economic and social change of the early twentieth century, the Old South canon revered the supposed gentility and stability of antebellum southern society. Largely through popular culture, such as Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* and its later motion picture adaptation, this rural idyll became the dominant conception of the antebellum South among the general public. Academics, too, played a part in propagating this idealized version of the southern past, and finding facts to validate the Old South canon was the primary concern of early twentieth century southern historians.

One of the first historians dedicated exclusively to the study of the South was Ulrich Phillips, whose central interest was the antebellum period. Phillips' best-known work on this era is *American Negro Slavery*, published in 1918. The influence of the Old South tropes is evident here, as Phillips describes slavery as a civilizing institution characterized by benevolent masters and (generally) obsequious slaves. In Phillips' history, the plantation was "...a school constantly training and controlling pupils who were in a backward state of civilization" that "...did at least as much as any system

possible in the period could have done toward adapting the bulk of [slaves] to life in a civilized community” (Phillips 1918, 342-343).

Phillips argues that the closeness in which slaves and owners lived and worked enabled harmonious race relations that in turn led to social stability in the pre-war South. Drawing a contrast between the plantation system and the increasing industrialization that characterized the time in which he was writing, Phillips stated: “There was clearly no general prevalence of severity and strain in the [plantation] regime. There was, furthermore, little of that curse of impersonality and indifference which too commonly prevails in the factories of the present-day world, where power driven machinery sets the pace, where the employers have no relations with the employed outside of work hours...” (Phillips 1918, 307). This idealization of antebellum economic and social relations in contrast to industrialization reflects a growing concern of southern scholars in the early decades of the twentieth century, a series of changes that were collectively known as the New South Creed.

The New South movement took root in the 1910s and 1920s and called for the northernization (i.e. industrialization) of the southern economy, but with reverence for the traditions of the Old South. Many observers, including Phillips, were worried that industrialization would have deleterious effects on the South, culminating in the destruction of the carefully crafted rural idyll. Critics of the New South movement found their strongest voice in the Twelve Agrarians, a group of academics at Vanderbilt University who decried the loss of southern culture to industrialization and increasing homogenization with the rest of the country.

The Twelve Agrarians included some of the South's most highly regarded litterateurs, such as John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, who would later win the Pulitzer Prize for his semi-fictitious account of southern politics, *All the King's Men*. In *I'll Take My Stand* (1930) the Agrarians assailed the New South movement, labeling it a threat to southern distinctiveness: "The younger southerners, who are being converted frequently to the industrial gospel, must come back to the support of the southern tradition. They must be persuaded to look very critically at the advantages of becoming a 'new South,' which will only be an undistinguished replica of the usual industrial community" (Ransom 1930, x-xi). The Agrarians iterated the ills of industrialization, including overproduction and unemployment, which they felt would only exacerbate the economic inequality already problematic in the South. Throughout their writings the Agrarians emphasized the loss of some southern 'essence' to the industrial invasion, which pitted "...a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way..." (Ransom 1930, ix).

The sectionalism of the Agrarians reflects the cumulative effects of the Lost Cause and Old South canons, as the idealized image of antebellum agrarianism had become not only the cornerstone of southern history, but of southern identity as well. The Old South canon underpinned work on the region until the mid-twentieth century, though some were not as acquiescent as Ulrich Phillips in accepting or propagating this idealistic version of the past. Certainly works such as *The Mind of the South* by W.J. Cash (1941) pointed to the inconsistencies in accepted versions of southern history and grappled with reconciling the past – factual and fictitious – with contemporary realities.

But the real deconstruction of the Lost Cause and the Old South would occur only when a new generation of historians who insisted on a more objective, critical and rigorous study of southern history emerged.

Southern Historiography, 1950s-1970s

By mid-century, historians began to openly question accepted scholarly accounts of southern history. Prominent among these historians was C. Vann Woodward, whose *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955) disrupted the idea of white supremacy as the central theme in southern history, a proposition made by Ulrich Phillips in the late-1920s (see Phillips 1928). Contrary to accounts that viewed the Jim Crow system as merely a continuation of traditional southern racism, Woodward illustrated that a myriad of political and economic factors contributed to the institution of Jim Crow laws; Woodward thus argued against the reductionist thinking exhibited by Phillips and other early southern historians.

Woodward and others paved the way for more critical study of the southern past, as well as for more forthright discussions of the pressing social issues of the Civil Rights era South. During the 1950s-1970s, works on the South centered around three themes: (1) the deconstruction of the myths that long dominated academic and common perceptions of southern history; (2) southern social issues, particularly (and unsurprisingly) race relations; and (3) the loss of southern identity due to the increasing influence of mainstream American culture.

In a highly influential 1964 essay, historian George Tindall proposed that mythology should serve as a “new frontier” in the study of southern history. While historians of this generation fully recognized the illogic of early twentieth century accounts, Tindall was the first to propose that much of southern history was, in fact, myth and therefore that the South was “...essentially a problem of intellectual history” (Tindall 1964, 1). Tindall noted that many of the myths of the South, particularly the pre-Civil War South, had been contradictory, with meanings that changed over time. For example, in the pre-war years, northern visitors often chided white southerners for an over-reliance on slave labor, which they claimed inculcated indolence among whites; later, notions of this relaxed yet orderly life were reincarnated in the plantation myth of the Old South. Tindall’s work opened up a new avenue for analysis, and soon works deconstructing the myths of the Lost Cause and the New South appeared (see e.g. Gaston 1970; Osterweis 1973).

Race relations were another common theme in writings on the South during the 1950s and 1960s, often eloquently and passionately discussed by southerners and non-southerners alike. Former Congressman Frank E. Smith, losing re-election largely because of his ‘liberal’ attitudes towards Civil Rights, wrote of racial equality and urged southerners to move beyond the insular and defensive thinking of Jim Crow, to “look away from Dixie and forward to America” (Smith 1964, 16). Howard Zinn, a northern, white historian teaching at Spelman, an all-black women’s college, wrote poignantly of the insights he gleaned while living in Atlanta during the early years of the Civil Rights movement. Zinn’s characterization of the South contains typical references to the South

as the "...most terrible place in America" (Zinn 1964, 5) and as "...a freak, an inexplicable variant from the national norm...a stranger to the nation" (Zinn 1964, 219). But Zinn, like Smith, concluded that racism was not an exclusively southern trait, but an American one, of which the southern variant represented the extreme, a theme that would see fuller elucidation in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

Zinn wrote that the "southern mystique" of white racism was eroding under the glare of the national spotlight brought to the South by media coverage of the Civil Rights movement. While many within and without the region heralded this, others were concerned about how the changes to southern society circa the 1950s and 1960s would impact southern identity. Harry Ashmore penned an *Epitaph for Dixie* in 1958, writing that post-World War II change in the South instigated an "emotional crisis" within the region. Ashmore wrote about the institutions that had structured and given identity to post-Civil War southern society – Jim Crow, the sharecropping system, one-party politics – lamenting the loss of the unique character that these institutions provided the South in the "twilight period" between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights era. Ashmore was no proponent of segregation; his concern was that the loss of traditional institutions combined with the increasing mobilization and urbanization of the population would lead to the breakdown of community within the South and a loss of the "...qualities that made the South distinctive..." (Ashmore 1958, 13). John Egerton later expressed similar (if bolder) sentiments, writing that the increasing alignment of southern culture with national culture led to "...an amalgamation of regions that spreads and perpetuates the banal and

the venal while it melts the great and valuable diversity of America into a homogenized purée" (Egerton 1974, xx).

Southern Historiography, 1980s – Present

The themes that predominated southern history in the 1950s and 1960s found fuller elucidation in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Interest in the "Americanization" of the South intensified, but some scholars began to argue that it was the South's influence on the rest of the country that was expanding, not the other way around. A prominent contention among proponents of this argument, first expressed by Smith and Zinn, was that 'southern distinctiveness' was as much fiction as reality, that the South was not fundamentally different from America at all. After the cultural-theoretical turn of the 1980s, scholarship on the South also included more explicit statements and examinations of the South as a social construct.

When John Egerton published *The Americanization of the South: The Southernization of America* in 1974, it was the former rather than the latter notion that garnered the greatest attention. To many, the "Americanization" of the South entailed the supplanting of distinctly southern cultural elements with those more northern in origin. Richard Current thus posited *The Northernization of the South* (1983), claiming that resistance to "Northernization" had been a continuous feature of southern history. By the mid-twentieth century, with increasing (sub)urbanization and industrialization, and with the spread of popular culture via mass media, Current proclaimed that the South had begun to resemble the North more closely than at any prior point in history. This

seemingly increasing homogenization of southern and American culture led Current to propose that the region would transition from the New South to the No South, a theme echoed later in Cobb's (2005) work on southern identity.

Yet Egerton's 1974 critique was no simple matter of the South being "Americanized," though he did contend that the region was becoming "...indistinguishable from the North, East and West" (Egerton 1974, xix). Egerton also asserted "...the North (that is to say, all of the non-Southern states) has lately shown itself to be more and more like the South in the political, racial, social and religious inclinations of its collective majority" (Egerton 1974, xix). He concluded that in a reciprocal trade, the South and the nation were not "...exchanging strengths as much as they are exchanging sins..." (Egerton 1974, xx), that both were "...exporting vices without importing virtues..." (Egerton 1974, 19). Peter Applebome (1996) generally concurred with Egerton, noting the remarkable degree to which, near the dawn of the twenty-first century, the remainder of the country resembled the South. Applebome attributed this apparent "Southernization" of America to migration (both out-migration from the South in the mid-twentieth century and migration to the region in the latter twentieth century), economic development, and the success of the Republican Party in national elections after 1970.

The debate about the nature of the South-nation relationship (i.e. "Americanization" versus "Southernization") underscored what would become a growing concern for and awareness of the processes through which regional and national identity are created and maintained. The cultural-theoretical turn in the social sciences in the

1980s had a profound impact on the way in which observers wrote about the South and its relationship with the rest of the nation. Specifically, in the last two decades scholars have increasingly treated the South as a social construct, some going so far as to argue that the South has been an ideological referent more than a real entity. In his study of changing perceptions of the South during the 1920s-1940s, historian Michael O'Brien has explained this shift in the conceptualization of the South, stating that observers have had to make a choice "...between seeing the South itself as an idea, used to organize and comprehend disparate facts of social reality, or viewing the South as a solid and integrated social reality about which there have been disparate ideas" (O'Brien 1979, xiii). Scholars of the early and mid-twentieth century fell squarely in the latter camp, while recent scholars have increasingly joined the former. A representative of this scholarship, O'Brien considers the South a "matter of social perception," a view shared by literary analyst Richard Gray, who writes that the South is "...primarily a concept, a matter of knowing more than of being..." that has been used to frame and articulate southerners' experiences (Gray 1986, xii). Gray contends that those who have written about the region have "...engaged not so much in writing about the South as in writing the South..." (Gray 1986, xii) essentially creating the South through the act of describing it.

Summary

Scholars in the early decades of the twentieth century were expected to uphold the carefully crafted mythologies of the antebellum and post-bellum periods; in doing so

these scholars, as historian Charles Reagan Wilson has noted, were responsible for inventing the “southern tradition” later implicated in the defense of segregation during the Civil Rights era (Wilson 1993). By mid-century, amidst the social upheaval of the desegregation era, scholars began to reject these myths and focused on providing a more critical and objective view of the South. But by the latter decades of the century, after desegregation and increasing cultural and economic integration with the rest of the country, scholars began to express concern about the status of southern identity, and what increasing homogenization – whether this resulted from external influence on the South or growing southern influence on the rest of the country – meant for the future of the region. This recognition of the instability of what had once seemed a very stable regional identity led some to question whether the South had ever really existed, or if the region was merely a figment of the nation’s collective imagination.

This changing conceptualization of the South in the last two decades has paralleled a broader shift in thinking about the concept of region. Through mid-century, historians and others writing about the South (save the regionalists of the 1930s, discussed in the following section), did not directly engage with literature on or theories of region. While there was questioning of how the South came to be and what the South represented, and debate about the ‘true’ character of the South, through the 1970s scholars did not seem to doubt that the focus of their attention was, in fact, a “real” entity. But in the 1980s, the cultural turn in the social sciences brought many accepted concepts, such as race and gender and region, under scrutiny. This reconceptualization of the region is reflected in the changing conception of the South so well framed by O’Brien.

But in order to understand the significance of this paradigmatic shift, we must first understand how the perception of the South as a “real” entity (and a problematic one at that) came to tacitly dominate studies of the region.

The South as a Region: Changing Paradigms

In 1945, historian Charles Sydnor, reflecting on the early decades of southern historiography, noted the difficulty in defining the South: “The historian of the South, unlike historians of the United States, France or other countries, began without knowing the boundaries of the region he [*sic*] was studying. To determine them, he was compelled to decide what constituted the South, to give thought to its distinctive characteristics and to discover the geographical incidence of these characteristics” (Sydnor 1945, 459). Sydnor went on to note that identifying these distinctive characteristics was problematic, given the physical and cultural diversity within the South; he concluded that each historian had to find a balance, “....to work out as best he could a way of writing about the South that would permit him to treat it as a coherent whole without denying the presence of its many diversities” (Sydnor 1945, 461).

Sydnor was one of the few practitioners of early-to-mid-century southern historiography to tackle the problem of defining the South; most others just accepted the definition of the region provided by Pollard in 1867 – the South was simply the states of the former Confederacy. Sydnor was less willing to embrace this definition, largely because of the heterogeneity to be found in southern society defined on Pollard’s terms. But, Sydnor’s logic illustrates a problem of regional definition pointed out by Agnew

many years later. Specifically, Agnew would charge that Sydnor is guilty of circular reasoning, that to claim that there is 'a South' waiting to be defined, by whatever characteristics, presupposes the existence of the region (Agnew 1999). Thus, while Sydnor was more attuned to the problems of regional definition of the South, and while he called on scholars to produce studies that elucidated the "...forces that differentiate men into variant civilizations [regions] and of how these forces operate" (Sydnor 1945, 468), he didn't question the material existence of regions in the first place.

The first southern studies scholars to devote real attention to the concept of region were the Regionalists, a group of sociologists working at the University of North Carolina in the 1930s. Led by Howard Odum and his student Rupert Vance, the Regionalists were the intellectual adversaries of the Nashville-based Agrarians. Whereas the Agrarians resisted industrialization and insisted on agrarianism as the fundamental way of southern life, the Regionalists supported industrialization as a means of achieving balance – balance between agrarianism and industrialism (i.e. history and modernity) in the South, and balance between the South and the rest of the nation. Thus, the Regionalists were proponents of regionalism, the idea of regional planning as national policy, which found popularity during the New Deal.

The Regionalists

The UNC sociologists felt that regionalism could ameliorate the divide that separated the South from the rest of the country, and therefore that the region could serve as "...a medium for portraying the new pluralism of the American nation and for

interpreting its growth through the orderly processes of the people and their institutions within the living geography of a natural and cultural heritage" (Odum 1938, v-vi). Thus, the Regionalists took a much more critical approach to region than had earlier scholars of the South. Regionalists conceptualized region as "...a *gestalt* in which...various factors find their meaning through their relationships to other factors; a complex of interrelationships" (Odum 1938, 414).

The UNC sociologists understood, or attempted to understand, the region as a set of interrelated physical and cultural processes that were all "...mutually conditioning, at once cause and effect" (Odum 1938, 414). This differed from how others with interest in region, such as geographers, conceived of the concept at that time. Still burdened with the recently rejected theory of environmental determinism that had once briefly dominated the discipline, geographers in the 1920s and 1930s were debating the impact of the environment on human development – one camp arguing for the primacy of the physical environment, the other advocating the importance of the cultural landscape (see e.g. Barrows 1923; Hall 1935; Sauer 1938; Hartshorne 1939). This bifurcation inhibited geographers' ability to conceptualize regions in the same way as sociologists, who were less concerned about assigning priority to the different factors that contributed to regional formation and more focused on the notion of regions as the relationships between those factors.

In early works, the Regionalists often cited geographers and relied on the essentialist notion of region characteristic of American geography at that time, as when Vance defined region as an "environmental type," the adaptation to which is reflected in

the cultural landscape (Vance 1932). Odum, too, often volleyed between defining region in essentialist terms (as having “organic unity” in its physical and cultural landscapes, for instance) and defining region as something more much complex. As the work of the Regionalists progressed, a more nuanced understanding of region coalesced, one that viewed regions as processes and as fundamental to the functioning of society.

The best explication of the Regionalists’ perspective on region came from Vance, in a 1951 essay on the use of region as a tool for social science, which is worth discussing at some length. Vance rejected static definitions of region and reflected the Regionalists’ matured view of regions as the outcome of processes: “Preoccupation with regional structure and the task of defining regional boundaries on the map tends too much to the impression that the region is a fixed and static thing. This misapprehension is to be corrected... . Here the task of research is dynamic; it aims at understanding the direction and redirection of a continual flow of forces” (Vance 1951, 167-168). The region thus is both the outcome of processes (the continual flow of forces), but also acts as a medium for the direction and redirection of those processes. Vance then framed his view of regions in terms of process, product and structure, writing “...society exists both as process and as product. In the ongoing trend of society, the process is one of social change, but the end product is the development of social order. ... Structure is the product of ongoing processes, but structure itself becomes process as it goes over into function” (Vance 1951, 160).

Vance argued that regions are one of the structures created from social processes that, in turn, condition those processes. Therefore, regions are one means of social

organization and should be studied as such: "Regionalism as a research key is not to be understood apart from considerations of process, structure and function. Regional structure is capable of analysis both as spatial pattern and as a facet of social organization" (Vance 1951, 160). Vance speculated that regions could serve as the basis for a theory of human behavior. While Vance never fully explicated this idea, his initial formulations called for a theoretical model based on "...the idea of a structure, the elements of which are themselves similar, if smaller structures. The assumption is that such theory may be approached by the analysis of society's component units, the relations of functioning parts and wholes" (Vance 1951, 169). The structures to which Vance referred in this instance are regions and what he termed 'subregions,' which exhibit traits (processes) slightly different from those of the larger region, but not so different as to constitute a region in and of themselves. If we extract a bit from Vance's focus on geographic entities, particularly in relation to his idea of studying society via its interrelated component units, this theoretical proposal sounds similar to the theory of systems and structures largely responsible for the radical transformation of thinking on region (and of the field of regional geography) in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

When applied to the South, this processes-and-relationships framework produced very different stories of the region from those told by historians. Historians of the early twentieth century had preoccupied themselves with finding evidence that would support the heroic, mythologized version of southern history; sociologists painted a decidedly less noble picture of the region. In his *Human Geography of the South* (1932),

Vance concluded that throughout the nation's history, the South had retained its coloniality – the region's reliance on agriculture and extraction of natural resources, its low wages and living standards, and its need to import many manufactured products marked the South not as a region resistant to and defiant of national norms, but as a destitute, dependent region. In making this argument, Vance anticipated later twentieth century studies that would apply postcolonial interpretations to the South and draw similar conclusions (see e.g. Greeson 1999; Winders 2005).

Where Vance saw enduring coloniality, Odum saw "deficiency areas," arguing that while the South was rich in physical and human resources, there was a large degree of waste in regard to those resources; this "...chasm between abundance possibilities and deficiency actualities..." was the root of what Odum (and others) considered "southern problems" (Odum 1936, 15). Odum argued that sectionalism, which he believed found its contemporary form in the reactionary defensiveness of the Agrarians, was primarily responsible for these problems, claiming that economic and cultural sectionalism led to southern "isolation...cultural inbreeding, civic immaturity and social inadequacy" (Odum 1936, 13). He also referred to the South as having a peculiar cultural pathology. For Odum, regionally-based planning was the means by which these problems would be resolved, the avenue by which the South could reintegrate into the rest of the nation. Thus, regionalism provided for the reconstruction of the South's cotton-based economy, and the "rehabilitation" of the southern people via "regional cultural adjustment" (Odum 1936, 189).

While the UNC sociologists had much to offer in terms of regional theory and a new vision for southern historiography, it is Odum's characterization of the problem South that persisted (Tindall 1964; Cobb 2005). Long after the regionalism movement waned in the 1940s, scholars (and much of the general public) continued to perceive the South only in terms social problems that often placed the region in opposition to supposedly universal American values of prosperity and equality. The seeming dichotomy between the South and America only grew in the post-World War II era, as national attention came to bear on the region's racial practices. By 1960 southern scholars were so sensitive to this dichotomy that a group of historians published a volume titled *The Southerner as American*. Led by John Hope Franklin, George Tindall and Dewey Grantham, these scholars decried the "serious distortion" in southern historical writing that they felt had exaggerated the South's "differentness" and therefore made it difficult for the region to "understand both its Southernism and its Americanism..." (Sellers 1960, v-vi). The authors agreed that "...the most important fact about the Southerner is that he [*sic*] has been throughout his history also an American" (Sellers 1960, vi).

In the 1950s and 1960s, then, scholarship came to focus more on the evolution of southern problems, on the implications of southern difference, on how to reconcile the South with the nation, and less on understanding or theorizing the South as a regional entity. The lack of criticality towards the concept of region during this time may be partially attributable to trends in the field of regional geography, which was migrating towards quantitative-based spatial science. As a result, in the 1950s and 1960s,

geographers did not provide theoretical conceptualizations of region viable to social historians. Despite the Regionalists' attempt to supply a complex framework for regional analysis, scholars in the mid-twentieth century continued to hold an essentialist, static view of region – positing the South as the locus of social ills (and, in fact, largely defining the region by these social problems) while failing to see the South itself as the product of many interrelated processes that worked to produce southern difference.

The essentialist view of region was challenged in the 1980s, when the cultural turn in the social sciences brought many long-accepted concepts under interrogation. For scholarship on the South, this meant a significant change in the characterization of region in discussions of southern difference. The groundwork for this re-envisioning of the South had been paved in the 1960s and 1970s, when Tindall and others exposed the myths and fictions that had characterized much of southern historiography. But the works of the 1980s and later looked more explicitly at how the South came to be, often examining the evolution of the South as a product of the South-nation relationship. This new work on the South coincided with new conceptualizations of region within the field of regional geography; however, while these trends were highly related, the two literatures, inexplicably, rarely addressed each other.

'New' Regional Geography

The 'new' regional geography that emerged in the late-1980s rejected the static view of regions that had long dominated geographic thought on the topic. Pudup (1988) attributed this uncriticality to an empiricist philosophy and methodology and a "pervasive

naturalism" within traditional regional geography, in which regions were defined by physiographic features. Hence, in much early regional geography, identifying regions meant cataloging physical traits, with little effort made to link regional characteristics and patterns to wider social processes (Hudson 1990, 67). Murphy (1991) charged that geographers had too long considered regions as mere "backdrops" for social interaction and called for a more thorough consideration of the processes through which regions evolve and the implications of inhabitants' understandings of the region.

The 'new' regional geography championed by Murphy and others was heavily influenced by the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens. Structuration theory relies on the concepts of reflexivity and contextuality, positioning humans as "purposive agents" who make choices about their actions based on changing social and physical circumstances. Inserting reflexivity and contextuality into his theory of social ordering, Giddens sought to break down the dichotomy between agent and institution (structure) that characterized prevailing social theories, such as functionalism and structuralism. These latter theories posit that human activity is constrained by broad structural forces and that humans have little power to resist or alter these forces. Giddens argued instead for human agency, the capability to act in response to structural imperatives; therefore, Giddens viewed power not as a force compelling human decision-making, but rather as something to be contested and struggled over in a "dialectic of control" through which structural properties are transformed and reproduced (Giddens 1984).

The 'structures' of structuration theory are overarching principles that bind together particular social systems. These systems, in turn, are the sets of rules and

relationships through which social practices are reproduced. Social systems exhibit structural properties and it is through the performance of these rules and relationships that the structure's existence and character is revealed. Thus, through social practices, humans construct and propagate the structures that guide (and sometimes constrain) their behavior; the structure only exists *a priori* as "...memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents" (Giddens 1984, 17). Structures that prove particularly durable, those with the greatest "time-space extension," are labeled institutions.

Giddens was concerned with how particular structures become institutionalized and drew inspiration in this pursuit from the time-geography of Thorsten Hagerstrand (though Giddens did take issue with Hagerstrand, particularly with what he perceived as the latter's simplistic conception of agency and power). The interest in human action in time and space led Giddens to theorize that structuration results not from the formalized rules and laws that govern society, but rather in the day-to-day practices of individuals, behavior that is largely influenced by tacit, informal rules. Giddens termed this routinization of everyday life the *durée* and argued that through the *durée*, structure is reproduced. Thus, while structure exerts influence on human activity, structure, conversely, does not exist outside of this activity. As Giddens explained "...the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize" (Giddens 1984, 25). Through the *longue durée*, the repetition of social practices over an extended period of time, structures become institutionalized.

Giddens proffered that social practices are enacted in particular locales, which could range in scale from individual rooms in a house to an entire nation-state. Giddens

argued that locale is crucial to structuration, for locale is one of the factors in the contextuality of human behavior. Thus, different locales may inspire different social practices and therefore lead to spatial differentiation of systems and structures. This idea of space being implicated in the reproduction and, over the long term, institutionalization of structure, provided the impetus for a new way of conceptualizing the region within geography. Instead of 'backdrops' for social interaction regions became "...constantly changing and socially significant historical and geographical formations, whose inhabitants interpret and respond to events and processes in particular ways as a consequence of the unique social and physical contexts in which they are situated" (Murphy 1991, 25).

Recognizing regions as a medium for social interaction, proponents of the 'new' regional geography also understood regions as recursive structures: the "interpretations and responses" to events and processes help to constitute and maintain the region (Murphy 1991), so that regions are both a medium and an outcome of social processes (Gilbert 1988). This in turn led to the formulation of regions *as* processes; put succinctly by Paasi, "Regions are...historically contingent social processes emerging as a constellation of institutionalized practices, power relations and discourses" (Paasi 2002, 40). Thus the task of 'new' regional geography was to uncover the historical-geographical processes that produce regions and to understand, conversely, how regions themselves are implicated in these processes.

This conceptualization of regions as processes led some to argue that regions are entirely social constructs that exist only in relation to specific criteria. Those holding to

this point of view argued for the unbounding of regions, claiming that demarcating regions led to a type of false geography in which the social relations that characterized the region became spatially fixed (Allen et al 1998). Critics of this view argued that while regions may be social constructs, to treat them entirely as such neglects the very real impact that region and regional identity can have on the daily lives of inhabitants. Paasi (2002) in particular has argued that regions are social facts that can inspire action (reproductive, resistant, or transformative) and that the social practices through which the region is reproduced reinforce hegemonic narratives about the region that are ultimately implicated in struggles over space and representation. Thus, while a social construct, the region has very real, if contested, meaning for inhabitants. These meanings get woven into the social practices that, according to structuration theory, reflect the larger structural properties of the region. Through this relationship between contestation, incorporation, system and structure regions become constitutive elements of society (Murphy, 1991).

