

COLLAPSE OF COTTON TENANCY by Johnson, Embree & Alexander

Cotton wkr. add a bil. \$ of wealth annually to world

Cotton & slavery grew up together in the Old So., beginning with the Carolinas. It then spread to Tex., Ark, Okla. & so. Calif.--at time of WW came a tremendous expansion Southwest

Negroes make up over 40% of total inhabitants of SC, Ga & Ala & more than 50% of Miss. But they are no longer bulk of cotton tenants. White wkr. outnumber blacks 5 to 3.

10 chief cotton states, 60% engaged in cotton culture are tenants
2 1/2 mln. whites & over 3 mln. N.

Tenancy on the increase, 36.2% in 1880, 1920 49/6%; 1930. 55/5%

1920-30 white tenants in cotton states increased approximately a million persons; approximately that many N moved No. since 1914.

over 1/3rd of all tenants in So. & over 1/2 of N. are croppers.

Landlord keeps books & handles the sale of all the crops.

The old "boss and black" attitude pervades the whole system... This fixed custom of exploitation of the N has carried over to the white tenant & cropper... Any movement of reform is confused with race issue. Because of their insistence upon the degrading of 3 mln. N. tenants 5 1/2 mln. white wkr. continue to keep themselves in virtual peonage

Income & Wages in the So. by Clarence Heer shows income in So. 1/2 of what income of farm families in No & that included independent farmers & plantation owner. When only tenants are considered earnings are below subsistence

More than 1/3rd of farmer have more than yr's indebtedness at actual earnings would give monthly income of \$1.75 per person And these were benefitting from aid to farmers. Few tenants had cleared any cash income since 1921

Break-up of large cotton plantations into small holdings continued till the decade of the 30s. Conditions changed with the turn of the century; a reconcentration of tenant farms under corporate ownership. 1900 census --rented farms possessed by landlords owning 5 or more rented farms in Miss. as 53.1; in 1920 Bur. of Agric. Econ. in a study of 5 selected areas in Mississippi Delta found 81.2% of rented farms were so possessed. IT IS ESTIMATED (p.33) that areas amtg. to 30% of cotton lands of various states are owned by insurance companies & banks.

Before 1850 bulk of cotton produced in Carolinas, Ga., Ala. & Miss.

Now Miss. & states west of Mis. Ariz. produce nearly 3/4ths of US total. Tex. & Okla. alone produce nearly 1/2. Development of acreage in Tex. & Okla. Oct. 1919-1929 tremendous; could easily supply world consumption of Am. cotton.

In old cotton area of S.E. the average area cultivated was 10-20 acres by a family with one mule & plow; in WESTERN area the average family can handle 100-150 acres using 2 row equipment drawn by 4-6 mules. Tractors increase acreage even more.--barriers of introd. of machinery in S.E. is topography & plantation system itself; these are overcome in W

Within past 2 yrs. (Internat'l. Harvester Co.) experimented successfully at Delta Experiment Sta. in Miss., a mechanical cotton picker capable of doing 7 1/2 hrs. the work of 3 1/2 months of a good hand picker.

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From 1928-9 to 1932-3 gross farm income from cotton fell from \$1,470,000,000 to \$431,000,000, with the result that the average gross income per farm family engaged in cotton growing fell from \$735 to \$216. At its new low point in June av. farm price of cotton stood at 4.6 per lb

FOR LANDOWNERS AA was success. price of cotton went to 10c where it was egged by govt. loans. Crop receipts plus benefit payments gave growers more than double income of previous yr. 1932.

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Through Dec. 31, '33 AAA distributed \$111,405,244. in rental & benefit payments in cotton plow-up campaign. So. absorbed about 85% of total payments of \$175,404,851. Many Delta counties with 90% tenancy & high Negro ratios received from \$500,000 to over \$800,000 in benefit payments alone.

Thru its prod. credit corporations the Federal Farm Credit Adm. offers landowner prod. credit at 4 1/2 to 6 1/2% interest. The TENANT CANNOT SECURE THIS CHEAP CREDIT UNLESS THE LANDLORD WAIVES HIS FIRST LIEN UPON THE CROP.

Risk of losing equity in farms has been lessened for owners by methods of refinancing thru Farm Credit Administration & by arrangements for scaling down debts in conference with creditors. SO FAR THE FEDERAL FARM CREDIT ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE NO attempt to have landlords scale down debts owed them from previous seasons by croppers & share tenants....

p. 51 "It is out the blunt truth to say that under the present system the landowner is more & more protected from risk by govt. activity while tenant is left open to risks on every side. Only after he loses 1st what property he may possess & then his tenure, does the tenant come to the form of risk insurance designed for him--relief."

