This Land Ain't My Land: The Eviction of Sharecroppers by the Farm Security Administration

JANE ADAMS AND D. GORTON

The New Deal resettlement communities appear in the literature as efforts to ameliorate the wretched condition of southern sharecroppers and tenants. However, those evicted to make way for the new settlers are virtually invisible in the historic record. The resettlement projects were part of larger efforts to modernize rural America. "Modernization" is a complex process whereby a relatively specific set of assumptions and behaviors make other assumptions and behaviors "wrong," both morally and pragmatically. The removal of former tenants and their replacement by FSA clients in the lower Mississippi alluvial plain—the Delta—reveals core elements of New Deal modernizing policies, exposing key concepts that guided the FSA's tenant removals: the definition of rural poverty as rooted in the problem of tenancy; the belief that economic success entailed particular cultural practices and social forms; and the commitment by those with political power to gain local support. These assumptions undergirded acceptance of racial segregation and the criteria used to select new settlers. Alternatives could only become visible through political or legal action—capacities sharecroppers seldom had. However, in succeeding decades, these modernizing assumptions created conditions for Delta African Americans on resettlement projects to challenge white supremacy.

JANE ADAMS is professor of anthropology and of history and director of the Center for Delta Studies at Southern Illinois University–Carbondale. Her research focuses on the transformation of rural United States, particularly studying political power and economic relationships.

D. GORTON is a photojournalist and independent scholar.

DOI: 10.3098/ah.2009.83.3.323

> The 12 mont 11 day 1937
> Dear president Mr Roosevelt I wants you to help out I have lived it on Lake View Plantation 25 years and have ford satisfaction with the landholders Why shud i work the rest of my life for the Government it would be to hard to run me away from my living i have over $200 Wast around my home i have a nice orchet and i have bilted a corn house allso have jacked the house up off the ground i what i am living an put blocks under it i think it would be too hard to give to some oneelsce so please give me a trial i will sute you if I don't live to pay for land boy 24 years old he is got a Wife and one Boy and I have too more sons and to Boys I raise 23 and the other one 17 so i think i would B a man for a 40 aracr i have What it need to Work it so i am lookin to heare from you in early date.
>
> From Walter Wilson
> R 2, Box 38A
> Lake Providence, La.
> (spelling and punctuation as in original hand-written letter).[1]

In 1937 LAKE VIEW, AT THE TOP of Lake Providence in East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, had been purchased by the federal government's Resettlement Administration (RA); its newly formed successor, the Farm Security Administration (FSA), was rapidly developing it and other projects throughout the Mississippi River alluvial plain. Walter Wilson's letter and other similar letters from Lake View Plantation to the president, Henry A. Wallace, the head of the USDA, and other officials, received little attention. However, the next year when the FSA developed the nine-thousand-plus-acre Transylvania Plantation as an all-white project, displacing the plantation's long-established African-American settlement, the African-American sharecroppers' protest would reverberate throughout the black press, which was taken seriously by the New Deal. Until a recent memoir, however, it is safe to say that no historical scholarship had more than noted the eviction of croppers and tenants—black and white—from plantations purchased by the RA/FSA.[2]

Franklin Roosevelt's Resettlement Programs have come down in history as one of the flash points in the agricultural New Deal. For those attached to the "agrarian New Deal," they exemplify the last significant effort by the US government to promote a democratic and egalitarian agrarianism—a vision of rural America that was economically supplanted and politically defeated by commercialized industrial agricultural

production. For opponents, vociferous at the time and ultimately successful in dismantling the resettlement efforts, they represented "socialistic" or "communistic" efforts to regiment and control the citizenry. In recent years, as the political and ideological battles over the New Deal have lost immediate relevance, it has been subjected to new critiques. Several new works have pointed out the ways in which the southern New Deal perpetuated, and in some dimensions intensified, racial segregation. Other scholarship, ironically in many ways congruent with New Deal–era conservative opposition, has focused on its statist "high modernist" aspects.[3]

Attention to these darker sides of the New Deal raises a significant question concerning these projects: what happened to the people who worked and farmed on the land before the government purchased it? And what significance might this have for understanding some of the contradictory aspects of government-led modernization programs in general and those of the New Deal in particular?

Not all of the resettlement projects in the Delta involved dispossessing extant farmers. Some were built on unsettled land. Russell Lee's 1939 FSA photographs of Chicot Farms, Arkansas, show the new buildings sitting among scrub trees and logging debris. In 1942 Chicot and the FSA's Kelso Farms were transferred to the War Relocation Authority, becoming the Jerome and Rohwer Japanese internment camps. They, like Dyess Colony, Arkansas, were largely undrained cut over land. According to oral recollections, Greenfield Plantation in southern Washington County, Mississippi, had been abandoned long enough for six-foot-high Johnson grass to reclaim it.[4]

But most of the land had been worked, and worked intensively. It took some letters we came across at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York, and our subsequent reading of John H. Scott's memoir that recounted the establishment of Transylvania Project, Louisiana, as well as testimony by FSA opponent Oscar Johnston at the 1943 House USDA Appropriations hearings in which he reported "pathetic and heartrending stories from evicted tenants" on Phillipston Plantation, Leflore County, Mississippi, to bring this reality into focus. Johnston managed the transnational Delta and Pine Plantation in Mississippi, headed the Finance Division of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and managed the AAA cotton pool, founded the Cotton Council in 1938, and served as its president until 1948. He became one of

the most vocal and influential critics of the FSA in the 1940s. Transylvania and Phillipston were not unique; the removals fell into discernable patterns, and were embedded in larger modernizing discourses and practices embodied in the New Deal.[5]

The resettlement projects were part of larger efforts to modernize rural America. "Modernization" refers to a complex process that entails a relatively specific set of assumptions and behaviors—what Foucault calls "epistemologies" and others term "discourses" or "paradigms"—that makes other assumptions and behaviors "wrong," both morally and pragmatically. James C. Scott studied a series of what he terms "high modernist" attempts to "improve the human condition" through centralized state planning that applies technology and science to all aspects of human activity. The full implementation of a "high modernist" agenda required both an authoritarian state and a correspondingly weak civil society. High modernists, he argues, believed that, through the leadership of technical experts, the hold of the past could be broken and "new men" created—men guided only by the rationality of science. Jess Gilbert argues that the agrarian New Deal had many attributes that Scott would view as "high modernists." He writes:

> It engaged in typically modernist state actions such as long-range planning of economy and society, the administration of huge public programs, policy education for the masses, and applied scientific research. Planned and led, in significant part, by expert social scientists (particularly economists) steeped in a Progressive state-building tradition, the New Deal assumed that a larger, administrative state was necessary to manage the modern economy.