The South: A Social Construct?

The emergence of 'new' regional geography coincided with a 'new' scholarship on the South, one that more explicitly considered the social constructedness of the South. The general theme of these works is the region-nation relationship as a catalyst for the formation of the South. Prior discussions of southern difference had been predicated on comparing and contrasting the South to the rest of nation, but in particular to the North (another remnant of the regional definitions proposed by Pollard after the Civil War).

Recent literature seeks to understand the dynamics between the South and the North/nation, to understand how the South was shaped by its status as an entity within the larger national polity. As Carl Degler has noted, neither the South or the North “identifies the nation; both are its creators simply because each has been different. ... American history is the *interaction* of North and South...” (Degler 1987, 18).

Deconstructing the seemingly enduring notion of the South as somehow oppositional to or problematic for America has been a primary objective of recent scholarship on the South. In 1960 southern scholars were insisting on *The Southerner as American*; by the mid-1990s, scholars were questioning *The South as an American Problem*. Contributors to this volume argued that the ‘problem South’ has largely been a social construct. Larry Griffin noted that certainly there were problems in the South, but there were surely conditions in the rest of the country that were also serious and in need of attention; thus “...the objective facts of southern life and culture were necessary conditions of America’s ‘southern problem,’ but they were not sufficient to induce it” (Griffin 1995, 13). Griffin argued that instead, the ‘southern problem’ arose out of a long process in which apparently problematic material conditions came to construct the region in the public psyche: “In no other case...were social problems so intimately related, even equated in the public mind to a particular region for so sustained a period of time that the region itself – rather than the objective conditions – became commonly understood as the ‘real’ problem” (Griffin 1995, 14).

Greeson (1999) argues that the perception of the South as different from and problematic to the North emerged not in the decades preceding the Civil War, as often

postulated, but immediately after the American Revolution. Applying a postcolonial framework to regional relations in the US during late eighteenth century, Greeson illustrates that northern publications often differentiated the South based on slavery, which northerners equated with a residual coloniality. This then served as negative referent against which the North defined its regional identity. Grant (2000) makes a similar argument in her analysis of northern nationalism during the antebellum period, arguing that the North used the South first to define a northern identity, and then a national one. Both Greeson and Grant argue that in the northern imagination, the South supplanted Europe (and particularly England) as a negative referent in the construction of what northerners would increasingly come to see as an American national identity.

Winders (2005) utilized a postcolonial framework to study the post-bellum South, arguing that the Reconstruction-era South was treated as an “imperial holding” and therefore acted at once as both an insider and an outsider within the nation. Winders’ postcolonial theory seeks to upset the colonizer-colonized binary, a task for which the Reconstruction-era US South presents an especially compelling case, and draws heavily on Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. In this regard, Winders’ work has something in common with that of fellow geographer David Jansson, who argues that the US South has been ‘othered’ through a process of “internal orientalism” (2003). Jansson argues that this ‘othering’ of the South has been carried out in the creation of an exalted national identity, which required severing what were perceived to be negative traits from the national body. According to Jansson, “By making the assumption that the South is the exclusive location

of the set of negative characteristics...we erase those characteristics from the national identity..." (Jansson 2003, 313).

Scholars have argued that through processes such as the "internal orientalism" proposed by Jansson, the South has been socially constructed as a repository for undesirable traits that are typically American, not exclusively southern, in character. John Egerton (1995) has stated that the rest of the country needed the South to act as a "dumping place" to alleviate the nation's guilt over racism and other social ills. Griffin and Doyle, in concluding their introduction to *The South as an American Problem*, assert that the South has been "...an American problem because it became the repository for problems that were really 'American' all along and that were only thought to be peculiar to the region and antithetical to mainstream American values" (Griffin and Doyle 1995, 9).

The notion of the South as a repository for American social ills is part of a larger body of literature that seeks to deconstruct the idea of the South by deconstructing commonly accepted notions of American national identity. Work in this vein, such as that of Jansson, argues that "...the construction of the South as an idea has been intimately related to the construction of the American idea over time" (Carlton 1995, 45) and that the South has played a crucial role in the evolution of America's self-image by serving as a stage on which quintessentially American myths are acted out (such as that of good overcoming evil, represented in the abolition of slavery and desegregation) (Ayers 1996). Thus, in contrast to previous studies that tended only to compare the South to the North, more recent works have tackled the dialectic relationship between the South

and the rest of the country, between region and nation. Critical to this project has been the acknowledgement that what were long considered the universal American standards by which the South was judged (and found lacking) were also a set of myths and constructs (Carlton 1995).

Conclusion

The South has undergone a radical reconceptualization in the last two decades. As late as the 1980s, writers of southern history considered the South an oppositional region whose material conditions fundamentally differentiated it from the nation at large. The use of these material conditions to define the region demonstrates that southern scholars, with a few exceptions, tacitly relied on an essentialist notion of region, the idea that, as Agnew states, the South existed somewhere out there, waiting to be defined by characteristics of difference. Since the 1980s, scholars have begun to argue that the South was not (and never had been) inherently different from the nation, but instead was socially constructed as different through various processes of othering. This change in thinking has created a dichotomy within the literature on the South, one that highlights the "...visceral tension between the idea that something is real and the idea that it is constructed," identified in Agnew's (1999) discussion of regions (Table 1).

There is tension, too, within constructivist literature on the South. One contingent holds that the pre-Civil Rights era South was entirely a discursive construction, what O'Brien calls a social perception and what Gray has termed "a way of knowing even

Table 1. Theoretical dichotomy in scholarly literature on the South.

	<u>Traditional</u>	<u>Recent</u>
<u>Idea of South</u>	Oppositional	Othered
<u>Theory of Region</u>	Essentialist	Constructivist

more than being” (O’Brien, 1979; Gray, 1986; xii). Both Gray and O’Brien examine how the southern elite, authors such as William Faulkner and academics such as the North Carolina Regionalists and the Nashville Agrarians, socially constructed the South through their writings. These studies, then, are predicated more on philosophical analyses and less on the material conditions that buttressed narratives of southern difference. Many scholars of the region, therefore, would stop short of Gray’s and O’Brien’s assertions that the South was entirely a social construction.

Instead, others in the constructivist camp examine the interplay between material conditions and socially constructed discourses about the South. For instance, Winders (2005) explores how a discourse of an uncivilized South was constructed around poverty in the postbellum period. Jansson (2003) explains how a discourse of the “othered South” was constructed as part of national identity formation in the United States. Griffin (1995) makes a similar argument, examining how a discourse of a “problematic South” evolved within narratives of America as a nation. The shortcoming of these studies is that they do not allow for reflexivity between perceptions of material conditions and constructed discourses; that is, such studies do not consider how discourses about the South influenced the interpretation of material conditions within the region. Instead,

externally created discourses of difference are accepted *a priori* as the appropriate avenue through which to analyze the South.

This failure to acknowledge the dynamics of discursive construction points to an additional weakness in new constructivist literature on the South: in discussing the South, scholars continue to rely on a 'static' view of region. 'New' work on the South – even that by geographers – generally fails to engage the 'new' work on regional geography, despite similarities in each literature's conceptualization of region. Thus, in the last few decades, work on the South has become uncoupled from the idea of region, as other theories – postcoloniality, internal orientalism – have supplanted region in explicating the regional difference of the South. Therefore, these new constructivist works, while purporting to make claims *about* the South, actually amount to studies on the construction of southern difference, not on the construction of the South as a regional entity.

Applying the principles of 'new' regional geography, this study conceptualizes the South as a set of recursive practices that mediated the interpretation of material conditions associated with southern difference. Specifically, the study disrupts the conflation of 'southern difference' and 'the South' common in constructivist literature by illustrating how different understandings of the South as a regional entity impacted understandings of southern difference (particularly southern rural poverty). The study demonstrates that the construction of southern difference and the construction of the South as a region were reflexive processes, rejecting the tendency within constructivist literature to conceptualize the South as a passive recipient of difference discourses. The

ultimate purpose of the study, then, is to reclaim region as a valid framework for analysis within constructivist studies of the South.

CHAPTER III

ARKANSAS: MICROCOSM OF THE DEPRESSION-ERA SOUTH

This chapter provides historical and geographic context for the analysis that follows. The chapter explains how what the Southern Tenant Farmers Union viewed as systems of oppression and what the Farm Security Administration considered problematic social conditions evolved in Arkansas. The chapter begins with a brief summary of Arkansas' pre-Civil War history. Arkansas was admitted to the union only 25 years prior to the war, but during this time, a strong factionalism developed between the Delta and the uplands, a divide based on geographic differences that would dominate the state's political and cultural development (Figure 1). This discussion is followed by a short history of the Civil War and Reconstruction period in Arkansas, describing the ascension of former Confederates to power after the end of Reconstruction. The section on the post-Reconstruction period in Arkansas details the rise of the agricultural tenancy system in the Delta and the declining status of black Arkansans in the post-Reconstruction period. The final section focuses on the entrenchment of the tenancy system and cotton monoculture in the Delta in the decades preceding the Great Depression.

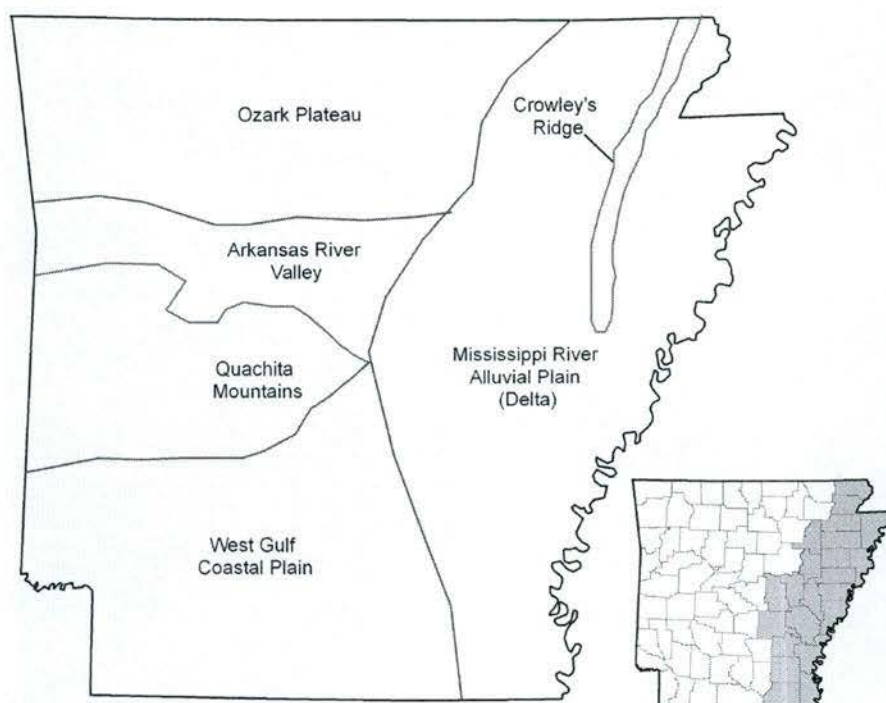


Figure 1. Physiographic regions of Arkansas. Arkansas is a geographically diverse state, with the highlands of the Ozark and Quachita Mountains dominating the northwest and central parts of the state and the Delta, the vast outwash plain of the Mississippi River, covering the eastern third. These geographic differences contributed to political and cultural differences and upland-lowland factionalism has characterized much of the Arkansas' history. The smaller map at right shows the 22 counties that fall mostly or wholly within the Arkansas Delta. (After Hanson and Moneyhon 1989, 2)

Arkansas: Construction to Reconstruction

Constructing Arkansas: Pre-War History

The present-day state of Arkansas was once part of the vast French land claims in North America. The French expanded into the area during the seventeenth century, seeking to grow the fur trade and to establish trading ties with the already resident Quapaw Indians.

French settlement in the region continued throughout the eighteenth century; the French solidified economic ties with the Quapaw and sometimes aided them in armed conflicts against neighboring tribes. The French also introduced slavery, utilizing slaves in land development and hunting activities (Arnold 1993; for more on French influence in Arkansas see also Arnold 1991).

When France sold this portion of its North American territory to the United States in 1803, the combined indigenous and settler population of the Arkansas region numbered less than 1,000 people (Arnold 1993). Congress divided the Louisiana Purchase lands at the 33rd parallel: areas to the south were grouped into the Territory of Orleans and areas to the north, including present-day Arkansas, became the District of Louisiana. A decade later, the Territory of Orleans had been admitted to the union as the state of Louisiana and lands north of the 33rd parallel had become the Missouri Territory. White American settlers migrated to the Arkansas portion of the territory in small numbers, but this population growth was far out-paced by that occurring in Missouri, due to the expansion of the city of St. Louis. When Missouri attained a population large

enough to apply for statehood in 1818, the territorial government requested a boundary that excluded Arkansas from the forthcoming state. A compromise was reached in which Missouri was granted statehood and the Arkansas region was given territorial status (Bolton 1998).

Migration into Arkansas territory was sparse in ensuing decades; the 1830 census enumerated a population of only 30,000 people in the entire territory, 4,500 of whom were slaves (U.S. Census Bureau 1830). The census did not report on the territory's indigenous inhabitants, but native populations had been decimated by this time, due largely to the impact of diseases introduced by Euro-Americans. The few remaining Quapaw lived in settlements in the southeastern portion of the territory, and Cherokee and Choctaws from the lower South were relocated to the western portion of Arkansas territory during the earliest period of Indian removal. Additionally, members of the Caddo and Osage tribes roamed, and sometimes warred, in the area. Despite the small numbers of permanent tribal inhabitants, white migrants to the new territory were generally antagonistic to the Indian population. Calls for removal of the Indians to 'Indian Territory' (present-day Oklahoma) increased, and by the 1830s most indigenous land claims in Arkansas territory had been extinguished (Bolton 1998).

With the removal of the tribes and the opening of their lands to white settlers, migration to Arkansas quickened; by the mid-1830s, the territory had amassed the population required to apply for statehood. The regional divide that would come to characterize Arkansas politics was evident in the statehood debate. Of primary concern was the issue of representation at the state's constitutional convention. Political leaders

from the northern and western upland portions of the state (the Ozark and Ouachita Mountain regions) argued that representation for each county should be based on the size of the voting (i.e. white male) population. In contrast, leaders from the southern and eastern portions of the state, where large-scale agriculture and the practice of slavery were taking root, argued that representation should be apportioned based on total population. Eventually a compromise was reached, but this pre-statehood divide between the upland and lowland regions of the state would echo through Arkansas politics for generations (Gatewood 1993).

After statehood, the pace of migration into Arkansas quickened (Table 2); by 1840 the population had grown to 97,500 and just ten years later, the population had more than doubled, to nearly 210,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau 1850). However, settlement was unevenly distributed, lagging in the eastern part of the state. Lying in the outwash plain of the Mississippi River, this eastern area, known as the Delta, consisted of densely forested swampland prone to frequent flooding. The forbidding physical conditions and the high rate of diseases such as malaria and yellow fever discouraged settlement in the region. Much of the land in the Delta remained in the public domain after the Louisiana Purchase and was therefore the property of the federal government. The government attempted to sell the land, but found few buyers willing to contend with the region's physical obstacles. Unable to generate a profit on these holdings, the federal government donated the unsold swamplands to state governments via the Swamplands Acts of 1849 and 1850. Under these agreements, the states of the lower Mississippi Valley (Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana, along with parts of southeastern Missouri)

Table 2. Population growth in pre-Civil War Arkansas.

	<u>1830</u>	<u>1840</u>	<u>1850</u>	<u>1860</u>
White	25,671	77,174	162,189	324,143
Slave	4,576	19,935	47,100	111,115
Other	141	465	608	192
Total	30,388	97,574	209,897	435,450

could utilize revenue from the sale of swamplands to finance flood control and drainage programs (Otto 1999).

The Swamplands Acts accelerated settlement in Arkansas; by 1860 the population had once again doubled, to nearly half a million people (U.S.Census Bureau 1860). The overwhelming majority (88 percent) of free (white) settlers came from southern states; native Tennesseans comprised one-third of Arkansas' population and settlers from Alabama and Georgia accounted for another 20 percent. The rate of growth of the white population was out-paced by that of the slave population, which increased 136 percent between 1850-1860. On the eve of the Civil War, slaves comprised just over one-quarter of the state's total population.

The geographic distribution of slavery in Arkansas was uneven owing to the state's diverse physical environments (Figure 2). In upland areas, the topography was unsuitable for commercial agriculture and large-scale slavery was rare. In the riverine areas of southern Arkansas, land was relatively flat and well drained, and large-scale slavery was common. However, the practice of slavery was most prominent in the Delta. In 1860, the Delta housed nearly half of Arkansas' slave population; 20 percent of all slaves in the state lived in three Delta counties: Phillips, Chicot and Jefferson. The slave

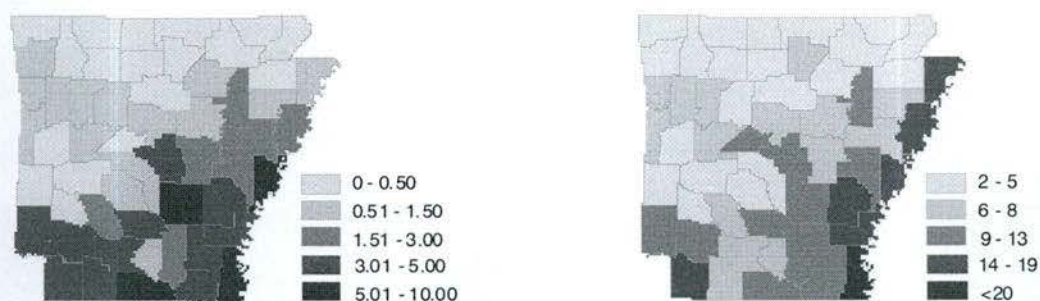


Figure 2. Slavery in antebellum Arkansas. *Left*, Percent slave population, 1860; *right*: Slave-to-owner ratio, 1860. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1860)

population far exceeded that of the white population in the Delta, with slaves comprising as much as 80% of the residents in some counties (U.S. Census Bureau 1860). By the time of the Civil War, Arkansas was clearly delineated into two societies: an upland society of small, family-size subsistence farms and a lowland society dominated by slave labor and plantation-scale production (McNeilly 2000).

Scholars have implicated regional differences in Arkansas' alliance with the Confederacy during the Civil War. These scholars (e.g. McNeilly, 2000; Bolton, 1998; Woods 1987; Dougan 1976) have argued that a powerful 'planter aristocracy' from the lowlands dominated antebellum Arkansas politics and was responsible for guiding the state into the Confederacy, over the objection of Unionists in the uplands. These scholars have noted, however, that Unionist did not mean abolitionist, agreeing that the vast majority of Arkansans supported slavery and viewed abolition as a threat to the sovereignty of southern states. Due to the divide between secessionists and unionists, Arkansas hesitated to join the Confederacy; at an initial secession convention in March

1861, intense debate on the issue preceded a close vote (69 to 65) in which secession was rejected. However, after Union troops were ordered to quell the Confederate rebellion at Fort Sumter a second convention was held, and the delegates voted overwhelmingly (133-to-1) in favor of secession (Roberts 1993).

War and Reconstruction

During the war, Arkansas was generally spared the intense fighting experienced in many Confederate States. In mid-1862, Union forces attempted to capture the state capital, Little Rock, but their efforts were repelled. The Union soldiers retreated to and eventually overtook the city of Helena (Phillips County), an important outpost along the Mississippi River. From this base at Helena, the Union was able to maintain supply lines to forces in Mississippi, who were engaged in the battle for Vicksburg (a much more strategic and valuable target than Little Rock). After the fall of Vicksburg in July 1863, Union forces in the area refocused their attention on Little Rock, eventually capturing the city with little resistance. For the remainder of the war, fighting in Arkansas consisted primarily of guerilla raids by Confederate soldiers on Union troops and supply lines. The war in Arkansas officially ended on May 11, 1865, when General Jeff Thompson surrendered his forces at Jacksonport (Jackson County) (Roberts 1993).

In the immediate post-war years, Arkansas's antebellum elites attempted to reassert political power, but these efforts were thwarted when 'radical' Republicans, who advocated harsh Reconstruction policies, gained control of the U.S. Congress in 1866

(DeBlack 2003). In the early spring of 1867 the Republicans passed an act requiring states of the former Confederacy to draft new constitutions that provided for universal manhood suffrage; the act also obliged those states to disfranchise those who had shown disloyalty to the United States (i.e. served the Confederacy). Arkansas was slow to respond to these commands, but eventually held a constitutional convention in January of 1868. The constitution that emerged granted the franchise to black males and also ensured the right of freedmen to serve on juries and to hold political office. A referendum on the new constitution was held in June, and despite numerous reports of voting irregularities, the constitution was ratified; Arkansas was officially readmitted to the Union on June 22, 1868 (Moneyhon 1994).

The Reconstruction period in Arkansas was marred by violence against both freedmen and former unionists, who now politicked as Republicans. Much of this violence was instigated by the Ku Klux Klan, which emerged as the vehicle through which disfranchised southern Democrats attempted to regain social, economic, and political control. Following the elections of 1868, Republican governor Powell Clayton called out the state militia to suppress skirmishes of violence throughout Arkansas, and declared a state martial law that lasted for months in some counties (Moneyhon 1994). While Powell remained popular with freedmen, such drastic actions alienated members of his Republican base and only inflamed the animosity that Democrats held for the state's government (DeBlack 2003).

When Clayton was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1871, a power vacuum developed in the higher echelons of Arkansas's state government. By this time the Republican Party

had splintered; some Republicans sided with Democrats, particularly on the matter of re-enfranchising those who had supported the Confederacy (Moneyhon 1994). After a highly contested election, conservative Republican Elisha Baxter assumed the governorship. Baxter allied with the Democrats and endorsed a proposed constitutional amendment to repeal the restrictions on the voting rights of ex-Confederates. A referendum was held in March 1873 and the electorate overwhelming passed the amendment, making Arkansas the last state to remove voting limitations on members of the former Confederacy (DeBlack 2003). The removal of franchise restrictions enabled Democrats to re-exert their pre-war political clout. In the elections of 1874, Democrat candidates gained every major state office and voters installed former Confederate Senator Augustus Garland as governor (Moneyhon 1994). With the ascension of the Democrats back into political control, the Reconstruction period in Arkansas came to an end (DeBlack 2003).

The Postbellum Era: Growth and Change

Economic Recovery and the Rise of Tenancy

While Arkansas had been spared intense military fighting, the state's economy had been decimated by the Civil War. Confederate planners had commanded their generals to follow a scorched earth policy, ordering the burning of cotton fields to prevent advancing Union troops from seizing and selling the cotton to finance the Union's war efforts (Roberts 1993). Union troops had also pilfered the land of resources

during their occupation of southern territory. In Arkansas, the currency system had collapsed by early 1862 and the population endured severe food shortages for the remainder of the war (Moneyhon 1994). At the time of surrender, Arkansas' economy – and that of the South in general – lay in ruins.

After the war, southern planters sought to quickly reestablish agricultural production; doing so required them to work with the South's newly-free black labor force. Planters hoped to reconstruct the plantation system, and initially offered collective share contracts to black workers. Under these contracts, workers formed groups and labored on the plantation much as they had under slavery; each worker was paid with a share of the crop at the end of the growing season. Such arrangements were prevalent in the years immediately following the war, but were soon supplanted by other forms of labor organization (Shlomowitz 1979).

By the late-1860s, plantation owners had begun to divide their landholdings and to allot parcels to individual families. The conditions governing these arrangements varied widely; some families received cash wages while others continued to receive their wages as a share of the crop. By 1870, the plantation had ceased to be the primary unit of agricultural production in the South, as land was increasingly subdivided into family-sized farms. This decentralization of plantation agriculture continued throughout the 1870s, and was a defining feature of southern agriculture in the post-bellum period (Royce 1993).

The subdividing of large landholdings and the utilization of crop shares as wages gave rise to the tenancy system that characterized southern agriculture from the

Reconstruction era until World War II. The origins of the tenancy system are highly contested. Some scholarship on the post-war South locates the origins of the tenancy system in the rebellion of former slaves against the collective, group-work system that had been instituted in the years immediately following the war. Though workers signed contracts and were guaranteed wages, this labor arrangement was too reminiscent of their lives in bondage; thus freedpersons rejected this style of work and insisted on conditions that provided them greater control over both the land and their labor (Aiken 1998). Tenancy and sharecropping seemed attractive, curtailing white oversight of agricultural production and, in strong market years, offering the opportunity for higher income than could be earned by working for fixed cash wages.

Alternatively, some scholars argue that the tenancy system emerged at the insistence of landowners who, due to the lack of circulating capital in the post-war South, were often unable to fulfill the cash wage contracts signed with laborers. As a result, some planters offered workers a portion of the crop, which could be sold in the marketplace, the profits intended to replace the cash wages originally contracted. This gave rise to the practice of "paying on shares," a forerunner of sharecropping and the tenancy system. Landowners saw advantages in such arrangements, which freed them from the need to maintain large cash reserves and which also shifted a significant portion of the risk (of poor yields, of weak market conditions) onto the laborers (Ransom and Sutch 2001).

Still other scholars have asserted that both planters and laborers resisted the implementation of the tenancy system. Newly-free laborers hoped to attain

landownership and viewed tenancy as a less favorable alternative. Planters resisted individualized labor agreements, wanting to maintain the more 'efficient' gang-work system and lamenting the loss of absolute control over labor and production. Thus, tenancy emerged as a 'standoff' between planters' monopoly on land and freedpersons' monopoly on labor – each group attempted to negotiate arrangements that most benefited them, but each lacked leverage in one essential area (Royce 1999).

While there was considerable variation in the terms of early tenant contracts, eventually three standardized types of rental agreements evolved: sharecropping, share tenancy and cash tenancy (Table 3). Sharecroppers, or simply "croppers," owned no farm equipment of their own, contributing only manual labor to crop production. Croppers were paid with a portion of the yield at the end of the growing season; the landowner kept the remainder of the crop as payment of rent for the parcel worked by the sharecropper. Share tenants, in contrast, owned farming equipment and thus paid less rent than croppers. Finally, cash tenants supplied their own equipment and generally paid cash rent to the landowner; consequently, these tenants were not bound to provide the owner with a portion of the crop yield (Aiken 1998).