AAA org'd. its program under direction of planters themselves.... Share-croppers seldom received cash as payment for their reduction. For most part landlords "credited their acc'ts." the amts. due them. Many large plantations reduced "wage hand crop"--i.e. land cultivated by owner with hired labor & did not disturb the tenant crops.

p. 54: The county agts. in charge of distribution of the payment made the credit stores points for distribution checks. As a result checks were passed over to merchants either for unpaid debts or

for future supplies. In many cases the merchant suggested that the checks be given him and that he would furnish the given farmer until his check was consumed. SUCH A SUGGESTION IS PRACTICALLY AN EDICT UNDER THE PREVAILING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE RURAL SOUTH."

p.55: "The code for cotton prod. has been properly designated "the landlord's code" & all that was not provided to the landlord's satisfaction in the code was taken care of in the administration of it. Many tenants actually pd. for use of land rented to the Sec. of Agric. & specified as available for planting food crops rent free."

p.57: "The net result of the program was that the landlords participated in the Federal Relief program & received the benefits it offered while the tenant merely obeyed the landlord's instructions. Federal relief came to the cotton belt, WAS TRANSLATED UNTO PLANTATION TERMS and the system (except for the further displacement & impoverishment of the tenants) was bolstered & given a new lease of life."

p.58: Hollisomer, in his study "The AAA & the Cropper" interviewed 800 landlords in 1934 & concluded that the eco. relationship & the resulting social attitudes had made a situation in which it WAS DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR THE GOVT. TO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH THE CROPPER. "nepotentialism of the planter, the dependency of the tenant so meticulously maintained, the stern objections on the part of the landlord to any change in the traditional relationship, set up well nigh insurmountable barriers to any tenants benefits thru this channel."

Fear in sack of landowner: that tenant will be removed from influence of landowner & learn that he is not entirely dependent on him.

--Am. Agric. 3-thelst 300 yrs--by
Everett E. Edwards

Under manorial system large tracts were granted to individuals, who were practically feudal overlords & collected quitrents from settlers. With such an abundance of lands in Am. this system was hard to enforce. Eventually manors became plantations & the owners made a profit FROM SLAVE LABOR RATHER THAN LAND.

Cotton expansion revived the moribund institution of slavery.

It was not until the So. was shorn of its power in congress that virtual empires of land were granted to railrd. magnates as subsidies.

Thru countless centuries agric. was carried on by hand labor with few simple tools supplemented to a slight extent by animal power. Pattern continued unchanged till 1830.

Decades from 1830-1860 crowded with with inventions & improvements that revolutionised agricl dev. After this per. food scarcity & famines no longer accepted as inevitable. Civil War decisive force in farm mechanization.

1860-1910 general displacement of men by horses as motive power for agric. implements. Just prior to outbreak of 1st world war another stage of dev. with substitution of mechanical power for horse power.

RRDS. In 1860 US had 30,000 miles of rrd., confined largely to the NORTHEAST; by 1920 country had a network of 253,000 miles covering every section...Rrd mileage in US in 1910 exceeded that of a;1 Europe & rep'd. more than a third of the world's total. Country's pop. increased 3-fold & rrd. mileage 8-fold.

Westward march of cotton evidenced by fact that Texas by 1900 was leading state with almost 7 mln. acres devoted to cotton culture & a crop almost equal in size to total prod. of So. prior to Civil War.

After 1885 textile ind. began to expand rapidly in Cotton belt itself; in 1900 so factories consuming 3.4ths as much cotton as Mo. & by 1910 had taken over lead in domestic consumption.

In election of 1907 So. Alliance worked thru the Democ. P. & succeeded in gaining control of the legislature in 5 states. In 1892 populists combined with Republicans in So. & Democ. in west--polls a million voted & won 22 electoral votes--1st time since 1860 that a 3rd party had achieved electoral recognition. 1896--worldwide depression Labor org'd. Coxey's army 7 struck at Homestead & Pullman farm prices lowest recorded in US. So. Populists opposed to Bryan & Democ P. which to them stood for old planters & new industrialists. Polls 6 1/2 mln. voted but went down to defeat & with it populists, though it dragged on until 1912.

Cotton dominates farm situation in So. Exx low av. income (\$162 gr ss per peron a yr, 1924-37 as compared with \$381 in the rest of farming US) because of high proportion of land in cotton & in corn for milk feed soil erosion serious. /Adjustments are difficult because of small size of 100 acres per farm in eastern cotton states in 1934)

In view of mechanical efficiency & high standard of living in US it is

amazing that 90% of our farms did not have central-station electrical service as late as 1935. At that time 100% of farms in Holland had elec., 90-95% of farms in Fr., 90% in Ger. & Jap., 85% in Denmark, 65% in U.K. & 60% in New Zealand. Since 1935 vigorous action stepped up no. of farms receiving elec. service to 25%.

1930 census--of 54 mln. rural people, 12% were Negro; in the Cotton Belt about 33% of the rural pop. & 37% of farm pop. were Negro. In rural Miss & on farms of S.C. N. pop exceeded the white

N. have been leaving farms however. Were 5,100,000 in 1920, declined to 4,680,000 in 1930, nearly twice as rapid a rate of decrease as that in the total farm pop. in So. States where practically all N. farm pop. is located. decrease from 4,621,000 in 1930 to 4,506,000 in 1935--a decline of 115,000 in the 5 yrs. despite a large natural incr. (excess of births over deaths) DURING THE SAME FIVE YRS. THE WHITE FARM POP. OF SO. STATES increased 721,000/ N. tenants inc. croppers) decreased 10,000 in no. & wh. tenants incr. 120,000. N. farm owners incr. 4,000 & white owner 155,000.

Wide range of agric. wealth per capita of farm pop.--In many counties in Ill. & Ia. this value is \$6,000; in a few counties in Calif. it is \$10,000 but IT DROPS TO \$300 & below in many counties in Cotton Belt.

(Rural poverty in No. in Upper Great Lakes region approaches the South!)

p. 264) (Both Detroit & Atlanta, Ga. are interested in standards of health, housing, educ. etc. maintained in rural Ala. for both cities received many migrants from that state.)