However, unlike the authoritarian high modernists Scott analyzes, Gilbert views the New Deal as "low modernist." The leaders of the agrarian New Deal, he argues:

> rejected, both ideologically and in practice, those crucial aspects of high modernism that, according to Scott, make it authoritarian: the dismissal of local knowledge, history, tradition, and other "illegible" activities like family farming. Nor did they exhibit blind faith in science, states, the progressive future, or industrial farming (which

epitomizes high modernism in agriculture). Above all, they were participatory democrats.[6]

Neither Scott nor Gilbert address the national/racial solidarities that undergirded segregation and white supremacy. Nationalism, however, was also a central element of nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernization. The examination of how specific New Deal programs were implemented can shed light on how modernizing assumptions, combined with formally democratic political processes and a reasonably robust civil society, shaped and constrained the actual practices of the most agrarian of the agrarian New Deal's programs, the RA's agricultural community programs. As Gilbert indicates, the RA and its successor agency, the FSA, responded to bottom-up political pressures, albeit not as grassroots as the term "participatory democracy" implies. This responsiveness is most clearly visible in the racial segregation of RA/FSA projects in the lower Mississippi alluvial plain and in the disproportionate number of white clients. In contrast, Scott's focus on the totalizing aspects of "high" modernism applies more to the criteria on which families were selected for membership in the community projects. However, congruent with Gilbert's claims, the modernizing African-American communities formed by the RA/FSA enhanced the political capacity of its members to organize and obtain voting and civil rights in the succeeding decades.[7]

Our interest in these projects began by an inquiry into the anomalous existence of a predominantly white school in rural Washington County, Mississippi. We soon discovered that a series of plantations had been subdivided and supervised by the FSA in the area; these predominantly white settlers formed the historical underpinnings for the school in question. The manufactured home we rented in Wayside, Mississippi, during our field season in 2003 happened to be on Unit 1 of Lowden Plantation, a small (twelve-unit) tract. The examination of the New Deal land reform efforts was, therefore, tangential to our larger project, yet these programs clearly had local level effects far beyond their period of major federal involvement.[8]

Focusing on Mississippi, we visited the Chancery Courts in each Delta county, where plat books recorded FSA subdivision of plantations. We went to each site, formally (with digital video) and informally interviewing residents. We located many RA/FSA communities and subdivided tracts through current aerial and satellite photos, particularly Google

Earth. We then sought records of the projects in the National Archives, consulting the Project Records at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and, for southeast Missouri, in Chicago, as well as the FDR Library in Hyde Park.[9]

The extensive photographic record made by the FSA photographers is a significant source of data. It is fair to say that this collection, now largely available on the web, is the primary lens through which people experience the Great Depression in rural America. The images are historical documents that, with their captions, help flesh out other sources or guide one to ask unanticipated questions of the historical record. Photographs in general provide direct empirical evidence of the phenomena translated to the chemicals (now digital code) exposed to light through a camera's lens. They also reveal, through the knowledgeable or naïve frame and choice of subject matter, what the photographer (or the person directing the photographer) considered important and significant. We view our sources both as a relatively transparent window into the past and as a complicated social discourse that must be decoded using information both internal and external to the interviews, documents, photographs, and photographic captions. These primary sources are amplified by the significant amount of relevant scholarship on the period in general, and the FSA in particular.[10]

The RA/FSA projects reveal the divided aims of the federal government, and particularly the USDA, during this period. The administration attempted to relieve the depression in rural areas through a variety of agencies, which had different agendas. Roosevelt's first New Deal agricultural program was the AAA established in 1933. It sought to stabilize and increase the market price of agricultural commodities, largely through reducing the amount of goods on the market via crop reduction. The RA, created in 1935 by executive decree, aimed to ameliorate rural poverty and urban unemployment and was formed from a number of New Deal rural and other relief and land adjustment programs. It was transferred to the USDA and renamed the FSA under the 1937 Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, simultaneous with the resignation of its administrator, Rex Tugwell, and his replacement by Will W. Alexander. Unlike the AAA whose goals were to support commercial farmers, the FSA's goal was to address the increasing number of landless (tenant) farmers and to enable rural working people to gain access to the benefits of the modern world.[11]

The New Deal land redistribution programs evolved, in the Delta region, from the Rural Rehabilitation programs of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), established in 1933. As Donald Holley notes, Dyess Colony in Arkansas was the only FERA community project established in the lower Mississippi Valley. However, the federally promoted state Rural Rehabilitation Corporations aided many individual families through supervised farm loans. In 1935 the RA absorbed the state Rural Rehabilitation functions. Under Tugwell's administration the nation was divided into regions; Region VI encompassed Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana, and Region III included southeast Missouri.

Although not authorized to provide farm ownership loans until passage of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, beginning in 1936 the RA began optioning land for large-scale rural communities and for what it termed "infiltration projects"—individual farms or subdivisions of farms that were too small for full-scale community projects. It created individual cooperative associations for project enterprises like gins, stores, tractors and other large equipment, canneries, and so forth, and occasionally for holding land. Some of the optioned lands were leased by the Rural Rehabilitation section of the RA/FSA before being developed as rural communities, which then rented the land to their clients. This created problems when Rural Rehabilitation clients living on the leased land were not selected as settlers for the projects. In the South, the FSA tried to recruit African-American and white tenants and sharecroppers as settlers in numbers proportionate to their numbers in the 1930 census. The agency, however, was sensitive to local opinion and did not locate "negro projects" where "leading citizens" did not support them. This resulted in far more white than black clients participating in all phases of the program—as Rural Rehabilitation clients, on FSA community projects, and as tenant purchase borrowers.[12]

Tenants were evicted from newly acquired RA/FSA lands for two reasons: because they were of the wrong race in the segregated communities, and because they did not qualify as RA/FSA clients. Transylvania Plantation, East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, remains the best documented, and perhaps the most egregious, instance of the eviction of a long-established African-American community and its replacement by white clients. According to John H. Scott's narrative, after the Civil War Transylvania Plantation was populated primarily by freed slaves. Scott's grandfather, who was born a freeman, came to Louisiana as a veteran of the Union

army. A durable community developed in which residents forged strong networks based on kinship, economic and social exchanges, fraternal organizations, churches, cemeteries, a Rosenwald school, and shared work on the plantation. The Memphis-based company, Abston, Crump, and Wynne, which operated this ten-thousand-acre plantation—the largest in Louisiana—sold it to the FSA in 1938. The FSA planned, Scott recounts, "to move out all the blacks, about 250 families . . . and resell the property to mostly poor whites."[13]

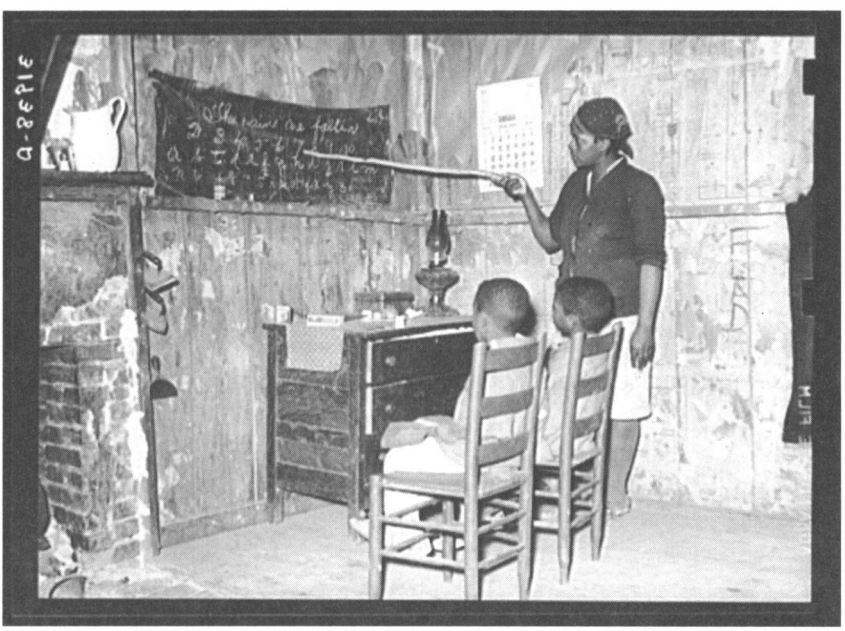
Various groups recognized the impending dispossession and opposed it at the time. As early as March 1937, NAACP legal counsel Thurgood Marshall contacted the director of the RA, asking for details about "one of your projects in Transylvania, Louisiana." Transylvania was surveyed for subdividing eight months later. An African-American newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier,* reported that the following June applications began to be accepted for what the residents of Transylvania believed to be units on the plantation. However, the *Courier* alleged, the papers they signed were applications for a project at Thomastown, some sixty miles to the south in Madison Parish. With the help of the NAACP, as well as the *Pittsburgh Courier,* the Associated Negro Press, the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches in America, and the National Negro Congress, the Transylvania tenants mounted a publicity and letter-writing campaign to keep their land. Not only were they reluctant to move, but, according to Scott, the Thomastown project was about three thousand acres smaller than Transylvania and farmed primarily by white tenants. The white tenants at Thomastown also protested to their congressman, Newt V. Mills, stating, according to the *Pittsburgh Courier,* that "they are content to live in Thomaston [sic] with Negro families." Mills, who opposed all African-American projects, contacted the FSA arguing against the displacement of several white FSA clients in Madison Parish by the "resettlement of Negroes" from Transylvania Plantation. Despite these complaints from varied sources, at the end of 1938, when Transylvania residents had still refused to move, they were formally evicted.[14]