The differentiations between types of tenancy led to the evolution of the "agricultural ladder," which hierarchically ranked farm workers based on their relationship to the land and to the means of production (Woofter 1936). The bottom rung of the ladder was occupied by day laborers, who worked only on a piece-meal basis, owning no equipment and having no claim to the crop. Croppers and share tenants

Table 3. Types and conditions of tenancy arrangements. (Adapted from Woofler 1936)

	Sharecropping	Share Tenancy	Cash Tenancy
Landlord Provides	Land Housing Fuel Work Tools Draft Animals Animal Feed Seed $\frac{1}{2}$ Fertilizer	Land Housing Fuel $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ Fertilizer	Land Housing Fuel
Tenant Provides	Labor $\frac{1}{2}$ Fertilizer	Labor Draft Animals Animal Feed Work Tools Seed $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ Fertilizer	Labor Draft Animals Animal Feed Work Tools Seed Fertilizer
Landlord Receives	$\frac{1}{2}$ of crop	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of crop	Fixed amount in cash
Tenant Receives	$\frac{1}{2}$ of crop	$\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of crop	Entire crop

occupied the middle rungs of the ladder; since share tenants generally owned some farming implements, they held a higher position on the ladder than did croppers. The fourth rung of the ladder was comprised of cash tenants, whose elevated status was derived from their ownership of farming equipment and their ability to pay cash rent. The highest rungs of the agricultural ladder were reserved for small landowners.

Positions on the agricultural ladder were tenuous. Drought, flood, or pestilence could result in a bad crop year, forcing cash and share tenants to sell their equipment in order to pay debts. Stripped of access to the means of production, these former tenants moved down the agricultural ladder to the status of croppers. An increase within the cropper ranks led to oversupply; some croppers found themselves unable to secure sharecropping agreements and were thus reduced to the status of day laborers. Several consecutive years of good harvests might enable croppers to purchase equipment and to

move up to the middle rungs of the ladder, but the vagaries of weather and crop infestations always made real the possibility of downward mobility in the agricultural hierarchy.

The subdivision of landholdings and growth of tenancy that characterized post-war southern agriculture had a dramatic impact on the structure of farms and land tenure in the Arkansas Delta. Between 1860-1880, the number of farms nearly tripled, from 7,800 to over 22,000; however, average farm sized declined dramatically – from 434 to 152 acres (U.S. Census Bureau 1880). The significant increase in the number of farms between 1860-1880 does not imply a decentralization of landownership. Studies on land tenure in the post-bellum South have found that landownership remained highly concentrated in the hands of a small planter elite (see e.g. Ransom and Sutch 2001). Thus, after 1880, statistics reveal an increasing number of farms with a decreasing average farm size, corresponding with an increase in the tenant ranks. By 1880, the tenancy rate within the Delta was 47 percent - just under half of all farms were run by non-landowners (U.S. Census Bureau 1880).

The increase in the number of farms was also compelled by continued deforestation of the Delta. After the war, lumber companies bought vast acres of forestlands in the northern Delta. As trees were felled and land was cleared, lumber companies began to rent out parcels of land to farmers. Work in the lumber industry and the availability of quality farmland attracted many new migrants to the Delta in post-war years. The population of the Delta grew 40 percent between 1870-1880; settlement in the northern Delta accounted for nearly half of this growth (U.S. Census Bureau 1880).

There was regional variation in the settlement of these new migrants; those from Missouri and the 'upland' southern states of Tennessee and Kentucky were more likely to settle in the northern Delta, while migrants from older, 'black belt' states, such as Georgia and Alabama, were more likely to settle in the southern Delta.

The Black Experience in Postbellum Arkansas

Post-war Arkansas also became a magnet for the South's recently-freed black population. More blacks migrated to Arkansas than to any other state in the decades following the Civil War (DeBlack 2003) and by 1880, the state housed nearly 210,000 black residents, almost double the number of blacks resident in the state at the denouement of slavery (U.S. Census Bureau 1880). Arkansas had a reputation for being more welcoming to black migrants than neighboring states; scholars have attributed this to the lower level of black settlement in Arkansas. According to Gordon (1995), since blacks comprised only 25 percent of Arkansas' population, they were viewed as less threatening to white dominance; therefore, black Arkansans faced less repression than black residents of states such as Mississippi and Louisiana, where blacks comprised much larger shares of the total population and consequently faced more white antagonism.

Blacks migrated to Arkansas for a variety of reasons. Some newly-free blacks relocated in order to reunite with family members who had been sold away during slavery; others sought greater economic opportunities, having often been recruited by

labor agents who traversed the South lauding the abundant jobs and land available in Arkansas (Gordon 1995). Most black migrants settled in river valleys in the southern and eastern portions of the state; the eastern Delta housed half of Arkansas' black population in 1880.

Arkansas' reputation for greater tolerance towards blacks began to wane as the black population increased and as agrarian Populism began to take root in rural areas during the 1880s and 1890s. As Populist calls for greater equality and inclusion spread among black Arkansans, the state's Democratic and Republican parties began to view the black populace in general as a danger to the white-dictated status quo. Although the state's black voters had typically aligned with the Republicans, leaders of the Democratic party in Arkansas had not regarded the black vote as a viable threat to the party's supremacy within local and state governments. However, fears of an agrarian alliance between blacks and rural whites created alarm among the Democrats. As the Democrats' publicly grew more racist, Republican leaders began to view the party's association with black voters as a liability. A strong, vocal lily-white movement emerged within the Republican ranks and by the 1890s, both parties made the exclusion of blacks a fundamental component of their political platforms (Gordon 1995).

In 1892, a general election was held on a proposed constitutional amendment requiring a \$1.00 poll tax of all voters; the law required every adult male to present a poll tax receipt at every election. Despite familiar claims of voting irregularities, the measure passed and in January, 1893, Arkansas became one of the first southern states to enact a poll tax. Arkansas' tax was one of the most far-reaching in the South. The poll tax laws

of many southern states eliminated the tax after voters reached a certain age (generally 45 or 60) and provided exemptions for the disabled; however, no such exemptions existed in Arkansas – technically every male (and later, female) resident over the age of 21 was liable for paying the tax (Ogden 1958). The poll tax, and other election laws passed around this time, such as one removing party designations from ballots, were aimed at disfranchising poor and illiterate voters – black voters, in the minds of Arkansas' political leaders. The implementation of the poll tax was soon followed by the passage of laws that ensured segregation in public facilities.

The deterioration in race relations within Arkansas in the late-1800s coincided with the beginning of a general decline in the economic well-being of the state's black residents, particularly those in the agricultural sector. Land subdivision and the opening of new lands to farming in the Delta continued so that by the turn of the century there were nearly 54,000 farms in the region. Migrants continued to relocate to the area; between 1880-1900, the population of the Delta increased 74 percent, to 382,000 people. The increase in the number of farms and population corresponded with an increase in tenancy; by 1900, the Delta's tenancy rate had grown to 65 percent. Black farmers comprised 70 percent of the region's tenant class as a whole, and comprised a disproportionate number of tenants in the northern Delta: while accounting for only 40 percent of the total population of the northern Delta, blacks constituted 56 percent of the tenant class in that area (U.S. Census Bureau 1900).

The conditions that characterized turn of the century Arkansas would become entrenched in the early decades of the twentieth century. Jim Crow segregation would, as

in other southern states, come to dominate the life experiences of hundreds of thousands of black Arkansans. Partially because of this racism and partially because of the increasing reliance on the burgeoning cotton monoculture, many black Arkansans floundered economically through the first decades of the twentieth century. The number of blacks involved in tenancy increased dramatically after 1900; many worked as sharecroppers, eking out an existence on the lowest rungs of the agricultural ladder. By the 1920s, conditions had deteriorated for white farmers as well, and growing numbers of white laborers in the Delta began entering into tenancy contracts.

Growth of the Cotton Monoculture

The Early Cotton Industry

Cotton had been the linchpin of the South's antebellum economy, but Arkansas was a latecomer to the southern cotton industry. The first cotton plantations were established in the 1820s along the Red and Arkansas Rivers; following the southeasterly flow of these rivers, cotton production soon expanded into the southern Delta region (McNeilly 2000). These initial forays into cotton cultivation produced minimal results; in 1839, just three years after statehood, Arkansas produced less than 16,000 bales of cotton (U.S. Census Bureau 1940). A decade later the industry had grown slightly but remained hampered by several obstacles, including unreliable and inadequate transportation to the cotton exchange in New Orleans.

During the 1850s, the cotton culture of Arkansas flourished as migrants (free and slave) from older cotton growing regions arrived in the state. Cotton production continued to expand in fertile riverine areas, particularly in the southern Delta. By the end of the decade, cotton production in Arkansas had grown dramatically; in 1859, Arkansas yielded over 360,000 bales of cotton. While this output was dwarfed by the millions of bales produced in older cotton-growing areas, it allowed Arkansas to move from 11th to seventh place in state rankings of cotton yield (U.S. Census Bureau 1918).

The cotton economy in Arkansas was devastated by the Civil War and did not fully recover until the late-1870s. By that time, the plantation-scale production that had characterized antebellum cotton culture had been reconfigured into the tenancy system. Tenancy was practiced throughout Arkansas, but was most prominent in the Delta, where the total tenancy rate was 47 percent, and was as high as 77 percent in some counties (U.S. Census Bureau 1880). The strong correlation between tenancy and cotton production began to solidify during this time: 45 percent of Arkansas's total cotton yield in 1880 was produced in the Delta (U.S. Census Bureau 1880).

Cotton cultivation and tenancy in the Delta both continued to expand throughout the 1800s and into the turn of the century (Figure 3). While cotton yields varied widely from year-to-year, by 1910 Arkansas was consistently producing at least 700,000 bales annually (U.S. Census Bureau 1940). The burgeoning cotton monoculture in the Delta was aided by World War I, which compelled skyrocketing cotton prices: between the start of the war in 1914 and its end in 1918, cotton prices quadrupled from 7 to 28 cents

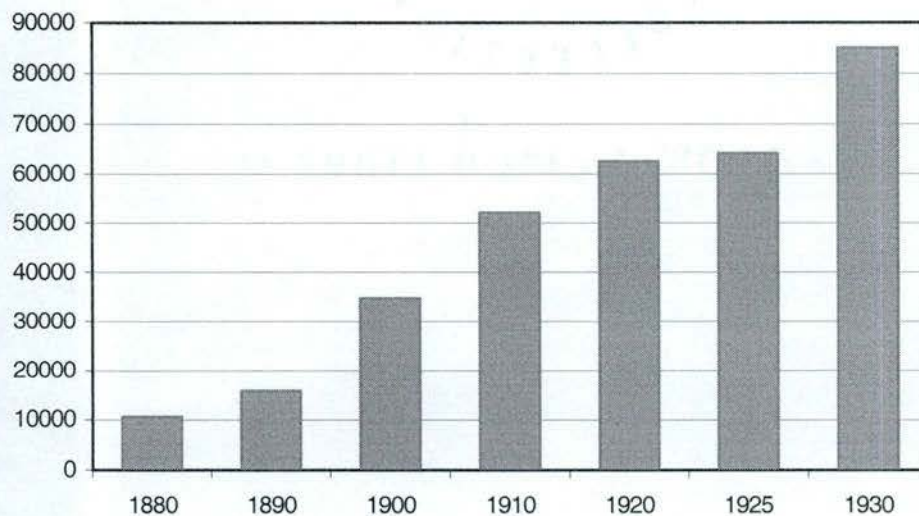


Figure 3. Tenants in the Arkansas Delta, 1880-1930. This illustration represents the total number of tenants, i.e. the summation of all tenant classes. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

per pound (U.S. Census Bureau 1918). The profitability of the wartime cotton industry no doubt lured many farmers into cotton cultivation. In 1916 Arkansas yielded over one million bales for the first time and ranked third among all states in cotton production. This expanded production coincided with an expansion in the tenant class; by the time of the 1920 census, there were over 62,000 tenant farmers toiling in the fields of Delta (U.S. Census Bureau 1920).

The farmers who had entered into cotton production during the war soon faced the harsh reality of post-war depression. Cotton prices hit a high of 35 cents per pound immediately following the war, but then fell to just 13 cents per pound in 1920. This rapid decline in cotton prices heralded the beginning of instability in the cotton market that would last for two decades (Figure 4). From the post-war high of 35 cents, cotton

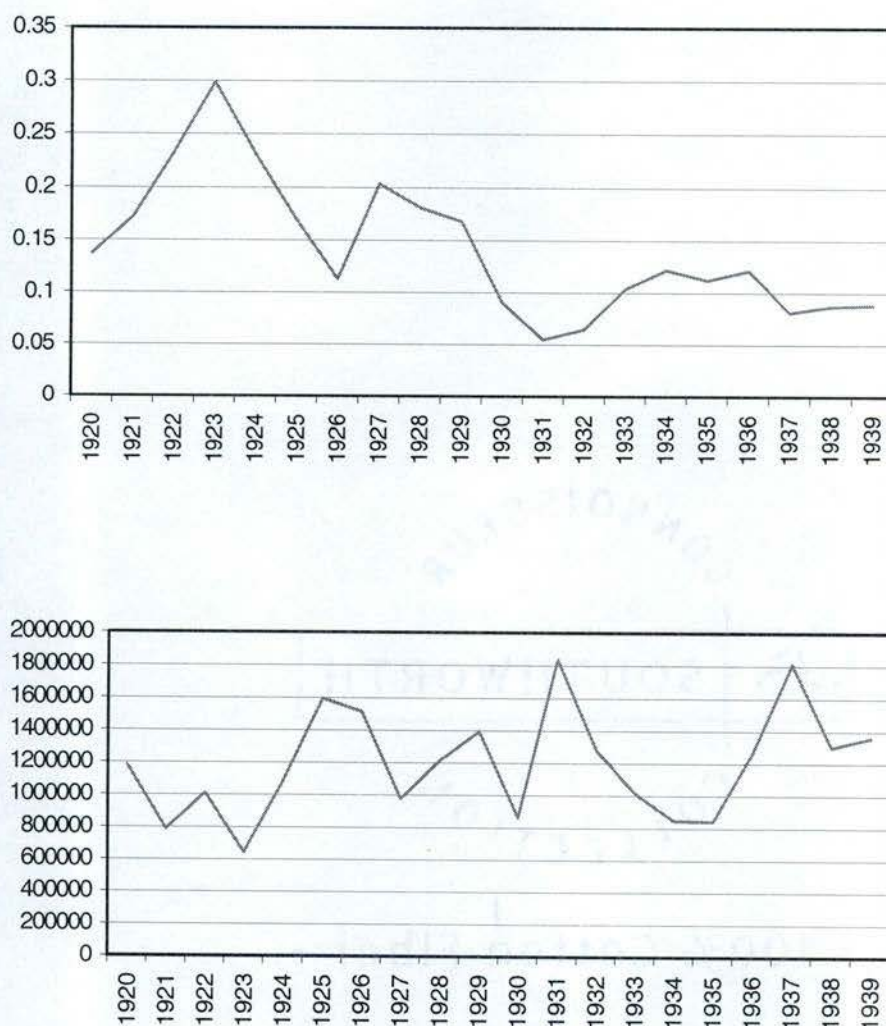


Figure 4. The fluctuating cotton market. *Above*, Cotton prices received by Arkansas farmers, 1920-1939 (cents per pound); *below*, Bales of cotton produced in Arkansas, 1920-1939. The volatility in cotton prices was paralleled by wide swings in production. The relationship between the two was sometimes inversely proportional, as the highest yields often occurred in years with lower prices. (U.S. Census Bureau 1940)

prices would wax and wane, hitting a low of five cents per pound during the Great Depression. Those most vulnerable to the wild fluctuations within the cotton markets of

the 1920s and 1930s were the tenant farmers and sharecroppers who made their living in the South's cotton fields.

The 1920s: Pre-Depression Disaster and Decline

In 1925, the U.S. Census Bureau undertook the first census dedicated solely to the collection of agricultural statistics; this first agricultural census revealed a significant decline in the status of farmers within the Arkansas Delta during the years following World War I. The overall tenancy rate had grown from 70 to 77 percent during the five-year period 1920-1925, but more significantly, change had occurred within the different tenant ranks. Cash renters, the most well-off of all tenants, comprised only seven percent of total renters, a drastic decline from the 20 percent of just five years prior. As was the case historically, blacks constituted the majority of all tenants, but the number of black tenants had declined from 43,000 to 39,000 and blacks now comprised 61 percent of the tenant ranks. Meanwhile, the number of white tenants grew by over 5,000 during the five-year period (U.S. Census Bureau 1925). Thus, significant racial change within the tenancy system was occurring in the Delta in the early-1920s.

The 1925 agricultural census was the first to differentiate sharecroppers from share tenants, and thus gives a more accurate accounting of the overall status of tenants (Figure 5). Cash tenancy – the smallest of all tenant ranks – was evenly split between white and black farmers. There was a greater racial disparity in the ranks of share tenants, with whites comprising 59% of share renters, by far the largest class of white

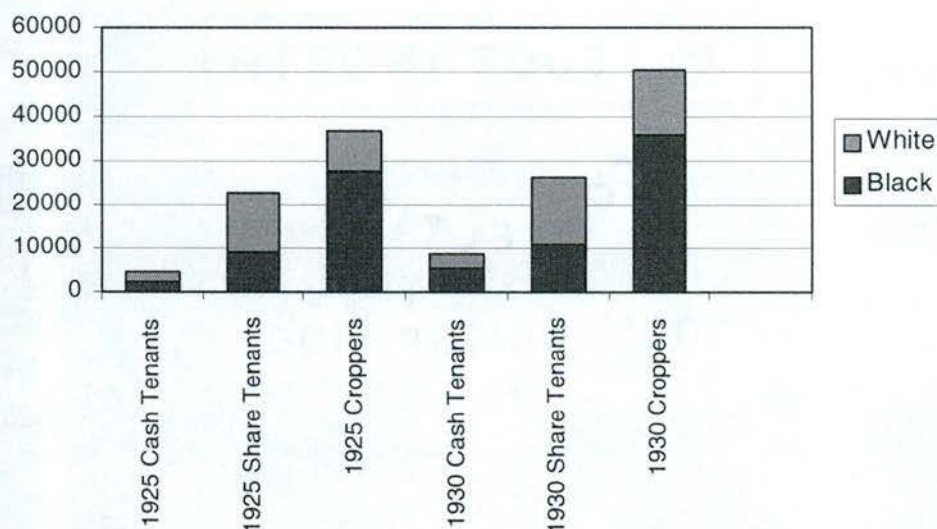


Figure 5. Changes in tenancy, 1925-1930. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1930)

renters. The greatest racial disparity, however, was seen in the sharecropper class; 75% of the 37,000 sharecroppers in the Delta were black. These figures – particularly the decline in the overall number of black tenants and the growing number of whites entering into tenancy arrangements – are indicative of the instability within the agricultural sector in the Delta in the 1920s.

Conditions for farmers in the Delta worsened in the years preceding the Great Depression, beginning with massive flooding in the Mississippi River valley in 1927. The river had flooded frequently – nearly a dozen times since the end of the Civil War – but none of these events could parallel the destructive 1927 flood. Heavy winter and spring rains swelled rivers in the lower Mississippi valley; by late April, levees along all of Arkansas' major rivers had been breached (Daniel 1977). In total, 56 of Arkansas' 88 counties were flooded, including all of the counties in the eastern Delta region. Over two

million acres of agricultural lands were inundated at the time when spring planting of cotton was to occur. The Red Cross conducted a massive relief effort, setting up 80 relief camps throughout the state, housing nearly 150,000 flood victims. Tenant and sharecropping families were hit especially hard by the disaster, accounting for 75 percent of those whose homes were flooded. When floodwaters began to recede in May, the Red Cross undertook efforts to salvage the year's cotton crop, funding a cotton-planting program (Red Cross 1928). These efforts resulted in some success, as Arkansas produced nearly 980,000 bales of cotton that year; still, this was more than half a million bales lower than the prior year's yield (U.S. Census Bureau 1940).

Farmers in the Delta had barely recovered from the flood when one of the worst droughts in U.S. history struck the South in the summer of 1930. Conditions were particularly bad in Arkansas, and particularly in Arkansas' eastern Delta region. The state and federal governments were slow to approve relief funds for drought-stricken areas; once again many in the Delta region came to rely on the Red Cross. By mid-January 1931, the agency was feeding half the farming population of St. Francis County, and was providing food to thousands more Delta families (Murray 1970). The drought led to a significant decline in cotton production; in 1930 Arkansas produced only 860,000 bales, even less than the yield after the 1927 flood (U.S. Census Bureau 1940).

The natural hazards that regularly confronted tenants and croppers were compounded by the oppressive economic systems that governed farm life, particularly relations with the local furnishing merchant. The cotton growing cycle began in January, when land was prepared for planting, which usually occurred in March or April. The

crop grew during the summer months, was harvested in the late autumn and usually reached market in November or December. Thus, tenants and croppers spent much of year without any immediately realizable source of income. In order to pay for agricultural inputs and household necessities, these workers often relied on short-term credit; the local furnishing merchant emerged as the credit conduit, for banks were often unwilling to assume the risks of extending loans to landless farmers.

Generally, the furnishing merchant would advance the farmer a certain amount of credit at the beginning of the year based on the number of work stock utilized by the tenant. The purchases made by the farmer during the year were debited to this account and after the cotton was sold the account would be settled up. Often, the merchant established two prices for goods: cash prices, which applied only if goods were purchased outright with cash, and credit prices, which were generally much higher than cash prices. When tenant farmers ran out of cash – as they invariably did by the summer months – they were forced to buy goods on credit. The merchant required some form of collateral for this credit, and the only collateral tenants and croppers could provide was the forthcoming crop. Therefore, local merchants typically placed crop liens on those farmers with accounts at the store.

Thus, croppers and tenants often had little chance of realizing income from their toils, as up to half the crop was already guaranteed to the landowner and the remainder was subject to lien from the furnishing merchant. Additionally, one condition of establishing accounts with the local merchant was a requirement that the farmer shop only at that merchant's store. Obviously, such a system was ripe for corruption, and

studies of tenancy in the South have found that farmers in cotton areas paid anywhere from thirty to seventy percent interest on purchases from the local furnishing store (Ransom and Sutch, 2001; 128). The potential for corruption became much worse when the local furnishing merchant was also the tenants' landlord, a not-uncommon occurrence.

The natural disasters visited upon the Delta in the 1920s and early 1930s put increased financial strain on the region's farmers, but the oppressive furnishing system and the generally worsening economic conditions of the Great Depression left many with no recourse. Unsurprisingly, the tenant ranks swelled under such conditions. Between 1925-1930, more than 20,000 farmers in the Delta entered into rental agreements; the vast majority of these (68 percent) signed sharecropping contracts (U.S. Census Bureau 1930). While sharecropping had long been the domain of black farmers, increasing numbers of whites entered into sharecropping arrangements during the latter-1920s. Between 1925-1930, more than 5,000 white farmers became sharecroppers; for the first time, whites were experiencing significant downward mobility in the agricultural hierarchy (Figure 6). This trend mirrored those occurring throughout the South; in a 1936 study of southern tenancy sociologist T.J. Woofter noted "The increase in tenancy, and especially in white tenancy, has been the most striking trend in southern farm life in the last 25 years" (Woofter 1936, xix). Indeed, by 1930, the majority of tenant farmers in the South were white.

As farmers became entrenched in debt, they dedicated more and more acreage to cotton production. This proved counterproductive: high yields in the years after the 1930

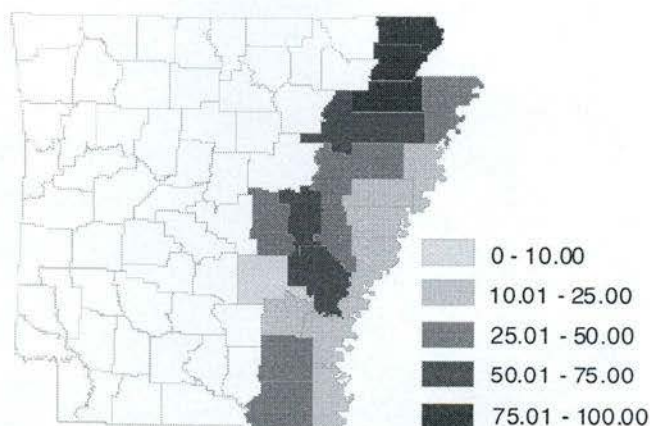


Figure 6. White sharecroppers as percentage of total sharecroppers, 1930.

While whites had engaged in tenancy since the postbellum era, most had been cash or share renters. By the late-1920s, however, increasing numbers of whites were signing sharecropping agreements. By 1930, whites comprised more than 75% of the sharecropping class in some northern counties of the Arkansas Delta, which was the last part of the region to be deforested and opened to agricultural production. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1930)

drought created large surpluses, which in turned led to lower prices. But many farmers had little choice; they relied on the furnishing merchant for sustenance, and the merchant would only accept cotton crops as collateral. So, despite low prices, farmers expanded cotton production. In fact, in 1931, when prices hit a low of 5 cents per pound, farmers in the Delta produced the largest cotton yield in the region's history (U.S. Census Bureau 1940). It was this cycle of credit via crop lien, overproduction, and low prices that mired hundreds of thousands of farmers in crippling poverty.

By the mid-1930s, the abhorrent situation of farmers in the Delta – and throughout the South – had become a matter of national concern. President Roosevelt

launched several initiatives aimed at rural relief, particularly among poor southern farmers. But these programs often hurt more than helped those in most dire need, exacerbating the already mounting frustrations of the South's landless farmers. Agitation was particularly acute in areas experiencing racial change along the tenancy hierarchy, such as the Arkansas Delta – which soon became a battleground in confrontations over the New Deal's rural programming.

Conclusion

The introduction of slavery into the Arkansas Delta by French fur traders in the eighteenth century was a signal moment in Delta history. By the time of the Civil War, slavery and cotton dominated the Delta. The cotton culture continued to flourish in the post-bellum period and slavery was soon replaced by a system of labor based on tenancy. The tenancy system and cotton monoculture became entrenched in the Delta after the turn of the twentieth century, coincident with the imposition of Jim Crow laws and the gradual decline in the political, economic and social status of black Arkansans. Economic downturns in the 1920s led to declines in cotton prices, which yielded instability within the tenancy system. In the early 1930s, increasing numbers of farmers in the Delta were entering into tenancy arrangements, a trend particularly notable among white farmers.