The move was chaotic. The FSA found additional land for what they called Ladelta Farms, which would accommodate more of the Transylvania families. The new projects, Scott recalled, were not ready to receive them, logistics of moving were not worked out, and some people found no place to store their food. "The Transylvania community was torn apart,

and family and friends were scattered to the north and south," he wrote.[15]

FSA photographer Russell Lee went to Transylvania in January 1939, as the evicted tenants were packing up and the new white clients were arriving. One of his photographs has become widely used (Figure 1). It shows a woman pointing to letters drawn on a cloth hung on the wall of her home, with the phrase "The rain are falling." It is deeply enigmatic, as are the images of black sharecroppers and white FSA clients in the series. The significance becomes clearer once the viewer realizes that the black sharecropper family is not simply being "resettled," but that their school has been transferred to the white clients and that this family is among the last to leave. The images of white FSA clients sitting in well-used homes (Figure 2) and old farmhouses with furniture piled on the porches make sense (Figure 3): these white families were moving into houses recently vacated by African-American residents. None of the

Figure 1. Negro Mother Teaching Children Numbers and Alphabet in Home of Sharecropper. Transylvania, Louisiana.



SOURCE: Photograph by Russell Lee, Jan. 1939. Reproduction number LC-USF34-031938-D, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Figure 2. Wife and Daughter of FSA Client in Front of Fireplace of Temporary Home. Transylvania, Louisiana.

SOURCE: Photograph by Russell Lee, Jan. 1939. Reproduction number LC-USF34-031894-D, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Figure 3. House Occupied Temporarily by FSA Client who Moved from Western Part of State to Transylvania Project. Louisiana.

SOURCE: Photograph by Russell Lee, Jan. 1939. Reproduction number LC-USF34-031888-D, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

FSA clients, white or black, received the new homes idealized in so many other FSA photographs. Eighteen months later, however, Marion Post Wolcott was able to show remarkable progress at both Transylvania and at Thomastown (Ladelta Farms).[16]

A similar situation occurred with Walnut Grove Plantation, near Rena Lara, Coahoma County, Mississippi, purchased from prominent Memphis businessman R. Vance Norfleet, and on the nearby Sunflower Plantation in Sunflower County, which was owned by the Buffalo, New York–based company, Taylor & Crate. Like Transylvania, both these plantations had long-established black populations. Walnut Grove had a Rosenwald school that served not only Walnut Grove tenants and croppers, but black children in the surrounding area. These schools invariably were built in stable black communities. When the FSA purchased the plantation in 1937, they replaced the black tenants with white clients. Sunflower

Plantation had been developed by the timber company Taylor & Crate in 1910, as a modern, industrial facility. It had about 125 African-American families in "well-built, ceilinged, and painted houses" that were supplied with electricity "until 10:00 each night. The owners also provided the resident workers with a school, church buildings, and a store."[17]

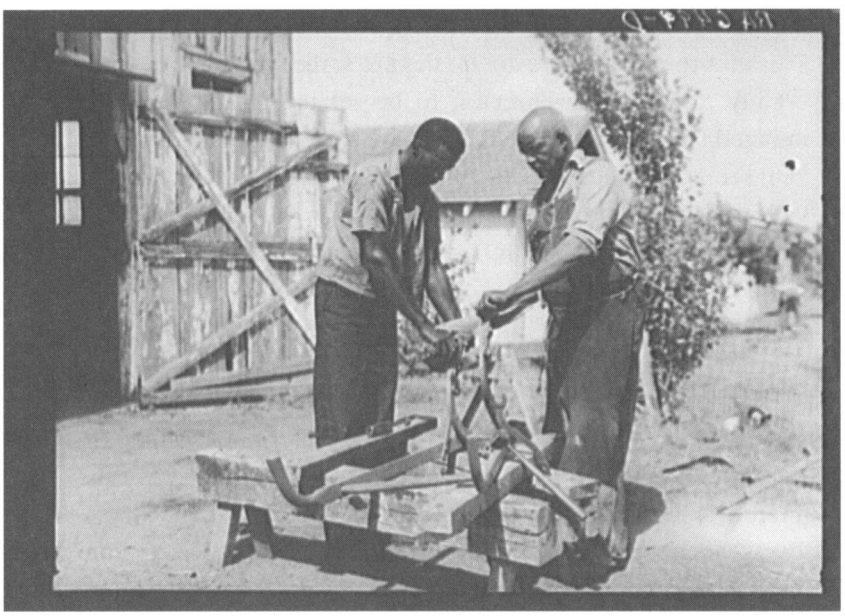
We found no protests about the removal of the black tenants at Walnut Grove in the FSA project files. However, the African-American community at Sunflower Plantation enlisted a member of the neighboring town of Drew's old families, J. W. Riddell, who appealed to Senator Pat Harrison on behalf of the community of "about twenty or twenty five families of negroes." "As the government is giving the colored a chance to own a home," Riddell wrote, it "seems that they could make a small colony of the Sunflower Plantation, as they feel that is their home and to my personal knowledge they have made good citizens." Harrison transmitted Riddell's letter to FSA Administrator Alexander. The Sunflower community also turned to the grand master of their Masonic lodge. On November 26, 1938, Grand Master Jon L. Webb of the M. W. Stringer Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, Jurisdiction of Mississippi, wrote to Alexander:

> We have a Masonic Lodge there with a membership of more than 30. I am reliably informed that the Government Agent there is trying to bring pressure to bear and frighten these Negroes and cause them to throw up their contracts [to purchase] and move away and thus make this a white project. As their Grand Master I am asking that you will please make some investigations and have something done in order that the agent will not discriminate....
>
> The Negro Masons built a Hall there and a school has also been erected and contributed to by them. They have been deprived of the hall.... The school for the children has not been opened to this late date. They have a cemetery in which their sainted dead is resting, some as long as 20 years. It is indeed hard to make them move away and leave all these memorys [sic] and treasures.

Regional Director T. Roy Reid replied that the black families would be placed "on other plantations operated by the Rural Rehabilitation Division and continue them as rural rehabilitation clients."[18]

Indeed, the federal government did not alter its plans in response to the various complaints on behalf of the African-American community. Sunflower Plantation was sold to the US government in October 1936 and leased by the Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, which replaced many of the black tenants with white Rehabilitation clients. Carl Mydans's June 1936 FSA photographs of the plantation center for the RA, show only black people working on the place (Figure 4). When the plantation was converted into a resettlement project in 1938, the plantation had seventy-eight white families and twenty-one black families. According to a letter from Reid to the district's congressman, Will Whittington, twenty-one of the white families were accepted on the project and five of the black families were "approved for assignments to FSA farms in the vicinity of Mound Bayou," an African-American town in neighboring Bolivar County. This meant that fifty-seven white and sixteen black families were not accepted into any project. The five black families approved for resettlement received individual scattered farms.[19]

Figure 4. "Double Shovel" Cultivator being Repaired at Sunflower Plantation. Near Sunflower, Mississippi.



SOURCE: Photograph by Carl Mydans, June 1936. Reproduction number LC-USF34-006499-D, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

We found no other evidence in the FSA project files of organized protest by long-established communities when their land was converted to a racially segregated government project. This is probably in part because Transylvania and Sunflower Plantations were both unusually large, at around nine thousand acres each, and had long been operated by absentee landlords who allowed (or perhaps encouraged) the development of durable communities. A significant number of whites had begun to come into the Delta as sharecroppers only after World War I and had not created stable communities, forming a largely transient labor force.

Although racial segregation was the basis for removing many African-American tenants, others—black and white—were evicted from working plantations because they did not meet the selection criteria. Lake View, Arkansas, was a large African-American resettlement community. Lake View (sometimes spelled Lakeview)—although not originally a massive plantation, having been created from a number of individual, but contiguous, parcels—had resident tenants. In 1936, shortly after the RA authorized the project, fourteen families faced eviction. Believing that the project director was prejudiced against them, they petitioned Regional Director T. Roy Reid to be allowed to remain. They wrote:

> We want to remain here, their [sic] are some who have been deliberately refused, RA Director, to be set up, though well recommended. . . . This was done because we were Negroes.
>
> It seems like those who are in authority feels that because we are Colored, we should not be rehabilitated, as other citizens. We have worked the land for a number of years, and would like to make it our home.

The project record files do not indicate how the protest was handled, but the following year the FSA produced "special selection criteria" for the Lake View Project. Among other things, these criteria stated "first consideration will be given to residents of the property who meet the selection requirements."[20]

Two years later in August 1939, after the widely publicized removals at Transylvania, a flurry of correspondence occurred between the regional and national FSA offices when officials saw it was "going to be necessary to kick some families off Lake View at the end of the present crop

season. There will be at least two and possibly five who have not proven acceptable. I am extremely anxious not to have a repetition of the kind of publicity we had at Transylvania through the negro press," Information Advisor George Wolf wrote to the director of the Division of Information. The potential problem received the personal attention of Alexander, who asked to be kept fully informed of removals, "In order that we may be in a position to handle any flare-ups in the Negro press." The letter that began this article came from another Lake View project, this one in the same Louisiana parish as Transylvania. On October 24, 1937, Lee O. Sumrall, Louisiana tenant security project community manager, wrote to the applicants whom had not been accepted on the project. This spurred a number of protests to President Roosevelt and various FSA officials.[21]

While officials were concerned that these rejections not receive attention in the African-American newspapers, not all those rejected were black. At Sunflower Plantation similar protests occurred. Congressman Whittington had received a petition from the sixty white families and eighteen black families who were not selected, protesting their disqualification. A brief history of Sunflower Plantation also states that the (white) managerial staff was not retained after the plantation was converted to a Resettlement project, suggesting that their dismissal created lingering resentments.[22]

Thus, displacements were based on two primary factors: the segregation of projects by race and individuals not meeting the criteria for acceptance as clients on community projects. A third basis for removal was the fact that the FSA farm units were on average twice as large as a sharecropper's farm so, even had all resident croppers qualified (which appears never to have occurred), some would have been displaced. The twin assumptions of racial segregation and specific selection criteria were embedded in the modernizing goals of the New Deal reformers, which were modified by the power local actors had to influence federal policies in their region.[23]

These federal policies of racial segregation reflected the dominant thought of the time and did not necessarily imply an attempt to reduce black farmers' access to New Deal relief. The RA/FSA was, initially, committed to racial equity in its projects. Tugwell chose Alexander as his deputy administrator and, when Tugwell resigned and the RA came under the USDA, Alexander took over as administrator. Alexander had been a

leader in seeking interracial harmony in the South, founding, in 1919, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and he served as president of (African-American) Dillard University. He was also concerned with the problem of tenancy in the South. His commitment was mirrored by that of his agency, as the original policy required that RA/FSA clients be served proportionate to their numbers on a county-by-county basis.[24]

The FSA's goals to establish racial equity, however, did not imply integration. We have found no evidence that either the RA or the FSA ever contemplated creating racially integrated projects, despite the fact that white and black sharecroppers lived intermingled on most Delta plantations. Some African Americans opposed this approach. The *Pittsburgh Courier* was particularly scathing regarding Alexander's actions, editorializing under the headline "A 'Friend' of the Negro":

> When Dr. Will Alexander of Atlanta and Interracial Commission fame was appointed Director of the Farm Security Administration, his selection was hailed as an augury of a squarer deal for the Negro farmers.
>
> It develops now that this "friend" of the Negro has given his blessing to the formation of segregated Negro farm colonies in sections where white and colored farmers have lived side by side for generations....
>
> This supposed friend of the Negro has okehed the segregated negro projects and the removal of Negroes from ancestral homes not only over their opposition but over the opposition of their white neighbors as well who are loath to see them go.[25]

While African Americans in the 1930s were divided on the issue of racial integration, few white leaders or intellectuals, of any political persuasion, advocated it. The dominant ethos, particularly that of the Democratic Party, viewed collective identities as benign, and potentially essential, elements in the society. Referencing W. E. B. DuBois's concept "parallelism," the anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner promoted the equalization of class mobility for both blacks and whites, each on their own side of the "caste" divide. The Communist Party, following Stalin's analysis of the "national question," between 1928 and 1935 advocated the creation of a separate nation for blacks in the historic southern "black belt." The New

Deal renewed the federal commitment to Indian reservations, reversing post–Civil War Republican efforts to erase Indians' special status. As democratic modernizers, the New Deal instituted elected tribal governments. In many cities Democratic political machines welded together ethnically distinct groups. Even rural ethnic groups appear to have been segregated, with one small FSA tract made up entirely of Italian-ancestry farmers in an area of Washington County, Mississippi, where a number of Italians farmed as sharecroppers. The racial and ethnic integration many sharecroppers had experienced ended with their access to federal programs.[26]

The modernist theory of equality between separate nations was, however, undermined by the durable structures and sentiments involved in the system of white supremacy, as well as inter-ethnic/racial competition. Some of the letters and petitions we read opposed black FSA projects because of African Americans' perceived inferiority and lack of worthiness. When Congressman Mills opposed the black Lake View project, FSA Director Walker wrote to Region VI Director Reid:

> [Mr. Mills] states that in his opinion there are no Negroes in that section who can meet the ordinary selection requirements to become owners, unless separate restrictions are made for Negroes than those covering the Whites.