As discussed in the following chapters, two prominent reform organizations intervened in the Delta in the early years of the Great Depression. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) was founded in the northern Delta in 1934, largely in response to what were considered ineffective attempts by the federal government to address the issue

of poverty among agrarian southerners. The Farm Security Administration (FSA) was the federal agency charged with alleviating rural poverty; due largely to agitation created by the STFU, the FSA's attention and funding was heavily skewed towards Arkansas. These organizations professed similar goals: to alleviate southern poverty and improve the quality of life of rural southerners; however, the two espoused fundamentally different ideas about the causes of southern poverty.

The STFU viewed the tenancy system as the primary cause of chronic poverty among rural southerners; the FSA, in contrast, attributed poverty to a series of mostly environmental and economic factors, such as soil degradation and low prices. Neither of these conceptualizations of southern poverty in the 1930s is incorrect. The tenancy system, which encompassed not only the various types of land rental, but also the furnishing system and proprietary plantation system (which required tenants to shop only at plantation-owned commissaries and have cotton ginned only at plantation-owned gins), certainly worked to keep farmers in poverty. The chronic indebtedness of most tenants compelled overproduction, which led to soil erosion and low crop prices, two of the primary causes of poverty cited by the FSA. In actuality, all of these factors were related; the fact that the STFU and the FSA chose to separate them and privilege some over others reflects each organization's broader approach to the South as a regional entity.

The STFU maintained a structural view of the region, one in which the South was seen as the outcome of interrelated systems of oppression, most especially the tenancy system. Soil degradation and low crop prices were problems that the union would have seen as emanating *from* the tenancy system, not as individual conditions that worked

collectively to (re)produce southern poverty. In the union's view, rehabilitating the soil and reducing overproduction would not have alleviated southern poverty if the tenancy system remained in place. Thus, in keeping with the structural view, the union focused its energies on abolishing tenancy, which was considered the only real solution to perpetual southern impoverishment.

The FSA too cited the tenure system as a source of southern poverty, but the FSA believed that the tenure system worked in conjunction with a host of other conditions to maintain impoverishment. In the view of the FSA, the tenancy system was one manifestation of the South's enduring coloniality: poor land and a preindustrial economy combined to give rise to the tenancy system, a paternalistic set of labor relations that robbed southern farmers of their ingenuity and self-sufficiency. Therefore, the FSA believed that if the South's lands could be rehabilitated, if the South's economy could be righted, and if the traits of initiative and self-sufficiency could be restored to the southern people, then the South could shed its coloniality and all of the conditions related to it, including tenancy. Thus, the reform efforts of the FSA focused not on the structures that maintained southern poverty, but on the conditions that maintained southern coloniality.

These differing ideas about the South are elucidated more fully in the following chapters, which discuss the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the Farm Security Administration in more detail. The analysis that follows illustrates that the two organizations employed similar tactics, particularly elevating poverty over race, in conceptualizing the South as a regional entity. Poverty became a dominant, if not *the* dominant theme for both organizations, but differing conceptualizations of the South

produced different definitions of poverty. The different definitions of poverty, in turn, forced the STFU and the FSA to draw on different, competing narratives of national belonging in attempting to effect regional reform.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS UNION

The plight of poor agrarian southerners brought increasing attention to the South during the Great Depression. Much of this attention reflected and reinforced the perception of the South as a problem, as a thorn in the side of the nation. Well-known South-baiter H.L. Mencken continued his diatribes against the region, his grievances first outlined in the 1920 essay, "The Sahara of the Bozart," in which Mencken wrote that the South was "...as sterile artistically, intellectually [and] culturally as the Sahara desert" (Mencken 1920, 136; for more on Mencken and the South, see Hobson 1974). Mencken's anti-southern diatribes were no doubt popular because they validated the stereotypes that many non-southerners held about the region and its residents, stereotypes that were reinforced in the mid-1930s when workers employed by the New Deal's Farm Security Administration (FSA) sent photographers to the South to document the region's social conditions.

The FSA Photographic Project (discussed in more detail in the following chapter) produced, depending on the sympathies of the observer, brutally realistic or blatantly

sensationalistic images of poor sharecroppers. These images were freely distributed to the nation's most popular magazines, providing many readers with their first glimpse of life in the rural South. The photos were also displayed in a series of traveling exhibits; the exhibit on the South proved to be one of the most popular, second only to the series on "Arkie" and "Okie" migrants in California (Stange 1989).

The FSA images fortified notions of a perpetually, problematically poor South, an idea later lent credence by President Franklin Roosevelt. In the earlier years of the New Deal period, dependent upon the support of powerful southern Democrats, Roosevelt was hesitant to directly address the 'problem South;' but by the late-1930s, Roosevelt openly cast the South as an economically and culturally problematic region. Consequently, during the Great Depression, 'reform' became one of the dominant discourses in and about the South. Two prominent, oft-studied reform organizations were the aforementioned Farm Security Administration, the federal agency charged with alleviating rural poverty, and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU), an indigenous labor union representing landless farmers.

The STFU and the FSA were both active in the Arkansas Delta (Figure 7). The union was founded in the Delta in 1934 by sharecroppers disaffected with early New Deal agricultural policies. Around that time, the FSA (under the auspices of its predecessor, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration) began constructing community farm projects that resettled farmers from submarginal lands. The agency would eventually build over 30 of these communities in the South, one-third of which were located in eastern Arkansas.

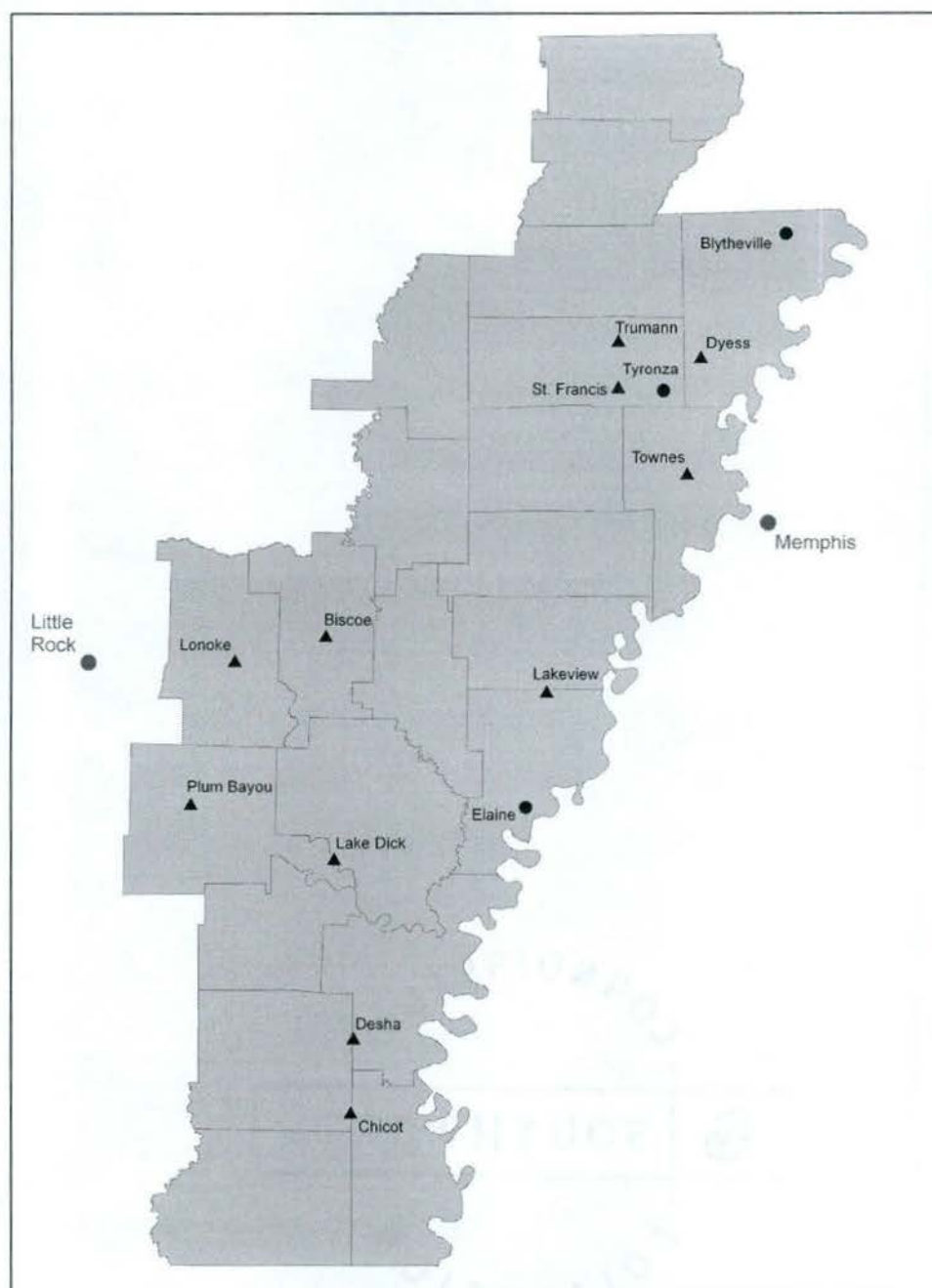


Figure 7. Reform organizations in the Arkansas Delta. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union was founded in the northern Delta, in the town of Tyronza, in 1934, largely in response to federal agricultural policy that disadvantaged tenants and croppers. The Farm Security Administration constructed nearly a dozen community-farm projects (represented here with triangles) in the Arkansas Delta in the mid-to-late 1930s. (Source: Conkin 1959)

The nature of the relationship between the STFU and the FSA is ambiguous and one that few authors have attempted to explore. Grubbs (1971) provides the most thorough analysis of the STFU's impact on New Deal policies, claiming that the union was largely responsible for the creation of the FSA community farm program, and therefore that the two organizations maintained an amicable relationship. Other scholars argue that funds for the FSA program were disproportionately distributed to Arkansas because of union activity (Holley 1975), thereby implying that the relationship between the two organizations was in some way antagonistic. Based on their experience with earlier New Deal programming, union members were distrustful of most federal agencies, and the FSA appears to have prohibited union members from participating in the community farm program (though Grubbs claims the FSA was supportive of union locals that organized within the communities). Union newspapers were often critical of federal policies, but the organization's attitude toward the FSA began to soften in the late-1930s, as the agency came under increased attack from southern conservatives. Thus, the historical record (at least that maintained by the union) reveals an early distrust of the FSA (and federal programs in general), followed by reconciliation during the agency's waning years prior to World War II.

The caution and mistrust with which the union treated the FSA during the New Deal's early years appears illogical in retrospect, given that the two claimed to have similar goals: to ameliorate rural poverty in the South by enabling landless farmers to attain ownership. However, just what 'poverty' meant and how poverty should be ameliorated wasn't entirely agreed upon by the two organizations. Given that poverty

was so intimately tied to the 1930s conceptualization of the South, the tension between the STFU and the FSA can be interpreted as disagreement over the character of the South as a region. The next two chapters use primary and secondary materials to illustrate the differing understandings of 'the South' held by the STFU and the FSA, and how these understandings influenced the approaches taken by each organization to reforming the region.

The current chapter concerns the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, discussing how prominent themes deployed by the union illuminate how the STFU understood and reacted to the South as a regional entity. The union's ideology was most influenced by the organization's leadership, which was primarily white. Scholars have noted that participation in the interracial union likely represented something different to black and white members (see e.g. Woodruff 2003); unfortunately, records and accounts of individual union members are scarce, and the only substantial data through which to analyze the union is found in the archives, which primarily document the activities of the union's white leadership. This, combined with the overall purpose of the present study, implies that references to "the union" are meant to refer to the organization as governed by the leadership, while acknowledging the diversity of experience of individual union members. The three themes prominently deployed by the union leadership were 'southernness,' poverty and citizenship. Each of these will be analyzed in turn, but the chapter begins with a discussion of the origins and founding of the STFU in the Arkansas Delta.

The AAA and the Rise of Agrarian 'Radicalism' in Arkansas

The financial instability experienced by cotton growers in eastern Arkansas and throughout the South during the 1920s was emblematic of general volatility within the agricultural sector. During the decade, prices for corn, wheat and other staple products declined drastically; by the time the Great Depression began in earnest, agrarian protest had become commonplace, especially in areas dominated by large-scale, specialized farming where workers had seen drastic declines in wages and status over the previous ten years (Perkins 1969; Jamieson 1945). The low crop prices of the early 1930s were generally the result of oversupply; this was particularly the case within the cotton industry. In 1932 there was a record carryover of 13 million bales of cotton; another 13 million bales were produced the following year. Thus, in 1933 a total of 26 million bales were available within a cotton market that had never consumed more than 16 million bales (U.S Department of Agriculture 1934).

The low prices rendered by overproduction created a parity problem, as the prices for the agricultural inputs required to grow and harvest cotton were much higher than the price garnered for the output. New Deal administrators under President Roosevelt recognized this discrepancy and advocated crop reduction as a means to reduce surpluses and to raise prices. To this end, the President proposed and Congress approved the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) in May 1933. The mission of the AAA was to reduce existing surpluses and to rebalance supply and demand through the voluntary participation of producers in crop reduction programs (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1934).

By the time the AAA received legislative approval, millions of acres of cotton had already been planted in the South; the desire to ensure crop reduction during the 1933-1934 season led to the infamous cotton plow up program. Under this program, the AAA agreed to compensate southern farmers who voluntarily destroyed portions of their already-planted cotton crop. Each producer signed a contract with the AAA that mandated quotas on total production and specified the amount of acreage on each farm subject to plow up. In 1933, a million cotton growers signed contracts with the AAA. Participation in the program varied widely (Table 4), with states in the older cotton region reporting fewer acres contracted than states in newer growing areas to the west (Richards 1936). In total, 4.5 million bales of cotton were plowed under in 1933; in this respect, the program was a success, as cotton prices increased and the total acres dedicated to cotton production fell in subsequent years (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1934).

Table 4. Cotton acreage contracted as percent of total, 1933.
(After Richards 1936, 120)

North Carolina	50.5
South Carolina	70.1
Georgia	72.2
Alabama	74.5
Mississippi	76.0
Tennessee	68.2
Louisiana	79.5
Arkansas	78.8
Oklahoma	72.9
Texas	74.6

The AAA plow up and crop reduction program was bitterly opposed by many of the South's tenants and sharecroppers. The idea of destroying crops was anathema to many farmers; however, the primary concern was the distribution of AAA compensation meted out under the plow-up contracts. Participation in the AAA program was open to all cotton producers, regardless of land tenure: any person with a legal claim to ownership of the crop could enter into an AAA contract. In instances in which more than one individual could make such a claim, all parties were required to sign the contract. In cases of tenancy, the AAA assumed that the landlord would compensate tenants and croppers in proportion to the terms outlined in their rental agreements (Richards 1936). However, accusations of landowners cheating renters by keeping the entirety of the AAA payment were common; in some cases, landowners were charged with demoting tenants/croppers to day laborers or simply evicting them in order to avoid sharing the AAA payments (Conrad 1965).

Tenant and cropper reports of inequitable treatment were most numerous in the Arkansas Delta, which accounted for 25 percent of all complaints received by the AAA between 1933-1935 (Richards 1936). The AAA often sent workers to investigate these complaints. These workers were to consult with county committees established by the AAA to hear the grievances of tenants and croppers; however, these committees were generally composed of the county's largest and most powerful planters and bankers, the very individuals against whom grievances were filed. Consequently, sharecroppers and tenants who felt that they had been cheated out of their AAA parity payments often found little recourse in appealing to the local committees (Hoffsommer 1935). In the fall of

1934, the AAA investigated 477 grievance cases in Arkansas, and found 346 of these unjustified (Grubbs 1971, 39). AAA investigators, unduly influenced by the local committees, often reported to Washington that the complaining tenants were just 'out to get something' from the government or were victims of manipulation by the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, which had recently formed in the northern Arkansas Delta (Grubbs 1971).

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union was founded in Tyronza, in Poinsett County, in mid-1934, in direct response to the AAA plow-up program (see Figure 7). Opposition to the plow-up program among tenants and sharecroppers was widespread in the cotton-growing areas of the South, but only in the Arkansas Delta did agricultural laborers organize in response to the AAA. Scholars have provided several explanations for this phenomenon, ranging from the northern Arkansas Delta's shorter history of plantation-style, tenancy-dependent agriculture (Fannin 2003) to more liberal white attitudes toward blacks in the Delta than in the cotton growing areas of the Deep South (Conrad 1965). A more plausible explanation is given by Whayne (1996), who contends that the formation of the STFU can be attributed to the increasing impoverishment of both black and white tenants in the northern Delta, to a history of unionism and socialism within the region, and to the eviction of a dozen white tenants from one of Poinsett county's largest plantations.

In the years leading up to the Great Depression, tenancy in the Arkansas Delta increased nearly 33 percent, with especially notable growth among white tenants in the Delta's northern counties (U.S. Census Bureau 1930). When cotton prices bottomed out in the Depression's early years, many tenants and croppers applied for aid through New Deal relief programs, such as the Civil Works Administration (CWA). However, having valid rental contracts often disqualified tenants and croppers from these programs because the federal government counted the traditional plantation furnishing system, in which planters advanced food and clothing to those who signed rental agreements for the upcoming year, as a source of material support. Moreover, jobs with the CWA and other New Deal work relief programs were allocated by county committees that were often composed of local planters, bankers and merchants, who assigned jobs only to those they deemed favorable tenants. This effectively barred the Delta's black residents from relief programs, and many whites also found themselves blacklisted by local relief committees (Whayne 1996).

Resenting their inability to secure federal aid, tenants and croppers in Poinsett County joined to form the Tyronza Unemployed League, which lobbied for more equitable distribution of relief jobs (Mitchell 1979). The League was aided by the local Socialist Party and was the latest manifestation in a long history agrarian 'radicalism' within the Delta (Biegert 1998). The first farmers' advocacy group, the Arkansas Grange, had formed soon after the Civil War, when the sharecropping system was just taking hold. The themes of self-sufficiency and reduced reliance on credit espoused by the Grange were taken up by later organizations, most notably the Arkansas Wheel,

which emerged during the agricultural depression of the early 1880s. The Wheel allied with black farm organizations and advocated the establishment of a third party to challenge the entrenched elite that governed state and local politics. This goal was realized when the Wheel joined with the Knights of Labor to form the Union Labor Party (ULP) in 1888. The ULP garnered about 46 percent of the popular vote in that year's gubernatorial election, making the party a viable threat to the Democrats and the first labor organization to gain any measure of real political power within the state. However, the tactics of the ULP alienated some members, which weakened the party and left the ULP vulnerable to attacks from Democrats. After the 1888 elections, the ULP ceased to be a political force. The demise of the ULP and the Arkansas Wheel most adversely impacted black farmers in the state: the alliance between these and black organizations inspired calls for the disenfranchisement of black Arkansans in order to inhibit future cooperation between agrarian blacks and whites (Moneyhon 1997).

Despite disfranchisement and growing hostility from whites, black farmers in Arkansas did attempt to organize; the most prominent black farmers' organization was the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America, which formed in Elaine (Phillips County) in 1919. At a union meeting near Hoop Spur in September of that year, gunfire was exchanged between black farmers and white law officers, though no clear consensus on the impetus for the violence has been established (for varying perspectives on the event and those that followed, see Rogers 1960; Butts and James 1961; Cortner 1988; Whayne 1999; Stockley 2001). Rumors that black farmers had been meeting to plan the murders of local landowners quickly spread to nearby Elaine, where white

citizens armed themselves against the black 'insurrection.' In the days of rioting that followed, an untold number of black Arkansans – estimates range widely, from two-dozen to over 800 – were killed; dozens more were arrested and held on various charges, including murder.

The events in Elaine were a cautionary tale for farm workers in the Delta, who expressed little interest in organizing during the 1920s, even as cotton prices declined and exploitation increased. However, when the passage of the AAA led to reduction in status or eviction for many tenants and croppers, agitation for collective action grew. One of the first planters in the Delta to evict a large number of tenants on the heels of the AAA was Hiram Norcross, owner of the expansive Fairview Plantation in Poinsett County. Norcross evicted nearly twenty tenants and croppers, the majority of whom were white (Mitchell 1979). This was likely the first time that white workers experienced the type of arbitrary and unfair treatment long-endured by their black counterparts, and thus whites began to realize how hazy the boundaries of the South's racial hierarchy were in regard to the tenancy system. The Norcross evictions ignited the smoldering tensions in the Delta that were initially sparked by disaffection with the allocation of New Deal employment relief, and provided the impetus for black and white farm workers to join together.

The renters evicted from the Norcross plantation enlisted the help of two businessmen in the nearby town of Tyronza. These men, H.L. Mitchell and Clay East, were members of the Socialist Party and had some knowledge of union organizing techniques. Mitchell and East encouraged the evicted tenants to form a sharecroppers' organization similar to the Sharecroppers Union that was active in Alabama. Tenants

began holding meetings out on the plantations, and invited Mitchell and East to attend. From these initial meetings, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union was formed (Mitchell 1973).

From an initial base of several dozen members living in and around Tyronza, the union quickly spread to nearby communities. Within a year the union had expanded to other cotton growing areas, and was particularly successful in neighboring Oklahoma, which had a tradition of localized agrarian radicalism (Jamieson 1945). By the end of 1935, the union contained nearly 200 local chapters, representing nearly 23,000 landless farmers (STFU Annual Report 1935). In the fall of that year, planters in the Arkansas Delta announced that wages paid to cotton pickers would be 40 cents per 100 pounds, 20 cents less than had been paid the previous season. The union quickly protested, proposing instead a wage of \$1.00 per 100 pounds. Workers refused to pick cotton until landowners raised wages; when planters offered 75 cents per 100 pounds, workers agreed and went back to the fields (Mitchell 1979; for an alternative perspective on the resolution of this strike, see Jamieson 1945, 309-310). This apparent success fueled further growth of the union. By 1937 dozens more locals had organized; while some growth occurred in Oklahoma, northeastern Arkansas remained the union's power base (Figure 8).

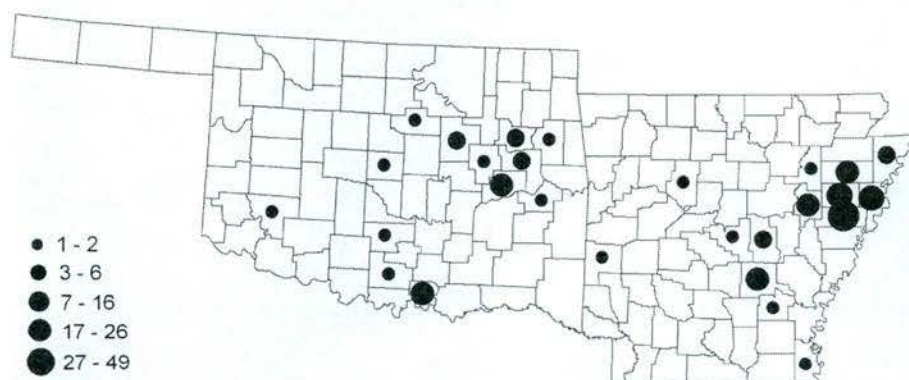


Figure 8. STFU locals, 1937. The STFU was popular in Oklahoma, but the union's base of power was always in northeastern Arkansas. The union also had two-dozen locals in the cotton-growing areas of the Missouri "bootheel" and a few locals scattered throughout the states of Mississippi and Texas. (Source: STFU List of Locals 1937)

'Southernness' and the STFU

From the outset, the leaders of the STFU emphasized the southern character and concerns of the organization. The union's seal featured a hoe, a plow and a cotton boll encircled by the name of the union (Figure 9). The union chose the cotton boll for its white color, which symbolized the "justice and truth" for which the union fought, and because, once picked, cotton bolls clump together, reminding members that "in union there is strength" (Sign and Ritual Manual for the STFU n.d., 1). The hoe also took on special significance, instructing union members to excise from their lives "...the weeds of hatred and jealousy and discrimination against our brother," a meaning particularly pertinent to an interracial labor union in the Jim Crow South. While the union could have

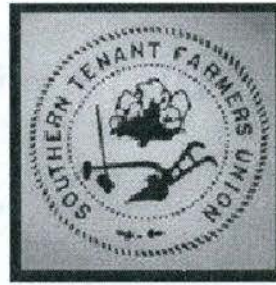


Figure 9. Official seal of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.

(Source: Arkansas Media Room)

viewed the materials associated with cotton production as symbols of disempowerment, these were reconceptualized to act as a source of unity and identity for an organization composed of and dedicated to southern farmers.

A musical tradition also coalesced around the STFU, which greatly benefited from the talent of member John Handcox. Handcox adapted traditional southern gospel songs, changing the lyrics to reflect the concerns of the union; his greatest contribution was the transformation of “Roll the Chariot On” to “Roll the Union On,” which has become a labor classic. In “Roll the Union On,” Handcox tells the story of sharecropper resistance to the southern tenancy system:

If the planters in the way, we goin’ to roll it over them,
 Goin’ to roll it over them,
 If the planters in the way, we goin’ to roll it over them,
 Goin’ to roll it over them.
 Goin’ to roll, goin’ to roll, goin’ to roll the union on.

The additional verses of the song take aim at others associated with the oppression of the tenancy system: bosses who managed plantations for absentee owners, merchants who

charged usurious credit at plantation commissaries, bankers, and even Arkansas governor Marion Futrell, who was openly hostile to the union (Sign and Ritual Manual for the STFU n.d., 12). The use of well-known gospel songs reinforced union members' identity as southerners, and the updated lyrics reinforced the union's identity as a southern organization.

The political aims of the union also focused on concerns unique to the South. The union fought for the repeal of poll tax laws, the most prominent symbol of the political disenfranchisement of the southern poor. The union supported a 1938 amendment to the Arkansas constitution that would have repealed the poll tax, but the measure was defeated when put to a popular vote (no doubt due largely to the fact that those most impacted by the poll tax were unable to vote on the amendment). But the union's main objective was to end the repressive tenancy system. Though various systems of land rental were found throughout the agricultural regions of the United States, by the 1930s tenancy had come to be regarded as a uniquely southern problem, so much so that the U.S. Census Bureau had ceased to collect tenancy statistics in non-southern states. Focusing the majority of the union's attention on tenancy issues solidified the STFU's characterization as a southern institution.