Mills's sentiments were shared by a number of businessmen and planters in Lake Providence, including the mayor, who telegrammed Alexander, stating "there is a much greater percentage of competent and deserving white tenants who desire to purchase these units than there is colored." Similarly, when the FSA tried to buy land for an African-American project in Mississippi County, Missouri, James Haw, the county's prosecuting attorney, opposed it because he viewed blacks as universally prone to criminality and other undesirable and immoral behaviors that were not, in his judgment, characteristic of poor whites. The claim that whites would react violently to a concentration of organized black landowners was also repeatedly raised.[27]

Along with stressing supposed black depravity, whites also made arguments on the basis of racial equity. The McGehee Rotary Club in Desha County, Arkansas, initially opposed the formation of a black project

outside the town on what was known as the Wolfe Plantation. They appealed to Congressman McClellan, arguing that the plantation, which had been operated by white Rehabilitation clients, should remain a white project. If it became a black project, they wrote, "it would leave nothing in Desha County except negro projects . . . we feel like McGehee is entitled to have at least the white project that is now settled here to be permanent." Reid was able to persuade the "leading citizens" of the county to accept the African-American project.[28]

Political interests were also at work. In Mississippi County, Missouri, where African Americans could vote, S. B. Hardwick, of the county's Democratic Central Committee, opposed an African-American project in part because he expected blacks to vote Republican. Hardwick, like numerous others who opposed projects for African Americans, favored the projects for whites.[29]

Discrimination against black farmers did not go unnoticed in Washington, DC. Indeed, they questioned local officials as to their policies. When challenged by the national FSA administrators in 1937, Louisiana Community Manager Sumrall wrote that the FSA policy of placing "colored families in all of the communities in which we were reasonably sure that there would be no friction or severe criticism from local people" meant that "their percentage . . . is under that designated by the Washington office." He estimated that "the final selection [in Louisiana] will show . . . 28.1% colored and 71.9% white." Thus, in Sumrall's eyes, the local administrators were doing their best to choose settlers who would cause the least opposition from politically vocal neighbors.[30]

Once the racial composition of a project was established, the question of who would qualify for acceptance became uppermost. The selection process most clearly revealed the modernizing assumptions guiding New Deal policy and goals. Administrators repeatedly invoked guidelines that selected for families that would succeed as independent yeoman farmers. The FSA's Rural Resettlement Division established eleven criteria for selecting tenant families; these were modified for the South. These included that the applicant had been primarily a farmer for the previous five years, demonstrating success and managerial capacity. He should be married and no older than forty or forty-five, with enough family labor to work the farm, and the family should be healthy. He should be responsible, have good moral character, and a reputation for paying his debts.

Organized initially as relief for the most needy, as Baldwin notes, the mission shifted to enabling those most likely to succeed.[31]

By far the largest number of complaints came from men who were not selected for inclusion on the projects. Many, like Walter Wilson whose letter prefaces this article, were too old. Others were rejected because they were not judged to be adequate financial managers, as demonstrated by unpaid debts. Although not part of the formal selection criteria, the FSA sought families who would take expert guidance regarding farm and home management and production practices. They required clients to practice diversified "live at home" farming and evicted those who focused too much on their cash crop or took off-farm work.

The key assumptions, central to the FSA's modernizing project, were the definition of what caused rural poverty and, consequently, who was to benefit from the FSA resettlement programs. These assumptions were embedded in New Deal agrarians' preoccupation with the "problem of tenancy." They believed that economic success entailed a specific array of cultural practices and social forms that limited participants to interchangeable young families who would follow expert advice, that placed responsibility for the elderly and other dependents on the state, and that sought local-level support from those with political power for federal policies.[32]

Agricultural experts and those concerned with the acute poverty of southern rural laborers understood this poverty to be rooted in "the problem of tenancy." They viewed sharecroppers and tenants almost entirely through their contractual economic relationships with their landlords. Many New Dealers and others in government sought to promote family farming, which agrarians had long viewed as fundamental to American democracy, and some promoted the creation of economic and other cooperative institutions, but virtually everyone took the nuclear family as the foundation of agriculture. Consequently, they viewed sharecroppers and tenants as individual families and did not consider relationships that might exist between and among the tenants, or between tenants and their disabled or elderly relatives. African-American and white tenants and sharecroppers were viewed by New Deal agrarians through the same lens, as farmers who should be enabled to "climb the agricultural ladder" and attain success as yeoman farmers through the application of expert knowledge.[33]

This contrasted with the lived experience of most sharecroppers, who relied on knowledge and material support from networks of kin and other informal associations for survival, and who drew upon many potential income streams in addition to farming. Walter Wilson argued that he had a right to stay on Lake View Plantation because of the labor he had invested in his home and farm, jacking up his residence, building a corn house, and planting an orchard. These improvements were recognized customarily as conferring permanence to his possession, although they had no standing in existing contract law. He also asserted that his adult sons and foster sons maintained claims on, and responsibilities toward, his farming enterprise, although United States's law severed such interdependencies when children reached adulthood, and did not recognize informal foster children as entailed in familial obligations. The FSA criteria excluded Wilson because of his age, and they could not be modified to incorporate either rights to land or capacity to meet FSA production expectations through something other than a nuclear family with minor children. The New Dealers did recognize the semi-formalized swap work farmers used for various productive activities and sought to formalize these traditions through cooperative associations. They also recognized that farm families consumed a considerable amount of their own production and promoted the concept of "live at home," but still much farm work fell outside their purview. Additionally, the FSA required agricultural diversification by its clients, which for many cotton sharecroppers required learning a wide array of new skills.[34]

Congruent with the definition of the problem of rural poverty as the problem of tenancy that could be solved through establishment of freeholding farmers, New Deal agrarians shared a common assumption that specific cultural attitudes would assure success. These "modern" attitudes included the responsibility of autonomous family units, rational planning, efficiency measured in terms of financial outcomes, deferred gratification, sobriety, and hard work. These qualities were later codified by Talcott Parsons as the "pattern variables" necessary for successful "modernization." Business classes that both opposed and supported the FSA concurred with these normative prescriptions, but many FSA clients found the level of supervision onerous. These requirements also fed racial exclusion as some opponents of the FSA's African-American projects considered blacks incapable of acquiring these behaviors.[35]

Along with behavioral guidelines, the FSA used a narrow social and cultural lens to define the kinds of communities they sought to establish. The "communities" created by the FSA included only families in their most productive years who met their selection criteria. The reformers and social engineers sought to create idealized, even utopian, communities that fostered cooperation and participation through cooperative institutions like schools, farm enterprises such as gins and workshops, and stores as well as, in some cases, farm (plantation) ownership. However, they neither observed nor valued what James C. Scott terms "metis"—practical knowledge embedded in "traditional" epistemologies. They included neither the knowledge, nor productive potential, nor maintenance of the elderly and infirm in their plans for community sustainability, nor the "social capital" incorporated in extended kin networks. In this sense, they accepted the logic of political economy. Liberals, socialists, and communists, as well as capitalists saw "production" only in reference to the provision of material goods that had a market value. They therefore did not incorporate the maintenance of social relationships that cannot be translated into quantitative measures in their value system. The costs of bearing and raising the next generation and of maintaining the infirm and aged, were to be mainly borne by the larger society, although farmers at this time were specifically excluded from the newly created Social Security Administration.[36]

Scott argues that modernizing states were able to most completely institute their "heroic," "high modernist" social revolutions in conditions in which the populace lacked the capacity to mobilize. Sharecroppers, in general, and African Americans, in particular, had very little political power and, therefore, little access to political processes. This meant that they could not force the state to recognize their customary claims to land and other benefits. In the depression-era United States generally, and particularly in the South, African Americans were at just about the nadir in their political capacity. They had been legally disfranchised by the 1898 decision to allow Mississippi's 1890 constitution, which instituted various tests as qualification for voting, to stand. Between 1890 and the 1930s the overwhelming majority of African Americans, and an increasing number of whites, lost their land, and therefore their capacity to control important aspects of their economic life. Further, Republicans had traditionally represented black interests. By the 1930s, even that party no

longer represented African Americans in the South and the New Deal was completely Democratic. Franklin D. Roosevelt was consumed with keeping his party together while implementing the New Deal reforms; his administration therefore did not challenge racial segregation and white supremacy.[37]

Nonetheless, a powerful congressional system limited the degree to which "high" modernists like Rex Tugwell could institute their schemes. Both a powerful democratic tradition that was particularly strong within the USDA and a relatively robust electoral system gave white Southerners considerable political power, particularly within the national Democratic Party. This power meant that FSA aims at racial equity were thwarted. But it also meant that the FSA was forced to modify its programs in ways that were sometimes responsive to client demands. Sharecroppers as well as the powerful wrote to the president and congressmen, and the agency felt a responsibility to respond to every appeal. Civil society organizations were strong enough and the national polity sufficiently diverse that the administration felt required to attend to demands by African Americans as well as powerful southern whites. On the local level, southern Democrats relied on votes, including the votes of poor whites. While corruption existed, and sharecroppers' mobility undoubtedly limited their political power, the newly settled white FSA clients were potential voters. At times this fueled opposition to some FSA projects, particularly when the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union organized. But in general, locally powerful whites favored the resettlement of white, and occasionally black, sharecroppers. At times, as seen regarding Sunflower Plantation, Lake View Plantation, Phillipston Plantation, and possibly Transylvania Plantation, members of durable black settlements could call on longstanding relationships between themselves and influential white neighbors, who could in turn appeal to their senators and representatives. In the industrial North, Democrats were courting the newly arrived black workers, who had both voting rights and potential union affiliation. But in the South, the dispossessed tenants, particularly black tenants, had very little direct access to political power. They therefore lacked capacity to place their counter-hegemonic discourses and interests on the agency's agenda.[38]

Further, the non-state actors who had political influence in the New Deal government, notably liberal and left organizations, parties, and churches, supported the (increasingly embattled) FSA and its projects,

and therefore had little interest in noting any potential injustice to the families removed to make way for the planned communities. Sharecroppers obtained considerable support from a broad swath of liberal-left supporters of the New Deal when they were dispossessed by planters who pocketed AAA payments, turning their erstwhile tenants into day laborers, but these same groups and individuals ignored those dispossessed to make way for the RA/FSA projects. Most of these non-state actors accepted the modernizing epistemology that justified the selection criteria on which most removals were made.[39]

Only the NAACP and associated African-American institutions, and a few elite white Southerners, took up the cause of black sharecroppers who were evicted from plantations that were transformed into white FSA projects. We found only two cases: a member of Drew's old families who appealed on behalf of the community evicted from Sunflower Plantation and Mississippian Oscar Johnston, who sought to eliminate the FSA. Johnston, although an aggressively modern plantation manager and businessman, opposed the particular form of modernization promoted by the FSA, invoking traditional paternalistic relationships in his attacks.

The people who did not qualify appear to have gone on with their lives, leaving little visible trace in the historical record. As far as we have been able to discern, the people displaced from Transylvania were the only ones to leave a collective record. John H. Scott, who did not qualify for resettlement on one of the FSA projects, went on to successfully lead efforts to obtain the vote and other civil rights in East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, an area that had had no African-American voters since Reconstruction.

The FSA's modernizing mission provided at least some fuel for the voting rights and civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. African-American Mileston Plantation, Holmes County, Mississippi, was a center of civil rights activism in the 1960s. As noted, Scott's base was FSA clients on the plantations collectively called Ladelta Farms. His account suggests that the bitterness of their removal may well have fueled their later militancy. But equally important were the organizational skills, education, and familiarity with government that the FSA clients gained. These communities found strength in their autonomy from white authority, their property rights, and their strong linkages with both government and civil society organizations.[40]

The sharecroppers and tenants who were invisible in their dispossession expose both "high modernist" and "low modernist" aspects of the New Deal: the high modernism of rational planning in which central authority defines who is worthy and who is expendable, based on putatively scientific norms; the low modernism of representative government that established racially segregated projects in which whites benefited disproportionate to their numbers. The subsequent success of the African-American communities in challenging white supremacy suggests, perhaps, that the low modernism described by Gilbert allowed, even encouraged, the development of civic participation. The New Deal was a complex phenomenon that does not allow for simplistic characterizations. The dispossessed sharecroppers reveal this complexity and its many contradictions.

NOTES

1. Walter Wilson to President Roosevelt, Dec. 11, 1937, File 912, Box 393, Louisiana LA14–LA18, Project Records Farm Security Administration & Predecessor Agencies, 1935–1940 (hereafter PR), RG 96, National Archives II, College Park, Md. (hereafter NARA II).

2. The memoir is John H. Scott, with Cleo Scott Brown, *Witness to the Truth: My Struggle for Human Rights in Louisiana* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

3. Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005); Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). The way the New Deal dealt with race and its legacy is a vexed one. See, for example, 2007 Sarah Lawrence College symposium "Rethinking New Deal Racial Politics: Citizenship, Public Policy, and the American Welfare State" reported in "Sarah Lawrence Symposium to Rethink Racial Politics of the New Deal," Collegenews.org, http://www.collegenews.org/x6842.xml (accessed Feb. 26, 2009). Kenneth Finegold and Theda Skocpol, *State and Party in America's New Deal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Deborah Fitzgerald, "Accounting for Change: Farmers and the Modernizing State," in *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America,* ed. Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 189–212; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

4. "Rohwer Relocation Center," Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture, http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=369 (accessed July 22, 2008); "Jerome Relocation Center," Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture,

http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2399 (accessed July 27, 2008); Rosalee Gould, interview with Jane Adams and D. Gorton, May 22, 2004, McGehee, Arkansas, notes in authors' possession; Bill Stroud, email correspondence with D. Gorton, Mar. 16, 2007, in authors' possession; Donald Holley, *Uncle Sam's Farmers: The New Deal Communities in the Lower Mississippi Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Matty Monteith and Jean Shields Jones, interview with authors, Jan. 12, 2003, Greenfield Plantation, Washington County, Mississippi, transcript in authors' possession.

5. M. H. McIntyre, to the Secretary of Agriculture, FSA, with letter from Dr. W. H. Jernagin, Fraternal Council of Negro Churches in America, Jan. 15, 1939; Howard S. Stansburg and S. R. Archer to the President, Jan. 26, 1939; O. C. W. Taylor to the President, Jan. 19, 1939, with transmittal from M. H. McIntyre to the FSA, Jan. 21, 1939, File 1568, Misc. papers, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde, Park, New York; Scott, *Witness to the Truth*; Holley, *Uncle Sam's Farmers,* 183, 112 also noted the protests over the transfer of Transylvania to white farmers. Johnston's charges were made at the *Hearings before the Select Committee of the House Committee on Agriculture, to Investigate the Activities of the Farm Security Administration,* 77th Cong., 1st sess., part 2, June 7 to July 2, 1943; quoted in Lawrence J. Nelson, *King Cotton's Advocate: Oscar G. Johnston and the New Deal* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 219, 223; also quoted in Holley, *Uncle Sam's Farmers,* 264–65; Plat of Phillipston Plantation, Plat Book 1, Chancery Clerk's Office, Leflore County Courthouse, Greenwood, Mississippi; Kathryn Richardson Brown interview with authors, Mar. 17, 2005, Leflore County Courthouse, notes in authors' possession.

6. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Jess Gilbert, "Low Modernism and the Agrarian New Deal," in *Fighting for the Farm: Rural America Transformed,* ed. Jane Adams (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 130–31. See, also, Fitzgerald, "Accounting for Change," 189–212.