The leadership's emphasis on the southern nature and goals of the union created problems during the organization's later years. In 1937, seeking greater national recognition and increased funding, the STFU voted, at the urging of the union's leaders, to affiliate with the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America Union (UCAPAWA). This move proved to be disastrous and nearly led to the

complete demise of the union (Table 5). Many of the rank and file had grown accustomed to the simple structure of the STFU and did not believe that a national organization associated with the CIO could adequately understand or represent the needs of southern agricultural workers. These concerns were reinforced once the UCAPAWA began trying to implement the standards of the national organization within STFU locals. H.L. Mitchell, who had served as the union's first president, recalled that, soon after affiliation:

Local union secretaries, most of whom could just barely read and write, received large packages containing ledgers, receipt books and minute books, plus almost daily letters from [the national] office, making appeals for funds to assist strikers in far away places. I then remarked that though I had a high school education, it would have been impossible for me to have kept the accounts each local union secretary was now called upon to handle.

(Mitchell 1979, 168-169)

Table 5. STFU decline after UCAPAWA affiliation. (From Jamieson 1945, 317)

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent of All Locals</u>
Locals in good standing	146	50.5%
Locals active, but not in good standing	34	11.8%
Disaffiliated with UCAPAWA	109	37.7%

Note: The STFU's affiliation with the nationally-based UCAPAWA split the Union. These figures from 1938 illustrate that over one-third of all STFU locals chose not to affiliate with UCAPAWA. Though the STFU-UCAPAWA relationship lasted only a short time, the union never recovered from the turmoil that surrounded the decision to affiliate.

When the STFU broke with UCAPAWA a few years later, leaders of the union located the roots of the catastrophe in the southern nature of the union and the inability of national leaders to understand the circumstances in which the STFU operated. In an open letter to members explaining the disaffiliation with UCAPAWA, STFU President J.R. Butler stated that "[T]he cotton fields of the South present a challenge to unionism," meaning unionism at the national scale, and insisted on the need for "regional consideration" in regard to labor and the South. Butler elaborated:

The cotton workers of the South are situated in a region which more than all others is strewn with dangerous pitfalls. Complicated by the racial problem, complex since cotton workers include several sorts of land tenants as well as wage workers, peculiar in that sectional differences are strong, aggravated by lack of adequate schools and other social institutions – organization here clearly requires leadership of indigenous origin, trained in the technique of the southern field. Small wonder that the bulk of the membership lack confidence in the judgment of International officers who are unacquainted with the problems peculiar to the region. (Open Letter to Friends of the STFU October 1, 1939, 4)

Butler's writing reveals much about how the union understood the South. The 'pitfalls' enumerated by Butler were, in reality, a series of interlinked systems that worked to reproduce the economic and social conditions in which many poor southerners found themselves trapped. A lack of educational and employment opportunities compelled generations of southerners into an agrarian way of life, primarily one of tenancy. The ability of planters to exploit the ignorance of workers, as well as long-standing fears and animosities surrounding the 'racial problem,' contributed to the bifurcation of the tenant classes along racial lines. Leaders outside the region who were only concerned with issues of labor failed to recognize the broader causes of tenancy, the

host of systems that propagated the oppression of poor rural southerners. In failing to exercise the "regional consideration" Butler insisted was necessary, UCAPAWA and CIO leaders failed to share the STFU's understanding of the South's labor problem as the manifestation of many interrelated forces.

Of the numerous 'pitfalls' listed by Butler, the 'racial problem' was the most immediate obstacle for the union. The union's leaders understood that racial conflict would destroy the union and knew that planters would try to incite racial tensions to deter membership. The survival of the STFU, then, rested upon finding a source of unity that would convince members of their common interests. To that end, the leaders of the union chose to emphasize poverty, framing the union as an organization fighting for the rights of poor southerners, black and white. In adopting this strategy, leaders intentionally marginalized concerns of racial discrimination.

Solidarity Forever? Race and Poverty in the STFU

Later twentieth century accounts have heralded the STFU for its policy of racial integration. Grubbs wrote that "...the STFU was cognizant of race only to the extent necessary to create a movement in which race would become unimportant," concluding that "within the STFU America's greatest problem, that of race relations, was solved as well as any realistic observer could expect" (Grubbs 1971, 60, 68). In his autobiography, H.L. Mitchell recounted the story of white union members helping to secure the release of a black member unfairly detained by local police, claiming, "Black and white unity

carried the day. There was never again any question that union members would come to the aid of their brothers, black or white, in time of need" (Mitchell 1979, 54).

While the union's acceptance of both black and white members was remarkable in the context of the 1930s South, the archival record reveals that the STFU was anything but a picture of interracial harmony. From the outset the union was vexed by the southern 'race problem,' having to consider first, whether to allow black members into the union and second, whether to have racially segregated local unions. With the AAA complicating the lives of both whites and blacks, the white members of the union realized that their fate was intricately tied to that of their black counterparts. As union leader J.R. Butler bluntly stated:

The whites were 'niggers' too. There was no difference, and some of 'em was beginning to see that there was no difference. Of course, there was a lot of prejudice among white people in those days, but hard times makes peculiar bedfellows sometimes, and so some of them were beginning to get their eyes open and see that all of them were being used. (Wise and Thrasher 1980, 128)

The decision to open membership to both black and white croppers and tenants raised questions about union leadership. The union had several executive offices, including president, vice-president and secretary; the decision was made to install whites in most leadership positions, given the racial climate of the times and the general lack of qualifications of many of the union's black members. George Stith, one of the union's most prominent black members who worked as an organizer in several southern states, recalled:

The problem was that blacks in the agriculture field didn't have leaders with enough education to do what was necessary. That's number one. And number two, a black man wasn't recognized enough to get into the places where he needed to go, even if he had enough education. Even at that time, government organizations didn't look at a black man too much. ... A black man was discussed sometimes as being president. And I was discussed at one time. But we decided, that if a black man got to be president, it might divide us. So we decided, well at least we'll put him in second spot, make him vice-president. This is the way most blacks wanted it. (Wise and Thrasher 1980, 138-139)

While Stith's assertion that many of the union's black members lacked the resources necessary for successful leadership is undoubtedly true, the notion that most blacks desired secondary status within the union hierarchy is debatable. Union correspondence indicates that the installation of blacks in certain leadership roles was more a calculated tactic on the part of white union leaders than a consensus opinion among black members. Writing to an organizer in Parkin, Arkansas Mitchell stated: "...in the Earle local, if you are going to organize the Negroes and the whites together, which I think is the best thing to do, select some outstanding Negro member as – say the Vice President, so that they will feel they aren't slighted" (H.L. Mitchell to J.E. Cameroon January 11, 1936). Later in the same letter, Mitchell gives Cameroon further instructions: "...you and Wiley get together soon and plan for calling the County Central Council meeting in Cross County. Better have Wiley Secretary, some other Negro Vice President, and a white man as President would be my idea." Regardless of the true motivations for the inclusion of black leaders, the reality is that for many black Arkansans in the Jim Crow era Delta, the union represented their only chance to express leadership, even if in a secondary capacity.

The integrated nature of the union's executive council did not, by and large, extend to locals, despite Mitchell's instructions to the contrary. STFU membership was overwhelmingly black and the majority of locals were comprised of members of one racial group. In part this was a function of geography, as there was a high degree of racial segregation on the plantations of the Delta. According to George Stith, "It was a community thing. Naturally the communities were segregated. That's why we had segregated locals, because whites and blacks usually didn't live on the farm together" (Wise and Thrasher 1980, 129). However, the establishment of segregated locals in a supposedly integrated union was aided by the STFU's lack of a clear policy. Clarifying the role of race within the union to attorney A.S. Bayne, Mitchell wrote:

The union is composed of members of all races. About two-thirds are white and the other Negro. In Texas and Oklahoma we have locals composed of Indians as well as Mexicans. Locals are organized either separately or together as the members desire. We have never made no rule about this. We leave it up to the people, but we have secured a great amount of cooperation between the groups.
(H.L. Mitchell to A.S. Bayne March 7, 1936)

Mitchell's assertion that two-thirds of STFU membership was white is dubious, especially in light of his own claims to have inflated membership numbers for publicity purposes (Mitchell 1979). A 1937 membership survey that included one-third of all locals found that 88 percent of reported members were black. Of the 111 locals responding to the survey, 67 were all-black and seven were all-white; most of the remaining locals exhibited very little racial diversity. Some STFU locals did achieve real integration – for instance, the large Blytheville local contained 180 black and 142 white

members – but this was the exception more than the rule (STFU Locals Questionnaire 1937).

Organizing across racial lines also proved problematic. When the union distributed questionnaires asking how the executive office could support locals, one leader replied “Send a white organizer to organize the white people of East Prairie, Missouri” (STFU Locals Survey 1939). The leader of the Kennett, Missouri local expounded when making the same request:

Send a white organizer to Kennett or this farm which have a colored church and white church. And let him talk to the whites as he could get closer to them than a Negro man and they would believe him more so. It is five times as many whites on this farm as it's colored and if we could get them we could stand firm.

(STFU Locals Survey 1939)

The ‘race problem’ was not the only issue confronting the union’s leaders and organizers. The poverty of most members and prospective members was a constant concern. The vast majority of the union’s members were sharecroppers and day laborers, those landless workers with the least financial resources. The 1937 membership survey found that 30 percent of the members of reporting locals were day laborers and another 40 percent were sharecroppers; true tenant farmers comprised less than 15 percent of total membership. The union’s Constitution mandated annual dues of \$2.00 per person, a not unreasonable sum, even for workers making only \$1.50 a day in the cotton fields. But, the union’s papers are rife with correspondence from local union leaders and union members about the hardship of paying dues.

The correspondence regarding dues payment and other topics starkly reveals the lack of education among the tenant classes alluded to by George Stith. Complaints of unfair treatment and intimidation by landlords were common:

To Hoon it May Consearn,

this is to Sertify that i have Ritten a contract with Aubrey Lancaster...to furnish one Dollar and twenty five cents per acar cash, per month for a period off five months begening the first day off March. And did on the first day of June fail to furnsh eney cash at all and Sead Hee would not furnsh eney moar cash at all and would furnsh only \$1.00 per acar in groceries, only take it or moove, and that the Sane flower Before cost me 90 cts per Sack and his price is \$1.10 per sack.

(W. A. Altron to H.L. Mitchell n.d.)

Mr H L Mitchell Executive secretary.

I want to say making member is hard. All landlord on the large farm is got tenant afraid of the union. All of them wont to join, But if they do and landowner find it out he must move. ...

I Received the plow up and I was renting from my land lord 1/3 and 1/4 34 AAA contract and 35 and he ant pay me no rent for no plat, no subsidy, only money I rescued was the plow up, I would ask hem about the money, he would said it ant come and I lost my mule... . (C.C. Brooks to H.L. Mitchell n.d.)

Issues of race and poverty could easily have undermined the often-fragile relationships that sustained the union. Realizing that racial discord would destroy the organization, the (white) leadership chose to emphasize class (labor) unity and generally dismissed concerns of racial inequality. When black Vice President E.B. McKinney wrote to H.L. Mitchell expressing dissatisfaction with the union's white leadership, stating that "...the Negro is the goat of the STFU..." (E.B. McKinney to H.L. Mitchell

July 11, 1936) Mitchell responded by emphasizing the need for class solidarity:

Want to have a long talk with you sometime soon – you ought to forget the race lines and think of the really important ones – the class against class – the solidarity of black and white workers is much more important than what happens to a white man or a black man. Who cares – it has happened before and will again, we can only do what our resources permit and you know as well as I do that their [*sic*] is no racial discrimination in the STFU. That is why we [are] powerful and feared. (H.L. Mitchell to E.B. McKinney July 31, 1936)

Mitchell's dismissive "who cares?" attitude towards McKinney's concerns of racial discrimination was in lockstep with STFU leaders' goal to ensure that class solidarity became the unifying theme of the union (Figure 10). The statement that black and white field workers were "all in the same boat" became common. Reflecting on the union, white member and leader J.R. Butler stated:

As soon as we began to tell people what the situation was and what might be done about it, well, they could see that the white people were being treated just the same as the Negroes, they were in the same boat and they all had to pull together. (Wise and Thrasher 1980, 128)

George Stith, echoed these sentiments:

Later, when we had our district meeting to bring our locals...together, you had the whites and the blacks. And when they sat down and talked and thought of the situation, they decided that we were all in the same boat. So they said, "Well, when are y'all gonna meet, we want to come over. When we're gonna meet, we want y'all to come over. (Wise and Thrasher 1980, 129)



Figure 10. “The Union Makes Us Strong.” Illustration from June 1940 *STFU News* depicting black and white union members arriving at a meeting. Though contemporary and historical accounts herald racial integration as a hallmark of the STFU, the union’s white leaders generally emphasized the greater importance of class solidarity.

From the outset the leadership sought to minimize racial discord and deploy a unified, “poor but proud” image of agrarian southerners, one that rejected stereotypes about the southern poor and instead illustrated the earnestness of both STFU members and their cause. The union’s constitution states that membership was open to “men of good reputation” (an amendment to open membership to women was later passed) and the official instructions to organizers include frequent reference to the need for “good” and “reliable” men in the union. Mitchell sometimes cautioned workers to exercise selectivity when organizing locals. Writing to Nathan Wiley, a black organizer in Widener, (St. Francis County) Arkansas, who had inquired about organizing white farmers in his area, Mitchell replied:

I think it would be a very good thing if you could get this man to help you set up an organization among his own people. Nothing will win the battle quicker than by having workers of all races, creeds and colors united in one strong union. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union is founded on these principals [*sic*]. There are no "niggers" and no "poor white trash" in the union. These kinds of people are all lined up with the planters. We have only union men in our organization, and whether they are white or black makes no difference.

(H.L. Mitchell to Nathan Wiley November 21, 1935)

Poverty, Rights and Citizenship in the STFU

The STFU leadership's carefully crafted image of its members as poor but virtuous tenants and sharecroppers was just one component of a larger project to reframe the terms of southern disempowerment. In essence, race was cast aside in favor of poverty as the basis for the denial of political and economic rights to thousands of agrarian southerners. Within the union literature, the themes of labor, poverty and rights are intricately connected, and indeed the organization's leaders considered the union a mechanism for the exercise and claiming of rights.

From the outset, the union explicitly linked labor, particularly within the tenancy system, to poverty, and poverty to the denial of rights. The preamble to the union's constitution clearly explains these connections, and strongly reflects the influence of the organization's socialist founders:

Those directly interested in agriculture from a production standpoint are divided into two (2) classes. The interests of those classes are opposite or antagonistic. On the one hand we have a small owning class who depend upon exploiting the working class by rents, interests, and profits. On the other hand we have the actual tillers of the soil who have been ground down to dire poverty and robbed of all their rights and privileges.

All productive laborers have been exploited in a like manner as the landless tiller of the soil and both now find it necessary to join forces to obtain their natural rights. (STFU Constitution 1936, 1)

The constitution's preamble is followed by a description of the purposes of the union, which included the "mutual benefit of members who join together to secure and protect our rights and interests as individuals" and to "defend the rights of our fellow workers" (STFU Constitution 1936, 1). There is no explication of exactly which "natural" and "individual" rights the union fights for; nonetheless, the vision of the union as a mechanism for the claiming of rights by poor agricultural laborers is clear.

Poverty is again directly equated with the loss of rights in the 1936 Statement on Farm Tenancy, produced by the STFU for the governor's office. Here, the leadership upholds the class solidarity line by deftly disconnecting rights denial from race: "When one body of men are guaranteed privileges, immunities and rights by the authority of the state and its police power and [these are] denied to another solely on account of their poverty, democracy in the state is dead" (Statement on Farm Tenancy 1936, 24). This emphasis on poverty as the source for rights denial also appears in the statement's discussion of the poll tax, widely recognized as a *racial* disfranchisement measure; in fitting with the union ideology, the tax is reframed as an undemocratic means of "...penaliz[ing] a resident for his poverty" (Statement on Farm Tenancy 1936, 25).

This focus on rights – the lack thereof – led the leadership to proffer the union as a means for exercising and claiming rights. These efforts were boosted in 1935 when Congress passed the Wagner Act, guaranteeing the right of workers to unionize. The Act was written primarily in response to dissent among northern industrial workers and

specifically excluded agricultural and domestic workers – the two primary means of employment among the South's black population – from its provisions. Nonetheless, the STFU referenced the Wagner Act in urging prospective members to join the union, exhorting them to exercise their now legally protected right to do so (Figure 11).

The focus on rights dovetailed with the union's claims to be fighting for citizenship for agrarian southerners. Woodruff (2003) has provided the only significant analysis of citizenship and the STFU, arguing that, particularly for black southerners, joining the union was a manifestation of their on-going struggle for citizenship, defined as a series of economic and political rights: "...the right to receive a just return on one's labor, to live free from terror, to own property, to have equal access to the legal system and a lawyer, to move and to vote..." (Woodruff 2003, 5). In fact, much of the union's early activities focused on these goals. The union filed numerous lawsuits on behalf of croppers cheated out of AAA payments (primarily via eviction), retained legal council for those unfairly arrested for union participation and advocated for repeal of the poll tax (though, as noted, characterized this as a penalty for impoverishment, not a racial disfranchisement measure as it is viewed by Woodruff).

The leaders of the union also expressed the organization's interests and goals in terms of citizenship, explaining how the oppressive systems of the South prevented poor southerners from acting as full members of society. In the Statement on Farm Tenancy, the union noted the truly appalling level of funding for primary education within Arkansas, as well as urban-rural disparities in educational funding. The report implied that poor agriculturalists had become mired in 'backwardness' because they had been

Attention! Attention!

RAISE YOUR PAY!

Do Away With Slave Wages!

Organize Now

The United States Government gives you the right and protection to organize. It is now the law of the land under the "Wagner Act." It is your righteous duty to take advantage of this law which was passed for the protection of Laboring people. Strike out for your rights for better wages. Just people and thoughtful people will support you. Your government is now endeavoring to put purchasing power at the bottom. ORGANIZE, get more pay and help your neighbor prosper. Be 100 per cent American. Come on with the crowd. Be a man! Don't be a scab.

"Open thy mouth and judge righteously and plead the cause of the poor and needy."—Prov. 31-8.

Come Join Us!

SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS UNION

W. M. TUCKER, Organizer

Figure 11. STFU Organization Flyer, 1936. The leaders of the union focused heavily on rights, in this case exhorting prospective members to exercise the rights granted to them as laborers.

"...denied the opportunity to learn something of the nature of modern society" and therefore had no chance to become productive citizens. The report thus advocated the importance of state-supported education for not only rural children, but the rural adult population as well. Through education, rural Arkansans could overcome their backwardness and attain the rights denied to them (presumably on the basis of their poverty). Thus, the education section of the report ended with the following plea:

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union pleads alike for white child and Negro child, for the Negro man as well as the white man: it asks that all men and their children be allowed to have a full and complete chance to become intelligent and useful citizens. (Statement on Farm Tenancy 1936, 21)

In addition to framing the grievances of the union in terms of citizenship, union leaders plainly stated that, along (and in association) with the abolition of the tenancy system, the attainment of full citizenship for members was a core goal of the union. In his letter explaining the STFU's disaffiliation with UCAPAWA, J.R. Butler enumerated the myriad difficulties that the South presented to organized labor as a means of explaining the disastrous relationship between the STFU and the national union. In concluding the letter, Butler reiterated the STFU's true, southern objectives and purpose: to remove the "cancerous disease" of tenancy and to "march resolutely ahead to win citizenship and economic security for working farmers of the South" (Butler, Open Letter to the Friends of the STFU 1939, 8).

Butler's phrasing is significant, for it underscores the STFU's understanding of the connection between "citizenship" and "working," a connection that goes unrecognized by Woodruff. The commonality in the union's various invocations of

rights and citizenship was the status of union members as laborers. Members' role as laborers in the tenancy system led to their impoverishment, which in turn led to a loss of rights, which implied a lack of full citizenship for southern tenants and croppers. Even appeals to members to exercise their right to organize and join the union was made on the basis of members' status as "laboring people."

In connecting labor to citizenship, the union marshaled traditional conceptions of citizenship in the United States, which consist of a tangled web of discourses about rights and the economic marketplace. Since the nation's founding, thought on citizenship has been dominated by two ideas: natural rights and economic self-reliance. Shklar (1990) has demonstrated the importance of earning to acceptance in the early American republic, noting that only those who earned were considered fit for citizenship. Such conditions have led Marston and others to argue that earning was the foundation of American society: "Effectively, those who framed the new American Constitution devoted their efforts to creating a community of individuals, reflecting an institutional structure based on the shared paradigm of civil society as an economic marketplace..." (Marston 1990, 451).

This focus on earning and participation in the marketplace meant that from the outset the traditions of American citizenship were at odds with the liberal philosophy espoused by leaders of the new republic. While declaring universal inalienable rights and the equality of all individuals, the economic basis of citizenship excluded nearly all of the republic's female and non-white residents from being defined as citizens. Yet, despite such inconsistencies, narratives of natural rights and universal equality dominated

American conceptions of citizenship well into the twentieth century (Karst 1989) and obviously underpinned the STFU's interpretation and use of citizenship.

In the only extant analysis of citizenship and the STFU, Woodruff argues that the union strengthened black southerners' knowledge of their citizenship rights; this is undoubtedly true. However, Woodruff fails to fully interrogate the union's actual use of citizenship. The STFU's deployment of citizenship was part of a grander project that elevated poverty over race, that correlated poverty with rights denial, and that associated the claiming and exercising of rights with labor. This entire project was predicated upon the marginalization of racial discrimination – within the union, within the Jim Crow South and within traditional conceptions of citizenship in the United States. Thus, Woodruff's analysis is weakened by a failure to recognize that the union's use of citizenship was never meant to endorse racial equality, but rather was part of a reframing of the terms of southern disempowerment in a way that denied the full scope of black oppression.

Conclusion

The correspondence and other materials within the STFU archive illustrate that union leaders had a very nuanced understanding of the South as a regional entity. STFU leaders realized that there were a series of interrelated systems that worked to reproduce the South as an oppressive structure. The tenancy system perpetuated poverty, which was exacerbated by illiteracy, and both of these worked to propagate racism that was codified in Jim Crow laws. The union leaders understood, too, that the relationship

between these systems was malleable and could be manipulated in efforts to bring about regional change. Certainly the union's privileging of poverty over race was a pragmatic response to Jim Crow era political and social norms and archival materials demonstrate a certain level of paternalism on the part of union leaders. However, the emphasis on poverty was part of a broader union ideology in which discourses of rights and citizenship served as means to circumvent, and hopefully undermine, the Jim Crow and attendant systems through which the South was reproduced.

The union's use of citizenship illustrates how the leadership perceived the relationship between the South and the rest of the nation. In essence, the union used members' status as *American* citizens to combat *southern* inequality. The leaders of the union saw no contradiction, then, in simultaneously claiming both "Americanness" and "southernness," despite powerful narratives that drew sharp distinctions between the South and the rest of the country. The impoverished southerners who joined the STFU in the 1930s seemed to intuitively know what it would take another 30 years for scholars to plainly state: that, despite their 'backwardness' and disempowerment, southerners were and had always been Americans. The STFU's use of citizenship thus challenges the idea of the South as an internal other, which, in attempting to frame the construction of U.S. national identity and nationalism, fails to interrogate how southerners marshaled other national concepts to resist the marginalization of the region and its peoples (see especially Jansson 2003).

The systems of oppression that reproduced the South presented a particular set of obstacles to those wishing to organize labor within the region. The union's elevation of

poverty over race and marshaling of discourses of rights and citizenship reflects a strategic, complex response to those obstacles. Unfortunately, the union's leaders were not able to grasp how this response would create conflict with others who appeared to share similar goals. Later twentieth century scholars have blamed the STFU-UCAPAWA disaster on a host of factors: financial problems, particularly the inability of the STFU to meet UCAPAWA dues obligations; ideological conflicts between the socialist-led STFU and the communist-led UCAPAWA; the UCAPAWA's ignorance of the southern agricultural system and disregard for rural workers in general. While these were certainly factors, the animosity that developed between the STFU and UCAPAWA was underlain by a deeper, more fundamental conflict.

The CIO (parent union of UCAPAWA) organized in the 1930s largely as a result of dissatisfaction among northern and urban industrial workers, who were often excluded from the craft-based American Federation of Labor, the only national union of real import at the time (Zieger 1986). The CIO's primary goals – beyond securing recognition as a bargaining agent – concerned work in industrial settings: labor contracts, wage regimentation, a reduced work week, and social benefits. These objectives were generally foreign to poor sharecroppers in the South; while the STFU advocated for legally enforceable wage contracts, the reality is that most goals of the CIO were not germane to the tenancy/sharecropping system, in which work was only needed at certain times of the year, in which there were few social benefits to be gained, and in which basic necessities were supplied (even if at obscene prices and usurious interest rates) by the plantation furnishing system.

In affiliating with the STFU, the CIO-UCAPAWA approached southern agriculture as it had unionization in the industrial sector, hoping to add STFU locals to a larger bureaucratic organization that could exert political and financial influence to bring about change (Naison 1996). While the STFU, too, desired to bring about change, the organization's goals were entirely different. The STFU certainly wished to improve wages and working conditions; but, the union linked this to the securing of rights and citizenship. In essence, the CIO fought for workers rights, while the STFU fought for the rights of workers. That is, the STFU used members' status as laborers, and traditional connections between labor and citizenship, to fight for basic rights for poor southerners: the right to vote, the right of legal representation, the right to a state-sponsored education, the right to earn without chronic indebtedness.

The STFU's understanding of the South as a region, and UCAPAWA's indifference to this understanding, then, was a root cause of tension between the two organizations. The STFU's conceptualization of the South influenced the union's deployment of rights and citizenship as the means to bring about regional change. This fight for citizenship did not cohere with the broader goals of UCAPAWA, in which the majority of members did not lack basic citizenship rights. Joining the STFU was, as Woodruff argues, one manifestation of poor southerners' quest for full citizenship; the CIO's inability to comprehend the real impact of this lack of citizenship would inhibit the labor movement in the South until well after the Civil Rights era (see e.g. Griffith 1988).