7. The literature on modernism and nationalism is large and beyond the scope of this article to discuss at length. See, for example, Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

8. Jane Adams and D. Gorton, "Confederate Lane: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the Mississippi Delta," *American Ethnologist* 33 (May 2006): 288–309; Jane Adams and D. Gorton, "'Southern Trauma': Revisiting the Indianola, Mississippi, of John Dollard and Hortense Powdermaker," *American Anthropologist* 106 (June 2004): 334–45.

The issue of long-term effects of government programs is examined by Lester M. Salamon, "The Time Dimension in Policy Evaluation: The Case of the New Deal Land-Reform Experiments," *Public Policy* 27 (Spring 1979): 131–32, which focuses on the importance of these projects in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The projects are listed in various reports to Congress and internal reports. The National New Deal Preservation Association published a "Complete List of New Deal Communities, compiled primarily from the Committee on Agricultures," *Hearing on the Farm Security Administration,* 78th Cong., 1st sess., 1943–44, http://www.newdeallegacy.org/table_communities.html (accessed July 27, 2008). Books of plats of all the tracts purchased by 1940 in Region VI (Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi) are in Box 105, Arkansas AK9–AK11, PR, RG 96, NARA II. Agency records indicate that what was defined as a "community project" varied through time. Additionally, some projects, like Sunflower Plantation were treated administratively as part of Mississippi Delta Farms, despite the fact that they had a number of cooperatives and other elements characteristic of community.

9. The county-by-county inventory yields a more detailed list of lands acquired by the FSA than available in the project records at the National Archives for two reasons: first, project records for Mississippi and Louisiana are far less complete than those for Arkansas; and second, after Congress forbade the FSA from directly acquiring land the agency acted as intermediary between clients and the landowner, so these lands, although technically not administered by the FSA, were effectively FSA projects, see, Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics,* 205–207; Paul V. Maris, *"The Land is Mine"; From Tenancy to Family Farm Ownership* (1950, repr., New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 149–50. Records on individual clients for Region VI are housed at the National Archives in Fort Worth.

10. "The collection includes about 164,000 black-and-white negatives; this release provides access to over 160,000 of these images. The FSA-OWI photographers also produced about 1600 color photographs" http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fahome.html (accessed July 27, 2008). See, also, http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fabout.html. Roy Stryker was the head of the RA's Historical Section from the formation of the photographic project in 1935 until his resignation in 1943. In 1942 the Historical Section was folded into the Office of War Information (OWI). The complete collection of photographs (approximately 270,000 negatives and 77,000 prints) was transferred to the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, in 1944, http://arthurdalewv.org/2007/09/06/fsa-owi-photography-project/ (accessed July 27, 2008).

The captions are not always accurate. See, Marion Post Wolcott's mis-attribution of Joe Gow Nue & Co.'s grocery store to Leland, Mississippi, (LC-USF34-052450-D) when it was a Greenville landmark. The reason for this was the method they used. The photographers sent their film to Washington, DC, where it was developed and contact prints made. "After Stryker reviewed and selected images, the negatives and file prints (or 'first prints') were returned to the photographers for captioning. The resulting captions were edited at the photographic unit's headquarters," http://rs6.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fabout.html (accessed July 27, 2008).

11. The precursors to the RA included rural relief programs begun under the Civil Works Administration (established 1933) that were rolled into FERA's Division of Rural Rehabilitation and Stranded Populations in 1934; the FERA community program that began to establish planned communities in 1935; and its program to purchase and retire submarginal land, begun in 1934, with the Department of Interior's Division of Subsistence Homesteads established under the National Industrial Recovery Act, see, Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics,* 64–65; L. C. Gray, "The Social and Economic Implications of the National Land Program," *Journal of Farm Economics* 18 (May 1936): 258. On Tugwell's resignation, see, Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics,* 121–23.

12. Holley, *Uncle Sam's Farmers,* 28, 67–68, 102, 179–81; Plats of Region VI projects, Box 105, Arkansas AK9–AK11, PR, RG 96, NARA II; T. Roy Reid wrote to W. W. Alexander, Aug. 13, 1937, stating, "we will not sell land to negroes in any community where such sale does not have the endorsement of the leading citizens of the area affected." File 903-011, Box 393, Louisiana LA14–LA18, PR, RG 96, NARA II. The proportion of black and white tenant families to be selected for the Farm Tenant Security Projects for each state in Region VI are listed in a letter from John O. Walker to T. Roy Reid, July 14, 1937, File 011-045, Box 151, Arkansas AK19, PR, RG 96, NARA II. The policy is spelled out in Walter E. Packard to T. Roy Reid, Feb. 27, 1937, File 991-045, Box 393, Louisiana LA14–LA18, PR, RG 96, NARA II; Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics,* 196–97, 202.

13. Scott, *Witness to the Truth,* 82. His account is corroborated by the FSA Project Records, RG 96, NARA II; James Matthew Reonas, "Once Proud Princes: Planters and

Plantation Culture in Louisiana's Northeast Delta, From the First World War through the Great Depression" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2006), 157.

14. Thurgood Marshall to RA Director, Mar. 23, 1937, File 701; Lewis Long to Mr. Aylesworth, Nov. 20, 1937, File 789-513, Box 392, Louisiana LA14–LA18, PR, RG 96, NARA II; "Fight Wholesale Ousting," *Pittsburgh Courier,* Aug. 13, 1938, 1; "FSA to Explain Removal of Louisiana Tenant Farmers," *Pittsburgh Courier,* Oct. 15, 1938, 6; a shorter version of the article appears in the *Chicago Defender,* Oct. 15, 1938, 6; Scott, *Witness to the Truth,* 89; "La. Whites Protest Removal: Transfer being Fought by Both Groups, as FSA Gets Itself Tangled Up," *Pittsburgh Courier,* Oct. 29, 1938, 5; "Man Who Ousted Tenants 'On Spot,'" *Pittsburgh Courier,* Dec. 10, 1938, 4; J. O. Walker to T. Roy Reid, Jan. 19, 1939; Reid to Alexander, Jan. 20, 1938, File 912-06, Box 393, Louisiana LA14–LA18, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

15. Scott, *Witness to the Truth,* 90.

16. To see the entire series of photos Russell Lee took of this family, see, http://www.siu.edu/~jadams/fsa/ahs/trans-fam.html and http://www.siu.edu/~jadams/fsa/ahs/trans-fam-cn-order.html.

17. J. O. Walker to W. W. Alexander, Sept. 21, 1937, "Soliciting Information from Julius Rosenwald Foundation Relative to Conditions of Title to Property on Which They Erect Buildings for Negro Education," File 210, Box 409, Mississippi MS18–MS23, PR, RG 96, NARA II; Marie M. Hemphill, *Fevers, Floods, and Faith: A History of Sunflower County, Mississippi 1844–1976* (Indianola, Miss.: Sunflower County Historical Society, 1980), 416–17; Horace Taylor, in a Nov. 14, 1938 history reproduced by Peggy Moore, ed., *Sunflower Plantation Part 1: A History,* spiral bound pamphlet, nd, copy in authors' possession, states that "at one time [Sunflower Plantation] accommodated 170 or more Negro families."