CHAPTER V

THE FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union demonstrated an insightful understanding of how the systems of oppression associated with the Jim Crow era were interrelated and worked together to reproduce a poor and aberrant South. During the union's disastrous affiliation with UCAPAWA, STFU leaders came to realize that not everyone shared, or cared to share, this particular understanding of the region. Leaders of UCAPAWA, and the parent organization, the CIO, attempted to graft national norms onto the extant labor structures within the South, and showed little concern for what the STFU insisted were the root causes of poverty among southern agricultural workers. The tenant union's carefully crafted image of poverty constructed the issue largely in terms of rights – economic disempowerment precluded poor farm laborers from claiming and exercising political and social rights. This rights-based view of poverty was disregarded by national union leaders, and also brought the STFU into conflict with other organizations actively advocating change in the South.

One seeming adversary of the STFU was the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the New Deal agency charged with ameliorating rural poverty. The relationship between the STFU and the FSA is subject to competing interpretations; as noted, Grubbs

(1971) essentially credits the creation of the FSA to the union's influence. Holley (1975) concedes that the STFU did aid in the creation of the FSA, but demonstrates that the two organizations were philosophically opposed on the issues of southern agrarianism and poverty. In the mind of the STFU, the FSA was immersed in an ideology predicated on a fallacious Jeffersonian 'rural idyll' that did not adequately address the core causes of southern poverty circa the 1930s. For the FSA, the STFU was a nuisance, the 'squeaky wheel' that resulted in the agency's financial disbursements in the South being heavily skewed towards Arkansas.

The disagreements between the FSA and the STFU on agrarian policy, and particularly the issue of poverty, reflect fundamental differences in the conceptualization of the region – the nature of the region, the region-nation relationship, and the path and purpose of regional reform. In advocating the abolition of tenancy, the repeal of the poll tax, and increased educational funding, the STFU made a clear statement that change in the South must occur via change in the oppressive systems that maintained and reproduced the region. Thus, the STFU's vision was circumscribed – the union devoted little thought to the South's relationship with the rest of the nation, for change within the South was the organization's end goal. As a national agency, however, the FSA's purview was considerably more expansive and the agency's leaders necessarily had to consider the South in relation to the rest of the country. In the mind of FSA planners, change within the South was not, in itself, an end goal, but rather was to occur as part of a larger plan of economic rebalancing via regional integration and cooperation.

This chapter explicates how the leaders of the FSA (and those of the New Deal more generally) considered the South as a regional entity. The chapter explains the FSA's conception of the South through an examination of rural resettlement communities constructed within the region, particularly those housed within the state of Arkansas. These communities represented, depending on the view of the observer, a grand experiment in agrarian democracy or a detour into communistic collectivism; the true intent of the communities was neither democracy nor communism, but rather, nationalism. The communities represented one attempt by New Dealers to reconstruct the image and *raison d'être* of the American nation during the Great Depression. The exact nature and implications of this reconstruction effort are seen in the photographs produced by the Farm Security Administration, a portion of which are presented and analyzed here. The chapter begins, however, with a discussion of the creation of the Farm Security Administration, whose roots lay in the earliest days of New Deal programming.

The Farm Security Administration: Genesis and Evolution

Early Incarnates: FERA and the RA

By the time Franklin Roosevelt ascended to the Presidency in early 1933, the Depression had upended the nation's economy and its collective psyche. Roosevelt quickly launched plans to combat the Depression, prescribing 'recovery' for industry via the National Industrial Recovery Act, and 'relief' for the unemployed via the Federal

Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Initially, urban and rural workers received the same treatment under FERA regulations, but administrators soon realized the need for a specifically farm-based rural relief program. To that end, the Division of Rural Rehabilitation and Stranded Populations was created in 1934.

This new division was to aid distressed families in rural areas and people 'stranded' in one-industry towns where employment opportunities had evaporated during the Depression's early years. Programming was administered through state rehabilitation corporations; FERA distributed money to the corporations, which then initiated projects in accordance with FERA goals and guidelines. FERA programs included the extension of credit to farmers, land reform, and the construction of rural-industrial communities (Baldwin 1968); these programs would carry-over into the Farm Security Administration, characterizing the agency's mission and philosophical outlook until its demise during World War II.

The FERA credit program was restricted to farmers who were already on productive land; in exchange for a low-interest loan, the borrower agreed to follow FERA-dictated farming methods and adhere to a FERA-created farm and household budget. The credit program obviously favored those who already owned land; share tenants, sharecroppers and day laborers, landless farmers most in need of relief, were generally unable to obtain loans. In the state of Arkansas, over 90 percent of those receiving FERA loans were either small landowners or cash tenants (Kirkpatrick 1938, 22). Despite this relatively restricted scope, the FERA credit program was popular with

politicians and the public, for receiving a loan was viewed more favorably than receiving charity from the government dole.

FERA's insistence that participants in the credit program subscribe to particular farming methods reflects the agency's growing concern with land utilization in rural areas. Federal leaders believed that the plight of the rural poor was due primarily to imbalances in the "man-land" relationship (Baldwin 1968). These imbalances were created by, among other things, overpopulation, monocropping, soil erosion and the farming of submarginal lands (US Department of Agriculture 1941a). Thus, FERA insisted that those receiving loans incorporate soil conservation and restoration into their farming practices. FERA also launched a program in which the federal government purchased tracts of submarginal land, retired them from production, and rehabilitated them into conservation or recreation areas (Baldwin 1968).

The rural-industrial community program was intended to combine part-time industrial work with subsistence farming and to complement an industrial community program administered by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads within the Interior Department. The largest of the rural communities constructed by FERA was Dyess Colony, located in Mississippi County, Arkansas (Conkin 1959). Begun in 1934 and funded by the Arkansas Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, Dyess was jointly administered by FERA and the Works Progress Administration (WPA): FERA built homes and community buildings within the project; the WPA built the schools and roads (Pittman 1970).

Dyess Colony spanned over 17,000 acres and contained 300 homes on individual farmsteads of 20 to 40 acres each (Figure 12). While the Dyess homes have been described as being of poor quality (see Conkin 1959), the reality is that Dyess housing was degrees better than most rural Arkansans could hope for: the homes were small (three to five rooms), but all were wired for electricity; the three-and-four room models had modern, sanitary outdoor privies, while the five room model had indoor plumbing. By 1937, the colony had established the Dyess Electrical Cooperative, which supplied power to homes within the colony and to neighboring areas (Pittman 1970). The Dyess town center contained a two-story administration building, a commissary, a school, a hospital, a cooperatively run cotton gin and cannery, as well as three-dozen subsistence homesteads (Conkin 1959). Applicants for the Dyess project were carefully screened; only white, Protestant farmers who had previously owned land were eligible to participate in the colonization project (Conkin 1959; Pittman 1970).

Dyess Colony and the other community projects had barely gotten off the ground when the FERA was discontinued in 1935; most of the communities constructed by FERA and the Interior Department's Subsistence Homesteads Division were transferred into the newly created Resettlement Administration (RA), which was given three rather expansive directives: (1) to administer a national land-use program; (2) to resettle poor families from rural and urban areas, partially via the construction of suburban 'model communities'; and (3) to administer a broad-based rural rehabilitation program (Baldwin 1969). Thus, the Resettlement Administration was responsible for projects as diverse as forest restoration to the oversight of migrant labor camps. In order to provide some



Figure 12. Resettlement house in Dyess Colony, Arkansas. (Ben Shahn 1935)

structure to the agency, the leaders of the RA created separate divisions for rural and urban resettlement. The Division of Suburban Resettlement was responsible for the ‘model communities’ program, which resulted in the construction of several ‘greenbelt towns’ in the North; the Rural Resettlement Division took over administration of the communities initiated by FERA and the Subsistence Homesteads Program (Baldwin 1969).

The Resettlement Administration, too, had little time to make a real impact before another round of bureaucratic shuffling led to its demise. The RA was discontinued in late-1936; the functions of the RA were transferred first to the Department of Agriculture and then to another new agency, the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

The Farm Security Administration

The Farm Security Administration inherited the FERA's and RA's community programs, but by the time the FSA was created, political and popular sentiment had shifted even further away from the idea of 'relief' and more towards the notion of 'rehabilitation' as the means to combat the Depression. Thus, the FSA was to act primarily as a lending agency, intended to increase farm security by providing loans for the purchase of individual family farms (Baldwin 1969). The philosophy of the new FSA, then, stood counter to the seemingly collective nature of the FERA and RA community farm projects (though, in reality, the vast majority of these projects, like Dyess Colony, were focused on individual farmsteads as the basic operating unit).

While the FERA and RA had clearly been concerned with various aspects of rural poverty, the FSA was the first agency to tackle what the federal government perceived to be the full range of sources of rural impoverishment. The FSA Credo plainly stated, "We believe that if the causes of rural poverty are abolished, rural poverty will disappear" (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1941b, 66). According to the FSA, the causes of this poverty were: (1) overpopulation in rural areas; (2) the closing of the western frontier, which traditionally had absorbed excess rural populations; (3) soil erosion; (4) the loss of foreign markets, particularly in Europe, which appropriated resources via colonization; (5) agricultural mechanization; (6) indebtedness among small farmers; (6) low prices for agricultural commodities; and (7) a "bad tenure system" (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1941a). Thus, much like the STFU, the FSA considered rural poverty the result of a series of interrelated phenomena; however, the causes of poverty propounded by the FSA

were quite different than those put forth by the STFU, with “a bad tenure system” being only one in a myriad of agency priorities.

The FSA quickly expanded the loan programs instituted under the FERA and the RA. The Tenant Purchase Program, also known as the Farm Ownership Program, was designed to help the landless purchase farms; however, the existence of strict financial and technical requirements for eligibility meant that few landless farmers actually qualified for these loans and thus few actually benefited from what was intended to be the strongest program within the FSA. Instead, the Rural Rehabilitation Program, responsible for a grouping of activities inherited from the RA, proved to be the most popular and helpful aspect of FSA programming.

The anchor of the FSA’s rural rehabilitation platform was the rehabilitation loan program, a combination of credit, farm and home management planning and technical assistance that was meant to serve a ‘higher risk’ clientele than that of the Tenant Purchase Program (Baldwin 1968). Under the loan program, a farmer applied for aid and, much like with the FERA loans, agreed to abide by a farm and home plan coordinated with FSA workers. Each plan consisted of three parts: a ‘live at home’ plan in which families were required to produce most of their food and livestock feed on the farm; a farming plan that included soil fertility measures; and a plan for cash income from at least two sources (thus prohibiting monocropping). Farmers participating in the loan program were subject to frequent checks by FSA field workers to ensure that the plan was being followed (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1941a).

The conditions of the farm and home plans were meant to address what the FSA perceived to be the most pressing environmental and economic sources of rural poverty, particularly rural poverty in the South, where the Rural Rehabilitation Loan Program was most popular. The FSA also addressed other issues associated with southern poverty, mediating landlord-tenant relations and conflicts between indebted tenants and their creditors. In addition, the Public Health Section of the FSA launched a very successful medical program that provided routine health care to agricultural workers, who often suffered from chronic diseases historically (and exclusively) associated with the southern poor, such as hookworm and pellagra (Breedon 1988). Under this plan, laborers were enrolled in locally based (generally county-level) medical cooperatives that negotiated care and payment agreements with medical practitioners. The program also had an educational component geared toward illness prevention, primarily through improved household sanitation. Nearly one-third of all rural US counties participated at some point during the program's seven year lifespan; nearly every county in Arkansas enrolled, giving the state the highest rate of participation of any in the South (Grey 1999).

The FSA also inherited the resettlement projects begun under FERA and the RA. These projects were not a particularly good fit for the reformulated mission of the new agency, and not particularly welcomed either, as they tended to inspire controversy that threatened to overshadow more successful FSA programs (see e.g. Holley 1973). Funding for the resettlement communities was heavily skewed towards Arkansas (Table 6), most likely a response to both STFU agitation in the Delta region and the political

Table 6. Allocation of funding for FERA/RA communities.
(Source: Conkin 1959)

	Communities	Total
Arkansas	12	\$8,695,569
Georgia	4	\$4,068,350
North Carolina	3	\$3,584,164
South Carolina	3	\$2,527,775
Florida	2	\$2,499,630
Louisiana	3	\$2,165,761
Alabama	3	\$1,850,522
Mississippi	3	\$1,489,152
Kentucky	1	\$971,425
Tennessee	0	\$0
Virginia	0	\$0

influence of Arkansas Senator Joseph T. Robinson, a Roosevelt ally who served as Majority Leader of the Senate from 1933-1937.

The FSA Resettlement Communities of Arkansas

The FERA and RA built two types of resettlement projects in the South. Infiltration projects consisted of clusters of farms scattered throughout already extant agricultural districts. This type of project was common in upland areas, where the purchase of large, contiguous tracts of quality farmland was not possible. Since the farmsteads were dispersed, infiltration projects generally lacked many of the components of the second type of FERA/RA projects, which were constructed to be complete communities (Holley 1975).

The farming communities built by the FERA and the RA were most often created through the division of large plantations into smaller farms. For instance, the Plum

Bayou project, spanning nearly 10,000 acres in Jefferson County, Arkansas, evolved out of the government's purchase of the Wright, Ferda and Morrow plantations. The three plantations, as well as two neighboring smaller holdings, were divided into family-sized farms that were opened for settlement in the fall of 1936 (Figure 13). The blueprint for Plum Bayou was similar to that of Dyess Colony: small houses on individual farmsteads, with a community building and school located in the project's center. Later, a cooperatively run store, warehouse and cotton gin were constructed (Holley 1975). Nearly all of the twelve communities sited in Arkansas retained the individual family farm as the basic unit; the Lake Dick project, officially known as the Lake Dick Cooperative Association, was the only truly communal farming project in the state (Conkin 1959) (Figure 14).

The federal government, bowing to the mores of the Jim Crow South, instituted a policy of racial segregation within the community farm projects. As mentioned, Dyess Colony was open only to white farmers, as was the Plum Bayou project. The Biscoe, Clover Bend and Lonoke farms were also exclusively white; the FSA photo record, discussed in the following section, indicates that Chicot Farms and the Lake Dick project were also all white. The Lakeview, Desha and Townes projects were black (Holley 1975). Thus, fewer than 400 FSA farmsteads were open to the nearly 150,000 black residents of the Arkansas Delta.

Prospective residents of the FSA farming communities not only had to meet racial requirements, but also fall within the agency's selective criteria for participation in the

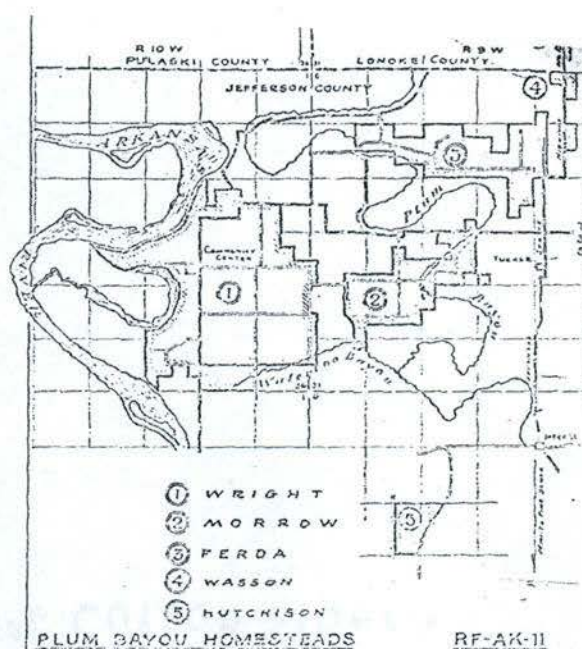


Figure 13. The Plum Bayou project. A plat of the Plum Bayou resettlement community, created from the consolidation of five adjoining plantations. Each plantation was subdivided into individual farmsteads, the basic operating unit of nearly all the FSA resettlement communities constructed in Arkansas. (From Mehlman 1970)

projects. Stated bluntly by a researcher commissioned to produce a report on family selection, the FSA resettlement projects required:

“...initiative and resourcefulness, ability to enter into community life and to profit from instruction and guidance, stability and reliability, married status with one or more children or others as dependents, freedom from infectious diseases or other disabilities preventing fulfillment of obligations, the experience necessary for a particular project, and inability to obtain credit elsewhere for shelter, food and farming purposes” (Holt 1937, 18)

As a result of these guidelines, farm project applicants had to be of a specific age (for men, between 30-55) and the gender ratio and staggering of ages among the children in

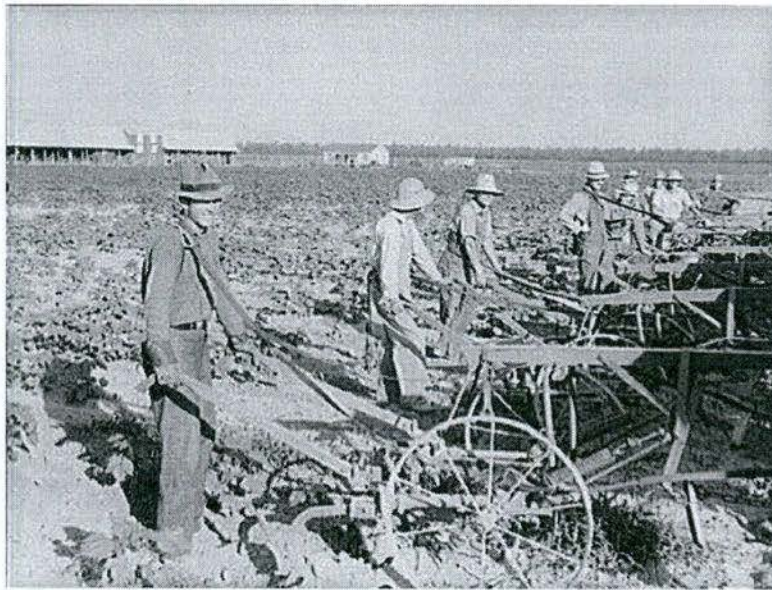


Figure 14. Farmers about to begin cooperative cotton cultivation at Lake Dick Project, Arkansas. (Dorothea Lange 1938)

each family was also considered to ensure that there were enough able-bodied hands to complete farm and household work. All family members were also subjected to extensive medical examinations that screened for physical, psychological, and moral defects that might inhibit successful adaptation to the work and lifestyle requirements of the farm community. Moreover, families also had to meet certain ideological requirements; in order to assure harmony and cooperation within the communities, selected families were not to have any "...extreme or singular economic, political, religious or social views" (Holt 1937, 42). Thus, socialists, non-Protestants and members of other seemingly subversive groups (such as, say, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union) were barred from participation in the FSA farms program.

The community farms were the most controversial project within the FSA. Critics admonished the government-as-landlord aspect of the program; they also cited the seemingly exorbitant cost of the projects, particularly since few of the cooperative enterprises operated by the farming communities ever turned a profit (Baldwin 1968; Holley 1975). Realizing that the farming projects would receive little public support, the leaders of the Resettlement Administration created an Information Division that was to act as a public relations board, presenting the agency's accomplishments to political leaders and the American public (Hurley 1972). The mission of the Information Division was carried out primarily through the activities of the Historical Section, which sent photographers around the country to document life during the Great Depression. These images, some of the most enduring of twentieth century America, have come to be known as the FSA Photographic Project.

The FSA Photographic Project

The Historical Section

The photographers of the Historical Section produced over a quarter-million images of American landscapes and people during the department's eight years of existence (Stange 1989, 107). Some of these images, such as Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother," received universal praise and, consequently, came to be regarded as somehow communicating the universal experience of the Great Depression. Lange's image was one of thousands that depicted migrant work and lives in the western United States. The

South, too, was a popular subject among FSA employees; in a study of 60,000 FSA images, Natanson found that a full 42 percent of photos were produced in that region (1992, 69).

FSA images were freely distributed to editors and publishers, and appeared on the pages of some of the country's most popular magazines, including *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Literary Digest*. The photos proved so popular that a collection was displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936; sets of images were also organized into traveling exhibits (Stange 1989).

Despite the enthusiastic response from editors, the Director of the Historical Section, Roy Stryker, denied that the photos were produced for publicity purposes. Biographer Jack Hurley has argued that, while Stryker may have understood the propagandistic aspects of the project, he was truly interested in the FSA photos as works of art (Hurley 1972). James Curtis has stated that Stryker considered the photo collection a project in historic preservation (Curtis 1989). As for Stryker himself, he regarded the purpose of the FSA Photo Project to be that of education:

If I had to sum it up, I'd say, yes, it was more education than anything else. We succeeded in doing exactly what [FSA director] Rex Tugwell said we should do: we introduced Americans to America. (Stryker and Wood 1973, 9)

Stryker strongly influenced exactly which America was introduced in FSA photographs. While often described as spontaneous snapshots of life during the Depression, in actuality many of the FSA photos were staged or posed, often in response to particular shooting scripts issued by Stryker. Stryker argued that there was nothing

disingenuous about staged photographs as long as the subjects were engaged in activities common to their everyday life (Curtis 1989). While many images were produced under the guidance of these scripts, the photographers of the FSA were also independent artists, and hence often strayed from the dictates issued by Stryker.

The artistry of FSA workers is especially apparent in the photos produced during the Historical Section's early years, in which the starkest images of the Depression's impact on individual lives and families were produced (Hurley 1972). During this time, FSA workers traversing the South became enthralled with the seemingly endemic poverty within the region (Thompson 2006). One of the earliest visits to the South occurred in the fall of 1935, when FSA photographers Ben Shahn and Arthur Rothstein toured the state of Arkansas.

Arkansas Through the FSA Lens

The dominant themes in the collection of Arkansas photos taken by Shahn and Rothstein can be reduced to two words: rural and poor. Aside from a handful of images of standard streetscapes in towns such as Marked Tree and Fayetteville, all of the photos produced during this trip were taken in rural areas. Even Shahn's series in Pulaski County, home to the state capital of Little Rock, focused on sharecroppers living in the city's outskirts.

In the work of Shahn and Rothstein, rural poverty in Arkansas is depicted as a phenomenon primarily affecting whites. FSA photographers were directed to follow standard social science practice of the time, so caption material on most images is sparse

and subjects generally remain anonymous (Curtis 1989). However, the dozen or so photographs that do make explicit reference to poverty all portray whites. Specifically, white Arkansans living in the Ozarks are referred to as 'destitute' mountaineers, stranded in 'deserted' towns, trying to eke out whatever existence can be had (Figure 15). The direct references to poverty in images of upland areas are absent in photographs of the state's Delta region and its residents, but the basic messages of whiteness and poverty remain.

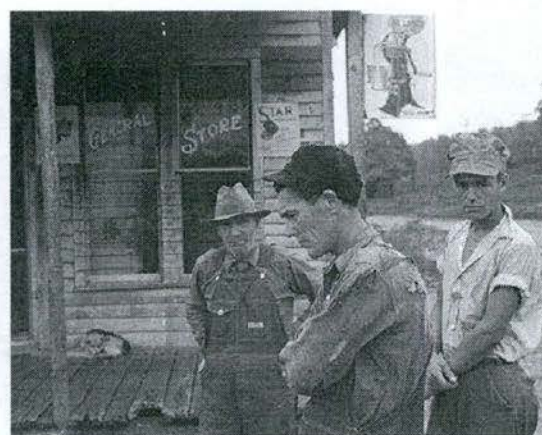


Figure 15. FSA images of southern white poverty. *Left:* Wife of destitute mountaineer, Ozark Mountains, Arkansas. *Right:* Zinc, Arkansas, deserted mining town. (Ben Shahn 1935)

Through this imagery, rural whites come to embody southern poverty, and consequently become the embodiment of southern difference as well. This is particularly true for white women and children, since many of the photographs were taken in private homes. Photos taken in the dilapidated cabins that characterized the poor rural white domestic sphere often depict gaunt or haggard looking women, the mothers of children who frequently appear equally forlorn (Figure 16). Through these photos, poor white

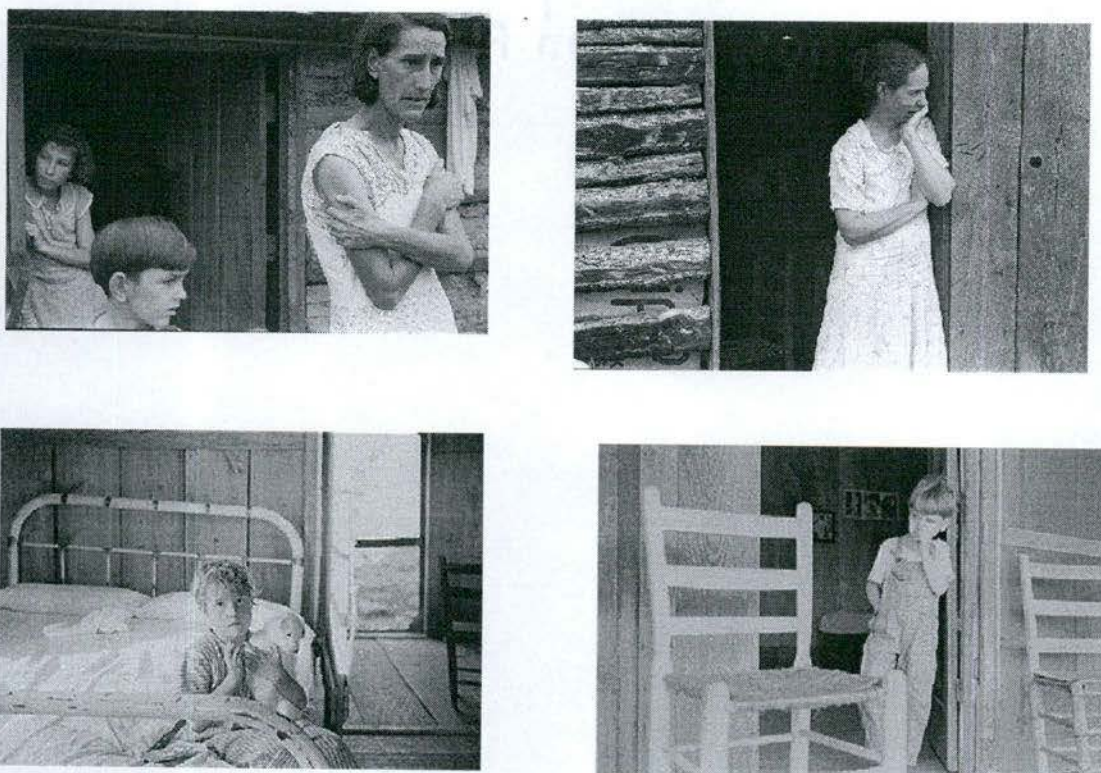


Figure 16. FSA images of white women and children. *Upper left:* The family of a rehabilitation client in the doorway of their home, Boone County, Arkansas; *upper right:* Rehabilitation client, Boone County, Arkansas; *lower left:* Sharecropper's child, Pulaski County, Arkansas; *lower right:* Child of rehabilitation client, Arkansas. (Ben Shahn 1935)

women and children become the primary bearers of the FSA's "two dimensional representation of [southern] deprivation" (Thompson 2006, v). Notably, these women and children rarely appear with male heads of household; in fact, in the entire collection of 168 photographs analyzed for this research, there are only two images in which white children appear with both of their parents. As Kidd (1993) has cogently argued, FSA images of white women and children in the absence of male partners/parents effectively disaggregate the family unit and deny poor southerners a conventional family identity, furthering their conceptualization as deviants from societal norms.

The conditions and effects of southern poverty – the dilapidated housing, the material deprivation, the tacit desperation – are clearly evident in photos of rural whites. These themes are generally lacking in images of black Arkansans, who were also a primarily poor and rural population. In fact, the dominant representations of blacks in the 1935 Arkansas photo collection actually marginalize black impoverishment. In this set of images, black men, women and children are overwhelmingly depicted as agricultural laborers. In 60 percent of the photos in which they appear as primary subjects, black Arkansans are shown either picking cotton, preparing to pick cotton, or otherwise engaged in activities related to cotton production (Figure 17). This depiction of black Arkansans as workers differs markedly from FSA images of desperately poor, unemployed, and generally disengaged whites.



Figure 17. FSA images of southern black laborers. *Left:* Arkansas cotton pickers; *right:* Picking cotton on Alexander plantation, Pulaski County, Arkansas. (Ben Shahn 1935)

FSA images of black women and children sharply contrast with depictions of poor white women and children. Here, black women are completely removed from the

domestic sphere, denied the opportunity to be wives or mothers, and cast only as anonymous cotton workers. These images, then, also disaggregate the family unit; but in this case, black children are often shown without any parental connection (Figure 18). By severing ties to parents and home, black children become isolated in the cotton fields, their role as laborers somehow naturalized by the absence of typical connotations of childhood.



Figure 18. FSA images of black children. *Left:* Cotton pickers, Pulaski County, Arkansas; *right:* Young cotton picker, Pulaski County, Arkansas. (Ben Shahn 1935)

Notably, none of the images of black Arkansans contain caption material that implies poverty, though the thousands of day laborers and sharecroppers that comprised the ranks of Shahn's nameless cotton pickers were among the poorest of southerners. Instead, the FSA photos essentially divorce these laborers from the idea of poverty. By defining the terms of southern poverty in images of destitute, debilitated whites, and by depicting blacks largely in contrast to these terms, the FSA images sever the connection

between southern blacks (and black labor) and southern poverty. The effect, then, is to create an image of the South that generalizes white poverty and naturalizes black labor.

The FSA's dominant representations of white and black southerners are both totalizing constructions that served to create a specific version of the South, one that Thompson (2006) argues was intended to garner support for New Deal programming. By reducing black and white southerners to what basically constituted a set of racially coded stereotypes, the FSA created an image of the South that illustrated the need for 'rehabilitation' programming and that therefore justified the FSA's existence and mission as a reform organization. The photographs produced by FSA workers reflect and reinforce the administration's understanding of the region, an understanding predicated on the notion that southern (white) poverty was problematic not only for the South, but for the nation as a whole. In the view of the FSA (and New Deal leaders more generally), southern regional difference threatened to block the nation's path to economic recovery.

The South, The Nation and the New Deal

In 1938, President Roosevelt requested that the National Emergency Council prepare a Report on Economic Conditions of the South. Such a study was needed, Roosevelt declared, because the South was "...the nation's number one economic problem..." (Roosevelt 1938, 1) Scholars of the South have seized upon this statement as a Presidential entrée into and endorsement of the discourse of southern difference.

However, these words are often taken out of their larger context; Roosevelt's full proclamation was as follows:

It is my conviction that the South presents right now the Nation's No. 1 economic problem – the Nation's problem, not just the South's. For we have an economic unbalance in the Nation as a whole, due to this very condition of the South.

Contemporary scholars are correct in claiming that Roosevelt regarded the South as different, but often fail to acknowledge that Roosevelt's interest stemmed from his belief that this difference represented a threat not just to the region, but to the entire country.

The Farm Security Administration also asserted, in much more direct terms, that the South posed a threat to the country's economic recovery. A leaflet detailing the causes and effects of rural poverty stated, "Worst of all, rural poverty means a heavy drag on our entire national economy. People who are trying to live on \$2 a week cannot afford to buy much of the goods made by our factories, and consequently, their low incomes lead to unemployment in the cities." Unable to contribute via purchasing, the rural poor also strained government coffers: "...they are a heavy burden to the taxpayer – more than 2,000,000 farm families have been on the relief rolls at one time or another since 1932" (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1941a, 8). The FSA claimed that the only way to eliminate rural poverty was to raise the impoverished to an "American" standard of living, so that they could participate in the burgeoning consumer culture meant to uplift the country out of the Depression.

The idea that the rural poor (and especially the southern rural poor) represented something 'unAmerican' was common in New Deal writings. Will Alexander, a well-

known southern liberal who directed the FSA in the late-1930s, argued that tenancy had subverted southern farmers' path to the agrarian version of the American dream, individual farm ownership. Alexander reasoned that the South's dependency on a tenancy system characterized by supervision and control had destroyed the self-reliance of southern farmers, robbing them of the character traits necessary for successful land and farm ownership (Alexander 1936). The FSA, Alexander declared, was attempting to 'rehabilitate' these farmers, to give them the financial and technical assistance needed to operate farms independently. The purpose of these rehabilitation programs was to develop within the South "...a pattern of rural life which will be worthy of American standards" (Alexander 1936, 539).

The FSA farming community program was one attempt by the federal government to 'rehabilitate' poor southerners by indoctrinating them into the new, more 'American' way of rural life envisioned by New Deal leaders. The idea was that through the application of 'scientific' home and farm management principles, poor southerners could somehow rationalize themselves out of poverty. A training manual for FSA field employees cautioned that, "It is necessary to point out to these families that the causes of their poverty are many, and that some of their difficulties can be dealt with through other than financial assistance. ... The families must be convinced that they are as much in need of better management and better methods as they are of the money advanced to them" (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1941b, 79). Thus was the rationale for the farm and home plans that rehabilitation clients were required to follow; the same manual

warned that, "Any mistakes or weaknesses in this plan will affect the family adversely and retard its rehabilitation" (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1941b, 98).

The farm and home plans required detailed budget and record keeping. The FSA manual went so far as to break down the consumption of certain foodstuffs: 1 quart of milk daily for each child over two years of age; three to four eggs per week for each adult; potatoes once or twice a day; ten to twelve servings of green or yellow vegetables a week (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1941b, 104). The FSA farm and home supervisor was to work with rehabilitation families to estimate how many livestock and other resources would be needed to produce the food quantities specified in the plan. The family was to record all of their activities in a book that, at the end of the year, would allow them to analyze weak points in their plan and make improvements for the future.

While men participating in the rehabilitation communities were often thought to lack farming knowledge, women were regarded as ignorant in the techniques of 'modern' housekeeping (Taylor 2003). Home economists were dispatched to rural southern households to instruct farm wives on the basics of canning and storing food, as well as how to properly dispose of garbage. Wives were also taught how to build fly traps and eliminate breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other insects in order to reduce the incidence of disease (Taylor 2003). Taylor concludes that these activities "...brought new standards of hygiene, self-sufficiency, morality and productivity to southern farm families" and "...served to bring the South's rural families closer to the mainstream of American middle-class culture" (Taylor 2003, 43).

The farming communities, then, were intended to address more than just the material deprivation associated with southern poverty. By the 1930s, there was widespread sentiment that poor southerners were in need of cultural rehabilitation as well. The Regionalists at the University of North Carolina supported this belief. In a study commissioned by the Social Science Research Council entitled *The South's Place in the Nation*, Rupert Vance placed blame for the South's peculiar cultural pathologies on the region's poor: "In so far as they are the products of fear, of ignorance, of the search for the scapegoats of misery, they are the products of poverty" (Vance 1938, 20). Vance concluded that, "...the prejudices inherent in Southern culture will respond best to economic treatment" that raised the standard of living among the region's 'common' men (Vance 1938, 20-21).

During the 1930s, the South became a laboratory for scholars interested in the study of culture (Rose 2005). Scholarly interest in culture as an explanatory framework converged with federal reform funding to bring social scientists to the South, considered "...the heartland of the nation's maladjustment" (Rose 2005, 337). Private foundations, including the Social Science Research Council, which commissioned the Vance report, funneled money into examinations of the region and its peoples. Race relations were a popular topic of study, and one of the best known socio-anthropological treatments of the impact of Jim Crowism, John Dollard's *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937), was produced during this time.

The federal government also treated the South as a field site for the study of culture and cultural change. The FSA established a Social Research Section that hired

scientists to produce reports on the characteristics of rehabilitation clients. Aiming to show that participation in the farming communities increased material living standards, which resulted in cultural improvement, these studies examined the minutest details of the family's lives. One study recorded the number of newspaper and magazine subscriptions within each household, as a clue to the progress families were making toward cultural rehabilitation (Loomis and Davidson 1938). Another report concerned the building of community within FSA resettlement projects; this study subjected clients to intense questioning about inter-family interactions, and produced complicated maps (Figure 19) of visiting relationships to demonstrate the success (or failure) of the farm communities (Loomis, 1940).

Understanding that the FSA was hoping to bring about cultural, as much as economic, rehabilitation lends new meaning to the photographs taken by Arthur Rothstein in Dyess Colony during his 1935 visit to Arkansas (Figure 20). These images illustrate not only the economic rehabilitation of poor southern agrarians, but their cultural progress as well. Far removed from the looks of defiance and despair among unemployed men in the abandoned town of Zinc, farmers in Dyess Colony wear expressions of strength, of pride and of hope. More importantly, in terms of cultural representation, the FSA farming communities allow for the reaggregation of the family unit. The project's emphasis on family-sized farmsteads and the farm and home plan's emphasis on "live-at-home" farming means that men no longer have to leave their families to labor in someone else's fields; women are no longer burdened with

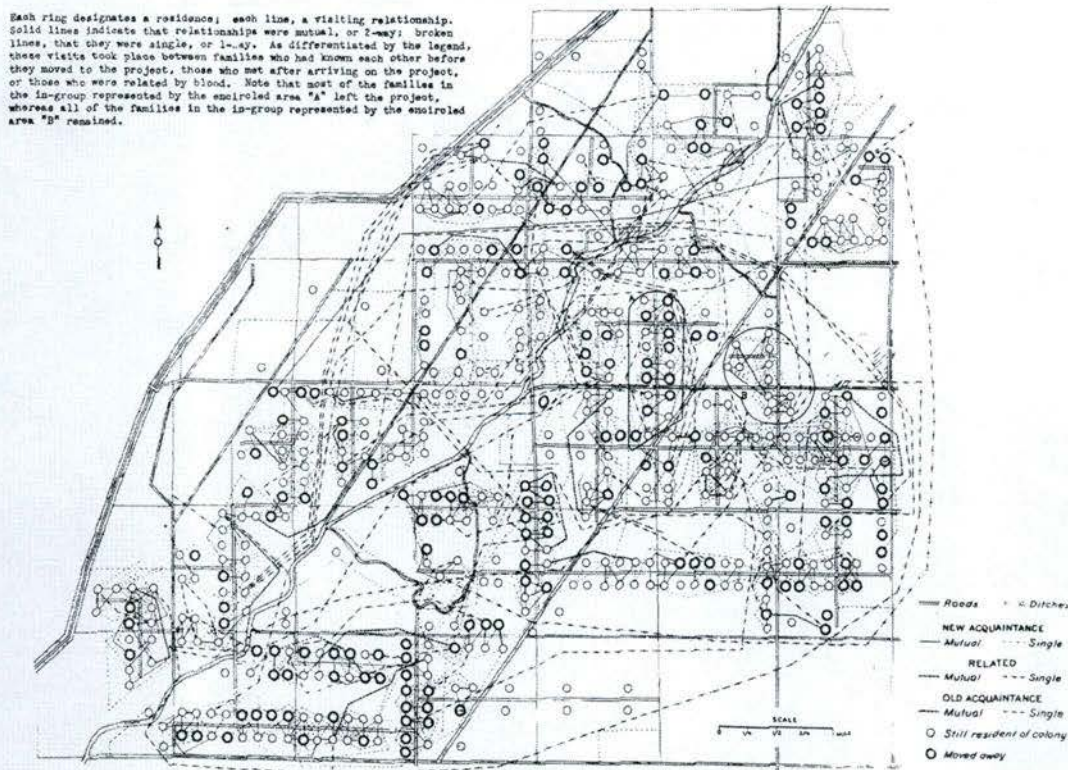


Figure 19. Visiting relationships between families, Dyess Colony, May 1936.
(Loomis 1940)

maintaining a household within the confines of decrepit, debilitated cabins. Children become happy and healthy members of society too, joining the quintessentially agrarian, American 4-H club, sponsored by the FSA's parent agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

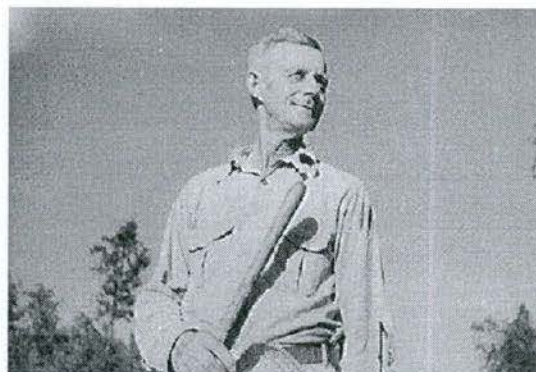


Figure 20. FSA progress in Dyess Colony *Upper Left:* Young, resettled farmer, Dyess Colony, Arkansas. *Upper Right:* Farmer who has been resettled on good land. Dyess Colony, Mississippi County, Arkansas. *Center:* Resettled farmer and family. Dyess Colony, Arkansas. *Bottom:* One of the children of Dyess Colony Project who is a 4-H club member, Mississippi County, Arkansas. (Arthur Rothstein 1935)

What Economic Nationalism Meant for the South

The resettlement communities administered by the Farm Security Administration reflected the wider concerns and aims of New Deal planners. The South's laggard economy was seen as a threat to the rest of the country, creating "...an unbalance that can and must be righted, for the sake of the South and of the Nation" (Roosevelt 1938, 1). For federal leaders, the country's ability to overcome the Great Depression rested largely on (re)integrating the South into the national fold. Thus, FSA director Will Alexander, speaking specifically to the politicians and peoples of the South, warned, "...sectionalism in planning or outlook must be thrown aside, for national progress is the only clue to sound regional or sectional prosperity" (Alexander 1936, 538).

The South was to be (re)integrated and the country (re)unified through policies rooted in economic nationalism, which sought to create a new, consumerist-oriented American society. Harold Ickes, who led the Interior Department, explained the philosophy of economic nationalism in a book aptly titled *The New Democracy*: "To put it into economic language, planning should be for the consumer. The major part of the activity of all of us is that of consuming. It is as consumers that we all have a common interest, regardless of what productive work we may be engaged in" (Ickes 1934, 142). Regional difference, particularly that of the South, threatened the goal of creating a unified consumer class, prompting Ickes to reiterate Alexander's warning: "Sectional and class differences must give way for the good of the people as a whole. Now that we realize the importance of cooperation and the interdependence of all the people, it is

urgent that we supplant diverse interests with an integrated nation. As consumers, we all have a common goal" (Ickes 1934, 154).

The consumerism associated with economic nationalism was intended to raise the poor, particularly the southern poor, to what were considered 'American' middle-class standards. The effect was to create an idealized, homogenized, predominantly white culture. The standards implemented in southern rural farm communities were the same as those implemented in urban resettlement projects. Within the new, consumerist-driven America, then, the lifestyles of rural southerners and urban northerners would be practically indistinguishable (Figure 21).

The FSA's treatment of the South was guided by these two beliefs: that the South was problematic and that economic nationalism presented a way to right the region. Like the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, the Farm Security Administration understood that a myriad of factors contributed to southern poverty. Also like the STFU, the FSA privileged whites and whiteness in addressing southern poverty, through both the unequal distribution of funds and through visual images that reinforced, rather than resisted, the South's extant racial hierarchy. But the larger goals of the FSA precluded the agency from viewing the South in the structural terms in which it was understood by the STFU. On a pragmatic front, the FSA needed the support of southern politicians; therefore the agency was not willing to launch a direct attack on tenancy, the poll tax, or racial segregation. On the other hand, the philosophies and tactics chosen by New Deal leaders in dealing with the southern poor made direct attacks on the South's oppressive systems unnecessary.

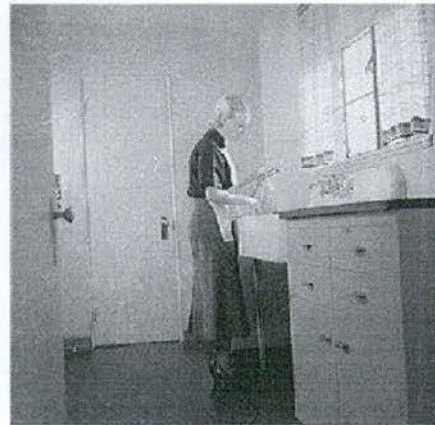
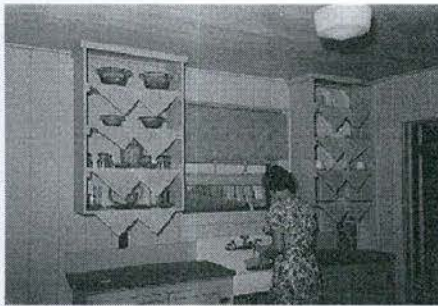


Figure 21. The New Deal's new democracy. The economic nationalism policies pursued during the New Deal sought to create a unifying middle-class culture. The photographs on the left were taken by Russell Lee in Lake Dick, Arkansas, a rural resettlement community. The images on the right, depicting a very similar (and highly gendered) lifestyle, were taken by Arthur Rothstein in Greenbelt, Maryland, an urban planned community. *Above left:* Kitchen in farm home, Lake Dick project, Arkansas (Russell Lee 1938); *above right:* interior of house, Greenbelt, Maryland (Arthur Rothstein 1936); *below left:* farmer in home, Lake Dick project, Arkansas (Russell Lee 1938); *below right:* interior at Greenbelt Maryland (Arthur Rothstein 1936)

The creation of a new American society predicated on economic nationalism presented a way for southerners to rid themselves of difference and backwardness, a chance to be 'rehabilitated' into people culturally acceptable to larger society. The government, then, used the notion of 'Americanism,' the new consumer-based national identity forged through recovery from the Depression, as basically a bypass around the political and economic systems of the Jim Crow South. If, through federal intervention, poor southerners could be rehabilitated into proper Americans, there was no need to evoke regional change through the region's indigenous structures. The expected result was that these structures would fall away naturally as southerners turned away from their aberrant, pathological regional culture toward a common, unifying national one.

Conclusion

Conflict between the Farm Security Administration and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union evolved from the two organization's differing conceptualizations of southern poverty. The STFU associated southern impoverishment with a lack of rights, while the FSA, reflecting the philosophy of federal leaders, attributed southern poverty to a host of mostly environmental and economic factors. These differing theorizations of the sources of poverty in the South led to differing ideas about the purpose of regional reform. For the STFU, reform in the South meant disbanding the oppressive systems of disempowerment and the guarantee of universal citizenship rights. For the FSA, regional

reform meant the economic and cultural integration of poor southerners into an emerging, middle-class American mainstream.

The FSA's focus on economic and cultural integration reveals a deeper philosophy about the South's relationship with the rest of the nation. Certainly the region's laggard economy was seen as a threat to the country's overall prosperity; but, more significantly, the South was thought to exist in a perpetual state of colonialism. Recent scholars have employed postcolonial theory to explanations of the South during the post-Revolutionary and immediate post-bellum eras (see Greeson 1999 and Winders 2003, respectively), but the notion that the South retained its coloniality was prevalent even in the 1930s. In his popular *Human Geography of the South* (1932), Rupert Vance declared, "the South remains largely a colonial economy," a statement he reiterated in his later report on *The South's Place in the Nation* (1938). The characteristics of the South's enduring coloniality included an economy reliant on the extraction and exploitation of raw materials, low standards of living, and a high debt-to-capital ratio (Vance 1938; Vance 1932).

The FSA's resettlement communities reflect this colonial attitude towards the South. The very language of the community program reinforced the notion. In agency literature, residents of the projects were often referred to, especially in early years, as "pioneers" or "homesteaders." Prior to being renamed (posthumously) for state FERA director William Dyess, the Dyess community in Arkansas was officially known as "Colonization Project #1" (Pittman 1970). The resettlement programs invoked traditional tropes of American expansionism, engendering the idea that participants in the farming

communities were partaking in a grand experiment, not just in the remaking of agrarian life, but in the remaking of America itself. The western frontier, which had historically accommodated the country's colonial and expansionist desires, and which had absorbed excess rural populations, was closed. Therefore, the FSA attempted to create an *in situ* frontier in the South, a frontier in which poor rural southerners possessing the right combination of traits – initiative, resourcefulness, stability and reliability – could shed their coloniality (i.e. their southernness) and become pioneers of a new American democracy.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Well, mamma got sick and daddy got down,
The county got the farm and they moved to town.
Poppa got a job with the TVA,
Bought a washing machine and then a Chevrolet.
“Song of the South” (Alabama)

The closing verse of Alabama’s “Song of the South” tells of the radical changes that the New Deal brought to one southern family. The song’s protagonists, poor cotton farmers who lost their land via tax default, were forced to move to the city. There, the father found work with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the New Deal’s most ambitious project in regional planning for the South. The TVA was charged with improving land conditions in the Tennessee Valley through flood control and soil conservation projects; but the most significant impact of the Authority on the lives of everyday southerners was the rural electrification project powered by TVA-constructed dams. The TVA, providing both employment and electricity, allowed the family in “Song of South” to enter into the middle-class, consumerist culture of washing machines and automobiles that New Deal planners championed through policies of economic nationalism.

Underlying the TVA was the notion of integrated management, of improvement in the human condition through improvement in environmental conditions. This

philosophy pervaded New Deal planning in the South and heavily influenced thinking on southern rural poverty. New Deal leaders, particularly those within the Farm Security Administration, attributed southern poverty to a host of environmental and economic factors that were believed to reflect the South's enduring coloniality. The idea of the South as existing in a state of perpetual coloniality extended back to the early years of American nationhood; by the 1930s, the region's chronic poverty and degraded environment were considered colonial traits. Approaching the South from this viewpoint, the FSA believed that rehabilitating the South's land and economy would eradicate the region's coloniality and allow the South (and southerners) to properly integrate with the rest of the nation.

The FSA's depiction of poor southerners, particularly poor white women and children, as victims of southern environmental and economic deprivation was one reflection of the agency's South-as-colony philosophy. These images, published widely in newspapers and popular magazines, were intended to illustrate for the American people the dire need for the South's 'rehabilitation.' The FSA marshaled narratives and tropes from the nation's colonial and expansionist past in discussions of rehabilitation projects, giving the impression of the South as a benighted land in which prosperity and propriety needed to be restored before the region could take its rightful place alongside the rest of the nation.

Unlike the FSA, the STFU could not draw on either internally or externally created narratives when conceptualizing the South. Both sets of narratives, if addressing poverty at all, depicted poor southerners in a derogatory manner. Moreover, no regional

or national narrative about the South could possibly allow for the racial unity that union leaders realized was vital to the organization's success. The STFU, therefore, had to conceptualize the South in a new and different way. To that end, the leaders of the STFU envisioned the South as a structure, as a specific set of interrelated oppressive systems, the most prominent of which was the tenancy system. STFU leaders considered the tenancy system and other social and political systems (such as the poll tax) as the means through which disempowerment was reproduced. Over time, these systems, and the relationships between them, became entrenched, which led to the institutionalization of the South as a regional entity. The reproduction of the oppression through the region's sociopolitical structures meant that the South itself, and not the individual systems of oppression, became the source of disempowerment.

The STFU engaged in what Giddens' terms the "dialectic of control" in its struggle for power to transform the South (and the oppressive systems that maintained the region). In so doing, the STFU necessarily had to look outside the region for sources and discourses of empowerment. The STFU thus deployed labor-citizenship connections contained within traditional national citizenship narratives. The marshalling of national narratives as a means of resisting regional disempowerment is a topic left largely unexplored in the theoretical literature and one that deserves more consideration, especially in light of recent arguments that American national identity was constructed through the severing of the South from the national body politic (see e.g. Jansson 2003).

This analysis of the FSA and the STFU highlights a shortcoming in current literature on the South. Contemporary studies of the South privilege theories of

difference over theories of region and actually tend to conflate the idea of southern difference and the South. That is, in claiming to provide analyses or make statements about the South, most studies instead analyze and make claims about the creation and significance of discourses of southern difference. As a result, these studies fail to acknowledge how the parties involved in constructing and/or contesting difference may have been operating under different conceptualizations of region.

This study has illustrated that the FSA and the STFU held vastly different understandings of the South; the FSA viewed the South through a lens of perpetual coloniality while the STFU crafted the South in structural terms. These differing perceptions of the South meant that the two organizations interpreted and constructed the material conditions of the South, particularly southern poverty, in very different ways. The FSA considered poverty one manifestation of the South's coloniality, while the STFU insisted that poverty was a result of the oppressive systems that reproduced the South as a region. These differing views of poverty, buttressed by differing views of region, meant that the two organizations had competing ideas about regional reform that relied on vastly different sets of supporting narratives.

The study also contends that in attempting to reform the region, that is, reform southern difference, the FSA, STFU and other actors in the 1930s were really reformulating the concept of region. In addition to the FSA and the STFU, the Nashville Agrarians and the North Carolina Regionalists were the strongest voices in debates about the South during the Depression. The Agrarians urged southerners to resist modernization, insisting that the South could and should be returned to the rural idyll

most often associated with the Old South. The Regionalists, intellectual adversaries of the Agrarians, believed that the South was a form a social organization and that by changing the relations that produced the South, southern society could be changed as well.

The FSA, the STFU, the Agrarians and the Regionalists were all, fundamentally, debating what to do about southern difference; but, on a more philosophical level, these actors were really creating two different ideas about the South (i.e. two different constructions of the region). The FSA and the Agrarians constructed the South as a static entity, one that was to be transformed, either through the eradication of colonial traits or the restoration of the agrarian idyll. The STFU and the Regionalists, in contrast, believed that the South itself could be a mechanism for regional transformation. Though the STFU and the Regionalists held different ideas about how the South was organized, both argued that regional change must occur through changes in the relationships and processes that maintained the region.

Constructivist literature that relies on postcolonial and other theoretical frameworks would acknowledge that the FSA, STFU, Agrarians and Regionalists maintained different understandings of southern difference, but would stop short of recognizing that these understandings were predicated on different conceptualizations of the South as a regional entity. This study points to the importance of making such connections, illustrating how different formulations of region impacted the interpretation of material conditions within the region. The conflation of 'southern difference' with 'South' in much of the constructivist literature is due largely to its disengagement with

regional geography. This work has illustrated that regional geography has much to offer contemporary southern studies and has shown the importance of the region as a framework for understanding regional difference of the South.

In Retrospect

In the eight decades since the Great Depression, much has been written about the activities of the STFU and the FSA in the South; most of these works have attempted to assess the success (or, more often, failure) of the two organizations in bringing about regional reform. The reality is that neither the STFU nor the FSA reached most of the millions of poor agrarians in need of aid. The STFU had limited financial resources and therefore encountered difficulty in organizing and sustaining locals far away from its base in northeastern Arkansas. FSA rehabilitation loans certainly helped some, but the loan program, as well as the community farm project, favored better-off farmers, excluding most sharecroppers and day laborers from the scope of the agency's programming.

The FSA community farms were, even at the time, considered failures. The projects were costly and rarely turned a profit. Moreover, despite careful screening of 'settlers,' most projects experienced high resident turnover. A study completed in the spring of 1936 showed that 179 families had already migrated into and out of Dyess Colony in just one-and-a-half years of the project's existence (Loomis 1940). Residents complained of over-regulation by the FSA, principally because of the detailed record keeping necessary under the farm-and-home plans. In addition, residents were irked by

an apparent lack of privacy, stemming from frequent visits by project managers, home economists, and government researchers (Holley 1975).

The Farm Security Administration was largely defunded during World War II, as the economy revived and government monies were rededicated to the war effort. After the war, the government divested its interest in the projects; many of the communities disbanded, but some remain. Dyess Colony is now a town of about 400 people. Most of the FSA-sponsored houses constructed on the project's individual farmsteads were razed long ago, but much of the housing built in the town's center remains. The community buildings had fallen into disrepair, but a restoration project has been launched in recent years (Figure 22). The town is attempting to capitalize on its unique history, hosting Dyess Days, an annual summer event that celebrates the town and the history and culture of the Arkansas Delta more generally.

About 15 miles southwest of Dyess, in the town of Tyronza, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union Museum recently opened. The STFU, which faced such fierce opposition in the Delta that union leaders were forced to move across the Mississippi River to Memphis, is now memorialized and hoped to serve as a tourist draw. The STFU Museum is located on the site where the gas station owned by Clay East and the dry cleaning store owned by H.L. Mitchell stood in the early-1930s (Figure 23). The museum contains displays that detail the evolution of the cotton culture in the Arkansas Delta, illustrate life in the Delta during the Depression and document the union's history.

As for the union itself, the STFU never recovered from the UCAPAWA catastrophe. By the eve of World War II, the STFU essentially existed in name only;



Figure 22. Administration building, Dyess, Arkansas. Once used to house the colony's administrative offices, this building is currently under renovation with plans to turn the structure into the Johnny Cash Memorial, dedicated to the life and career of Dyess' most famous resident. (Photo by author)

whatever functioning locals remained were absorbed into the National Farm Labor Union after the war (Mitchell, 1979). Scholars attempting to understand the union have claimed that the organization was largely a failure (see e.g. Stephens, 1941); in material terms this contention is difficult to dispute: the union's strikes were often ineffective, failing to secure written rental contracts or stable wages. The union fell far short of other goals as well, namely the abolition tenancy and the repeal of the poll tax.

To argue that the STFU was a failure because the union could not overturn the oppressive systems of the Jim Crow South is simplistic and does not fully consider the



Figure 23. The Southern Tenant Farmers Museum, Tyronza, Arkansas.
(Photo by author)

circumstances under which the union operated. In some aspects, the union was quite successful. Due to the publicity generated by the union's leadership, the plight of sharecroppers became a national issue. The union made headlines in newspapers across the country and a March of Time news crew created a short film about croppers and the STFU that ran prior to movie showings in theaters nationwide. Through this and other national publicity, the STFU was able to strongly influence how those outside the region understood both sharecroppers and the South.

While some scholars contend that this ability to generate publicity was the union's greatest success (see e.g. Auerbach 1966), others have argued that the union's enduring legacy lies in the example it provided for the Civil Rights movement. Mindful of the

bloodshed that had erupted around unionization in Elaine in 1919, the STFU adopted a policy of non-violence. As H.L. Mitchell explained, "If they shot into our meetings, we would just run and not fire back because if we did, it would mean that the Negro members would be slaughtered and probably some of the white leaders too" (Mitchell 1979, 352).

This philosophy of non-violence extended to the union's strike and protest activities. In January 1939, Owen Whitfield, a black sharecropper, peripatetic preacher and STFU member organized a protest demonstration in the Missouri bootheel. The protest was called in response to the mass eviction of tenants and croppers following changes to the AAA that required landowners to double the parity payment given to renters. Evicted from their land and with nowhere to go, over 1,000 people set up makeshift camps along state highways in the bootheel (Cantor 1969). The demonstration went on for several days before the governor ordered the forced removal of the protestors, a scene captured on film by FSA photographers (Figure 24). Due largely to these images, the Missouri roadside demonstration was national news for several weeks; but, like most union-affiliated activities, the protest resulted little material gain for the participants. However, the event proved that that public demonstrations could serve as "peaceful weapons for social change" (Cantor 1969, *i*), and the tactic was later adopted by civil rights advocates.



Figure 24. Scene from the Missouri roadside protest. State highway officials moving sharecroppers away from roadside to area between the levee and the Mississippi River, New Madrid County, Missouri. (Arthur Rothstein 1939).

The influence of the STFU on the Civil Rights movement is a topic that deserves greater exploration, as does how participation in the union may have affected white members' racial attitudes in the long-term (Beigert 1998). There is also a need for more incisive works on the intersections of race and class, and especially gender, within the STFU. By the leaders' own admissions, women played a critical role in the union, often performing tasks that men were unwilling to do. George Stith remembered, "Women were very active and made a lot of the decisions. Women decided to do things that men felt like they couldn't do. We had several locals around Cotton Plant and I believe in one

of the locals all the officers were women. This was because men were afraid" (Wise and Thrasher 1982, 132).

While women members may have been bolder than their male counterparts, they often faced difficulty when seeking leadership roles within the union. Payne (1998) has cogently described how the South's racialized and classed standards of femininity often worked against poor white women seeking greater authority within the STFU.

Specifically, black women could exhibit behaviors and access cultural realms that white women could not, lest they be considered 'unladylike.' Thus, while union leaders recalled Myrtle Lawrence as one of the union's most effective white female organizers, there is little documentation of her activities in the union papers, largely because the leaders regarded her spontaneity and outspokenness as unfeminine and embarrassing for the organization. Poor white women, were held to a highly particular set of cultural standards; the very traits that made them effective leaders required them to transgress those standards and alienated them from the union's predominantly male leadership.

The FSA farm communities constructed in the Arkansas Delta likewise merit further investigation. In fact, the FSA farms have received much less scholarly attention than the tenant farmers union. One topic desperately in need of exploration is the politics involved in locating the communities. While some communities, such as Dyess, were constructed in sparsely populated areas on land owned by lumber companies, other projects, such as Plum Bayou, were built over pre-existing plantations. There is nothing in FSA records to indicate what became of the farm workers living on those plantations prior to the government's purchase of the land. However, there is some evidence to

suggest that the construction of the FSA farming projects entailed a great deal of displacement, a burden borne primarily by black southerners. •

In his autobiography, John Scott, a minister and civil rights activist, recalled what happened to his community when the FSA decided to locate a farm project nearby. Scott and his neighbors lived in Transylvania, in East Carroll Parish, Louisiana; most worked as croppers and tenants, many on land that had been farmed by their families since the slavery era. Given that many residents had ties to the land extending back several generations, Scott was "...really surprised when a white man told me one day that the Farm Security Administration now had possession of the Abston, Crump and Wynne land. Plans had already been laid to move out all the blacks, about 250 families at that time in 1938, and resell the property mostly to poor whites. He said that the local administrator and certain white people already living in the Transylvania area had had a meeting and decided our land was too rich for black folks to have" (Scott 2003, 82). The FSA forcibly evicted black residents from Transylvania and appropriated the community's schools and churches for use by white 'settlers' in the FSA project. Most black residents were relocated to Thomastown, about twenty-five miles to the south. Their lives disrupted, the new residents of Thomastown often had difficulty reestablishing themselves and their livelihoods; some ended up working as day laborers for the new white residents of the FSA's Transylvania project (Scott 2003).

Conclusion

John Scott's story of displacement at the hands of the FSA and Arthur Rothstein's photographs of state police removing protesting sharecroppers demonstrate that there were many localized battles over race and place in the Depression-era South. The focus of this study has been on region and how various reform groups in the South contested the meaning of region during the Depression. It is important to remember, however, that these battles over the meaning of region were often enacted in specific localities: Tyronza, Dyess, Transylvania and many others that never made national headlines.

Some proponents of the 'new' regional geography argue that regions are entirely social constructs and should be unbounded to prevent the 'fixing' of social relations (e.g. Allen et al 1998). Such a proposition is shortsighted, failing to take into account the real impact that regional formations have on peoples' lives. Moreover, recent constructivist studies of the South have examined the ways in which the South was created through the work of some of the region's most famous scholars and artists, such as Howard Odum, the Nashville Agrarians, and William Faulkner (see e.g. O'Brien 1979; Gray 1986) – all rather well-to-do white men. If we accept the proposition that the South was a social construction, an idea formulated through the work of educated elite white men, then the struggles of poor southerners somehow seem less meaningful. For the millions of southerners – black and white – seeking justice and empowerment, the South was a real entity that impacted, in dramatic ways, their daily existence. Studies on the South, as a

region and as a construct, need to be grounded so as not to undermine the validity of their fight.

REFERENCES

- Agnew, John. 1999. Regions on the mind does not equal regions of the mind. *Progress in Human Geography* 23, no. 1: 91-96.
- Aiken, Charles. 1998. *The cotton plantation South since the Civil War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Alexander, William. 1936. Rural resettlement. *Southern Review* 1, no. 3: 528-539.
- Allen, John, Doreen Massey and Allen Cochrane, eds. 1998. *Rethinking the region*. London: Routledge.
- American National Red Cross. 1928. *The Mississippi valley flood disaster of 1927: official report of the relief operations*. Washington, D.C.: The American National Red Cross.
- Applebome, Peter. 1996. *Dixie rising: how the South is shaping American values, politics and culture*. New York: Times Books.
- Arnold, Morris. 1993. The Delta's colonial heritage. In *The Arkansas Delta: land of paradox*, ed. Jeannie Whayne and Willard Gatewood, 58-68. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- _____. 1991. *Colonial Arkansas, 1686-1804: a social and cultural history*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Ashmore, Harry. 1958. *An epitaph for Dixie*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Auerbach, Jerold. 1966. Southern Tenant Farmers Union: socialist critics of the New Deal. *Labor History* 7, no. 1: 3-18.
- Ayers, Edward. 1996. What we talk about when we talk about the South. In *All over the map: rethinking American regions*, ed. Edward Ayers, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Stephen Nissenbaum and Peter Onuf. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Baldwin, Sidney. 1968. *Poverty and politics: the rise and decline of the Farm Security Administration*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Barrows, Harlan H. 1923. Geography as human ecology. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 13, no. 1: 1-14.
- Biegert, Melissa Langley. 1998. Legacy of resistance: uncovering the history of collective action by black agricultural workers in central east Arkansas from the 1860s to the 1930s. *The Journal of Social History* 32, no 1: 73-99.
- Biles, Roger. 1994. *The South and the New Deal*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Bolton, S. Charles. 1998. *Arkansas, 1800-1860: remote and restless*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Breeden, James. 1988. Disease as a factor in southern distinctiveness. In *Disease and distinctiveness in the American South*, ed. Todd Savitt and James Young, 1-28. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Butts, J.W. and Dorothy James. 1961. The underlying causes of the Elaine riot of 1919. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 20, no 1: 95-104.
- Cameron, Ardis. 2005. Introduction. In *Looking for America: the visual production of nation and people*, ed. Ardis Cameron, 1-12. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Cantor, Louis. 1969. *A prologue to the protest movement: the Missouri sharecropper roadside demonstration of 1939*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Carlton, David. 1995. How American is the American South? In *The South as an American problem*, ed. Larry Griffin and Don Doyle, 33-56. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Cash, Wilbur J. 1941. *The mind of the South*. New York: A.A. Knopf.
- Cobb, James. 2005. *Away down South: a history of southern identity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____ and Michael Namorato, ed. 1984. *The New Deal and the South*. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press.
- Conkin, Paul. 1959. *Tomorrow a new world: The New Deal community program*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Conrad, David. 1965. *The forgotten farmers: the story of sharecroppers in the New Deal*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Cortner, Richard. 1988. *A mob intent on death: the NAACP and the Arkansas riot cases*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Coulter, E. Merton. 1964. What the South has done about its history. In *The pursuit of southern history*, ed. George Tindall. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Current, Richard. 1983. *The northernization of the South*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Curtis, James. 1989. *Mind's eye, mind's truth: FSA photography reconsidered*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Daniel, Pete. 1977. *Deep'n as it come: the 1927 Mississippi River flood*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- DeBlack, Thomas. 2003. *With fire and sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Degler, Carl. 1987. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis: the South, the North and the nation. *Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 1: 3-18.
- Dollard, John. 1937. *Caste and class in a southern town*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dougan, Michael. 1976. *Confederate Arkansas: the people and policies of a frontier state in wartime*. University, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Egerton, John. 1995. The end of the South as an American problem. In *The South as an American problem*, ed. Larry Griffin and Don Doyle, 259-274. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- _____. 1974. *The Americanization of Dixie: The southernization of America*. New York: Harper's Magazine Press.
- Fannin, Mark. 2003. *Labor's promised land: radical visions of gender, race and religion in the South*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Friedlander, E.J. 1979. The miasmatic jungles: reactions to H.L. Mencken's 1921 attack on Arkansas. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 38, no 1: 63-71.

- Gaston, Paul. 1970. *The new South creed: a study in southern mythmaking*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Gatewood, Willard. 1993. The Arkansas Delta: deepest of the deep South. In *The Arkansas Delta: land of paradox*, ed. Jeannie Whayne and Willard Gatewood, 3-25. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gilbert, Anne. 1988. The new regional geography in English and French-speaking countries. *Progress in Human Geography* 12, no 2: 208-228.
- Gordon, Fon Louise. 1995. *Caste & class: the black experience in Arkansas, 1880-1920*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Grant, Mary Sue. 2000. *North over South: northern nationalism and American identity in the antebellum era*. Lawrence, KS: University Press Kansas.
- Gray, Richard. 1986. *Writing the South: ideas of an American region*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greeson, Jennifer. 1999. The figure of the South and the nationalizing imperatives of early United States literature. *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12, no 2: 209-248.
- Grey, Michael. 1999. *New Deal medicine: the rural health programs of the Farm Security Administration*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Griffin, Larry. 1995. Why was the South a problem to America? In *The South as an American problem* ed. Larry Griffin and Don Doyle, 10-32. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- _____ and Don Doyle, ed. 1995. *The South as an American problem*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Griffith, Barbara. 1988. *The crisis of American labor: operation Dixie and the defeat of the CIO*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Grubbs, Donald. 1971. *Cry from the cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Hall, Robert. 1935. The geographic region: a résumé. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 25, no. 3: 122-136.

- Hanson, Gerald and Carl Moneyhon. 1989. *Historical atlas of Arkansas*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Hartshorne, Richard. 1939. *The nature of geography: a critical survey in current thought in light of the past*. Lancaster, PA: The Association of American Geographers.
- Hobson, Fred. 1974. *Serpent in Eden: H.L. Mencken and the South*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Hoffsommer, Harold. 1935. The AAA and the cropper. *Social Forces* 13, no. 4: 494-502.
- Holley, Donald. 1975. *Uncle Sam's farmers: the New Deal communities of the lower Mississippi valley*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- _____. 1973. Trouble in paradise: Dyess Colony and Arkansas politics. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3: 203-216.
- Holt, John. 1937. See U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1937.
- Hudson, Ray. 1990. Rethinking regions: some preliminary considerations on regions and social change. In *Regional geography: current developments and future prospects*, ed. Ron Johnston, Joost Hauer and Gerard Hoekveld, 67-84. London: Routledge.
- Hurley, Jack. 1972. *Portrait of a decade: Roy Stryker and the development of documentary photography in the thirties*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Ickes, Harold. 1934. *The new democracy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Kidd, Stuart. 1993. The Farm Security Administration Photographic Project's reinvention of the southern poor white in the 1930s. In *Rewriting the South: history and fiction*, ed. Honnighausen, Lothar and Valeria Gennaro Lerda, 219-230. Tübingen, Germany: Francke.
- Kirkpatrick, E.L. 1938. See U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1938a.
- Jamieson, Stuart. 1945. See U.S. Department of Labor. 1945.
- Jansson, David. 2003. Internal orientalism in America: W.J. Cash's *The mind of the South* and the spatial construction of American national identity. *Political Geography* 22, no. 3: 293-316.

- Karst, Kenneth. 1989. *Belonging to America: equal citizenship and the Constitution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Kolchin, Peter. 2003. *A Sphinx on the American land: The nineteenth-century South in comparative perspective*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Loomis, Charles. 1940. See U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1940.
- _____ and Dwight Davidson. 1938. See U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1938b.
- Marston, Sallie. 1990. Who are the people?: gender, citizenship and the making of the American nation. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 8, no. 4: 449-458.
- McNeilly, Donald. 2000. *The old South frontier: cotton plantations and the formation of Arkansas society, 1819-1861*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Mencken, H.L. 1920. The Sahara of the bozart. In *Prejudices, second series*, 136-154. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Mitchell, Harry Leland. 1979. *Mean things happening in this land: the life and times of H.L. Mitchell, co-founder of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union*. Montclair, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun & Co.
- _____. 1973. The founding and early history of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 32, no 4: 342-369.
- Moneyhon, Carl. 1997. *Arkansas and the new South, 1874-1929*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- _____. 1994. *The impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Murphy, Alexander. 1991. Regions as social constructs: the gap between theory and practice. *Progress in Human Geography* 15, no 1: 22-35.
- Murray, Gail. 1970. Forty years ago: the Great Depression comes to Arkansas. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 4: 291-312.
- Naison, Mark. 1996. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the CIO. In *We are all leaders: the alternative unionism of the 1930s*, ed. Lynd, Staughton, 102-116. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Natanson, Nicholas. 1992. *The black image in the New Deal: the politics of FSA photography*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

- O'Brien, Michael. 1979. *The idea of the American South, 1920-1941*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Odum, Howard. 1938. *American regionalism: a cultural-historical approach to national integration*. New York: H. Holt & Company.
- _____. 1936. *Southern regions of the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Ogden, Frederic. 1958. *The poll tax in the South*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Osterweis, Rollin. 1973. *The myth of the lost cause, 1865-1900*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.
- Otto, John. 1999. *The final frontiers, 1880-1930: settling the southern bottomlands*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Paasi, Anssi. 2004. Place and region: looking through the prism of scale. *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 4: 536-546.
- _____. 2002. Place and region: regional worlds and words. *Progress in Human Geography* 26, no. 6: 802-811.
- Payne, Elizabeth. 1998. The lady was a sharecropper: Myrtle Lawrence and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. *Southern Cultures* 4, no. 2: 5-27.
- Perkins, Van. 1969. *Crisis in agriculture: the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the New Deal, 1933*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Phillips, Ulrich B. 1928. The central theme in southern history. *The American Historical Review* 34, no. 1: 30-43.
- _____. 1918. *American Negro slavery: a survey of the supply, employment and control of Negro labor as determined by the plantation regime*. New York: D. Appleton & Company.
- Pittman, Dan. 1970. The founding of Dyess Colony. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 4: 313-327.
- Pollard, Edward. 1867. *The lost cause: a new southern history of the War of the Confederates*. New York: E.B. Treat & Company.
- Pudup, Mary Beth. 1988. Arguments within regional geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 12, no. 3: 369-390.

- Ransom, John Crowe. 1930. Introduction: a statement of principles. In *Twelve Southerners. I'll take my stand: the South and the agrarian tradition*, ix-xx. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers.
- Ransom, Roger and Richard Sutch. 2001. *One kind of freedom: the economic consequences of emancipation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, Henry. 1936. *Cotton and the AAA*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- Roberts, Bobby. 1993. Desolation Itself: The Impact of the Civil War. In *The Arkansas Delta: land of paradox*, ed. Jeannie Whayne and Willard Gatewood, 70-93. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Rogers, O.A. 1960. The Elaine race riots of 1919. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 19, no 2: 142-150.
- Roosevelt, Franklin. 1938. The President's letter. In *Report on Economic Conditions of the South*, 1-2. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Rose, Anne. 2005. Putting the South on the psychological map: the impact of region and race on the human sciences during the 1930s. *The Journal of Southern History* 71, no. 2: 321-356.
- Rose, Gillian. 2001. *Visual methodologies*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Royce, Edward. 1993. *The origins of southern sharecropping*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Sauer, Carl. 1938. *The morphology of landscape*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schwartz, Joan. 2003. More than 'competent description of an intractably empty landscape': a strategy for critical engagement with historical photographs. *Historical Geography* 31: 131-150.
- Scott, John and Cleo Scott Brown. 2003. *Witness to the truth: my struggle for human rights in Louisiana*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Sellers, Charles, ed. 1960. *The southerner as American*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Shklar, Judith. 1991. *American citizenship: the quest for inclusion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Shlomowitz, Ralph. 1979. The origins of southern sharecropping. *Agricultural History* 53, no. 3: 557-575.
- Smith, Douglas. 1988. *The New Deal in the urban South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Smith, Frank E. 1964. *Look away from Dixie*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Stange, Maren. 1989. *Symbols of ideal life: social documentary photography in America, 1890-1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stephens, Oren. 1941. Revolt in the Delta: what happened to the sharecroppers union? *Harpers Magazine* 183: 656-664.
- Stockley, Grif. 2001. *Blood in their eyes: the Elaine race massacre of 1919*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Sturken, Marita and Lisa Cartwright. 2001. *Practices of looking: an introduction to visual culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stryker, Roy and Nancy Wood. 1973. *In this proud land: America, 1935-1943, as seen in the FSA photographs*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd.
- Sydnor, Charles. 1945. The southern experiment in writing social history. *The Journal of Southern History* 11, no. 4: 445-468.
- Taylor, Brenda. 2003. The Farm Security Administration and rural families in the South: home economists, nurses and farmers, 1933-1946. In *The New Deal and beyond: social welfare in the South since 1930*, ed. Elna Green, 30-26. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Thompson, Angela. 2006. Ethics of seeing and politics of place: FSA photography and literature in the American South. Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon.
- Tindall, George. 1964. Mythology: a new frontier in southern history. In *The idea of the South: pursuit of a central theme*, ed. Frank Vandiver, 1-15. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tonkiss, Fran. 1999. Discourse analysis. In *Researching society and culture*, ed. Clive Seale, 245-260. London: SAGE Publications.
- Twelve Southerners. 1930. *I'll take my stand: the South and the agrarian tradition*. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers.

- U.S. Census Bureau. 1940. *Bulletin 177: cotton production and distribution, season of 1939-1940*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1930. Fifteenth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1925. First agricultural census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1920. Fourteenth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1918. *Bulletin 140: cotton production and distribution, season of 1918-1919*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1910. Thirteenth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1900. Twelfth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1890. Eleventh decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1880. Tenth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1870. Ninth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1860. Eighth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1850. Seventh decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1840. Sixth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1830. Fifth decennial census of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1941a. *The Farm Security Administration*. Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1941b. *Toward farm security*. Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. Agricultural Adjustment Administration. 1934. *Cotton leaflet number one*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. Farm Security Administration. 1940. Social relationships and institutions in seven new rural communities, by Charles Loomis. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1938a. Analysis of 70,000 rural rehabilitation families, by E.L. Kirkpatrick. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1938b. Standards of living of residents of seven rural resettlement communities, by Charles Loomis and Dwight Davidson. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- _____. 1937. An analysis of methods and criteria used in selecting families for colonization projects, by John Holt. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 1945. *Labor unionism in American agriculture*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Vance, Rupert. 1951. The regional concept as a tool for social research. In *Regionalism in America*, ed. Merrill Jensen, 119-140. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. Reprinted in *Regionalism and the South: selected papers of Rupert Vance*, ed. John Shelton Reed and Daniel Joseph Singal, 155-175. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- _____. 1938. *The South's place in the nation*. New York: Public Affairs Committee, Inc.
- _____. 1932. *Human geography of the South: a study in regional resources and human adequacy*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Wayne, Jeannie. 1996. *A new plantation South: land, labor and federal favor in twentieth-century Arkansas*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

- Wilson, Charles Reagan. 1993. The invention of southern tradition: the writing and ritualization of southern history, 1880-1940. In *Rewriting the South: history and fiction*, ed. Lothar Honnighausen and Valeria Gennaro, 3-21. Tübingen, Germany: Francke.
- Winders, Jamie. 2005. Imperfectly imperial: northern travel writers in the postbellum U.S. South, 1865-1880. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 2: 391-410.
- Wise, Leah and Sue Thrasher. 1980. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union. In *Working lives: the Southern Exposure history of labor in the South*, ed. Marc Miller, 120-142. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Woodruff, Nan. 2003. *American Congo: the African-American freedom struggle in the delta*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Woods, James. 1987. *Rebellion and realignment: Arkansas's road to secession*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Woodward, C. Vann. 1955. *The strange career of Jim Crow*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Woofter, T.J. 1936. See Works Progress Administration. 1936
- Works Progress Administration. 1936. *Landlord and tenant on the cotton plantation*, by Thomas Jackson (T.J.) Woofter. Washington, D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office.
- Zieger, Robert. 1986. *American workers, American unions, 1920-1985*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Zinn, Howard. 1964. *The southern mystique*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.