18. Webb to Alexander, Nov. 26, 1938; Alexander to Webb, Dec. 12, 1938; Alexander to Reid, Dec. 12, 1938; Reid to Webb, Dec. 20, 1938, File 910, Box 410, Mississippi MS18–MS23, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

19. Reid to Whittington, Jan. 31, 1939, File 910, Box 410, Mississippi MS23–MS56, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

20. Holley, *Uncle Sam's Farmers,* 47, 140; Report on Plum Bayou Project, Lake View, see plats of projects, including Arkansas Tract No. 27, 1935, File ACC 59A-I213, Box 105, Arkansas AK9–AK11; Ogero C. Brewer to Senator Joe Y. Robinson, Apr. 20, 1936, Box 119; T. Roy Reid to Will W. Alexander, July 14, 1937, with "Special Selection Criteria," File 911-041, Box 121, Arkansas AK12, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

21. George Wolf to Jack Fischer, Aug. 5, 1939; Alexander to Reid, Aug. 19, 1939, File AD-AJ-12, Box 121, Arkansas AK12, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

For letters protesting removal, see, Cammack to J. O. Walker, Aug. 9, 1937, Sept. 23, 1937; R. L. Montgomery to E. B. Whitaker, Aug. 23, 1937; Sumrall to Whitaker, Oct. 5, 1937; Sumrall to Donilson, Willie Taylor, Louis Dixon, Walter Wilson, Nov. 24, 1937; Willie Taylor to President Roosevelt, Dec. 7, 1937; Lewiss Dixon and twenty-six other farm tenant families to Henry Wallace, nd, Dec. 7, 1937; Walter Wilson to President Roosevelt, Dec. 11, 1937; Cammack to Alexander, Dec. 27, 1937; Bill Donilson to President Roosevelt, Jan. 3, 1938; Walker to Walter Wilson, Dec. 3, 1937; Walker to Reid, Jan. 6, 1938, File 911-04, Box 393, Louisiana LA14–LA18, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

22. Letter from thirty-two signatories to W. M. Whittington, Dec. 17, 1938, File 910, Box 410, Mississippi MS23–MS56, PR, RG 96, NARA II; Taylor, "Sunflower Plantation."

23. Maris, *"The Land is Mine,"* 148.

24. Holley, *Uncle Sam's Farmers,* 179–81; Donald Holley, "The Negro in the New Deal Resettlement Program," *Agricultural History* (July 1971): 179–95; Baldwin, *Poverty and Progress,* 95–96, 121–23; Charles S. Johnson et al., *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy: Summary of Field Studies and Statistical Surveys, 1933–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935).

25. Adams and Gorton, "Confederate Lane"; "A 'Friend' of the Negro," *Pittsburgh Courier,* Dec. 10, 1938, 10.

26. W. Lloyd Warner, "American Caste and Class," *American Journal of Sociology* 42 (Sept. 1936): 234–37; Allison Davis et al., *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 3–14; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). The party, Kelley notes (p. 13), advocated racial integration in the North but nationalism in the South. Paul V. Canonici, *The Delta Italians: Their Pursuit of "The Better Life" and Their Struggle Against Mosquitoes, Floods, and Prejudice* (Madison, Miss.: Paul V. Canonici, 2003).

27. J. O. Walker to Reid, Aug. 7, 1937; letters regarding protests over Lake View being a black project are in File 913-011; Lake Providence leaders to White, Dec. 4, 1937; Alexander to Biggs, Dec. 17, 1937; Walker to Reid, Jan. 18, 1938; Reid to Alexander, Jan. 19, 1938; Reid to Alexander, Aug. 17, 1937, File 911-045; Reid to Alexander, Sept. 7, 1937, File 911-04, Box 393, Louisiana LA14–LA18; J. M. Haw to Bennett C. Clark, Apr. 10, 1937; E. L. Brown to Clark, Apr. 17, 1937, File 913-01, Box 412, Missouri MO16, PR, RG 96, NARA II. The cited file contains copies of numerous letters and petitions transmitted by Missouri congressmen and senators expressing similar sentiments, as well as typescript of "Let's Nip This in the Bud," *Enterprise Courier* (Charleston, MO), Apr. 8, 1937.

28. John L. McClellan to Alexander, Apr. 20, 1938, with copy of letter from Tom Johnson to McClellan, Apr. 15, 1938, Box 158, File 700; Alexander to McClellan, May 11, 1938; Reid to Alexander, Apr. 22, May 16, 1938; Reid to Alexander, with attached letter from Desha County citizens, May 23, 1938, File 703-01, Box 158, Arkansas AD-AK-19, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

29. S. B. Hardwick to Orville Zimmerman, Apr. 8, 1937, File 913-01, Box 412, Missouri MO16, PR, RG 96, NARA II. Despite greater political power and access, African Americans in southeast Missouri were unable to obtain more than a portion of La Forge Project, despite considerable effort. See, N. C. Bruce, Bud Johnson, J. B. Graves, J. A. Alexander, and S. D. Woods to Henry A. Wallace, Apr. 20, 1939; J. O. Walker to N. C. Bruce, nd, General Correspondence 1935–42, Box 230, RG 96, Chicago, NARA Great Lakes Region.

30. Lee O. Sumrall to E. B. Whitaker, July 22, 1937, File 913-011, Box 393, Louisiana, LA14–LA18, PR, RG 96, NARA II; Baldwin, *Poverty and Progress,* 199.

31. Gilbert, "Low Modernism," 131; Fitzgerald, "Accounting for Change"; Form dated May 5, 1936, File 911-45, Box 151, Arkansas, AK19, PR, RG 96, NARA II. On revising the criteria, see, Project Brief, July 23, 1937, File 918, Box 153, Arkansas Tenant Security, Arkansas RR-AK-19, PR, RG 96, NARA II, p. 2. Lake View, Arkansas and Lake Dick, Arkansas, had special selection criteria that slightly modified the general criteria. See, Special Selection Criteria, Lake View Project, RR-AK-12; Special Selection Criteria Lake Dick Project, RR-AK-14, with transmittal letter dated July 14, 1937, approval letter dated July 28, 1937, File 911-041, Box 121, Arkansas, PR, RG 96, NARA II; Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics,* 217–19.

32. The three assumptions schematized here should not be viewed as eliding the deep ideological cleavages within the New Deal itself between liberal and radical modernizers,

and in the larger polity, particularly regarding conservatives of various stripes. See, for example, Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics,* chpt. 9.

33. Johnson et al., *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy* is representative of this concern. See also the manual prepared under the direction of the FSA Personnel Training Committee for FSA employees by Joseph Gaer, *Toward Farm Security* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1941).

American Indians and the African-American community at Gee's Bend, Alabama, may be the only exception to this generalization. The various "community studies" undertaken by the USDA looked at formal institutions like economic enterprises, churches, civic organizations, and schools that functioned to make rural communities coherent; they did not study "informal" social networks and economic relationships created through kinship, patronage, and reciprocity.

34. Gaer, *Toward Farm Security,* 82–84, 109–10; Holley, *Uncle Sam's Farmers,* 135–36.

35. Gaer, *Toward Farm Security,* 97–115; Brief Outline County Procedures Instructions, Resettlement Administration, Rural Resettlement Division, Farm Tenant-Purchase Project, May 5, 1936, File 911-45, Box 151, Arkansas AK 19, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

36. Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*; Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*; "The New Frontier," on DVD *Our Daily Bread and Other Films of the Great Depression* (1934, Hat Creek, Calif.: Film Preservation Associates: Image Entertainment, [distributor], 1999); Holley, *Uncle Sam's Farmers*; Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal,* 155, chpt. 12; Holley, "The Negro in the New Deal Resettlement Program," 185–86, notes that fifteen elderly couples were not approved as resettlement clients at Gee's Bend, Alabama, despite the fact that all other (97) Gee's Bend residents were and they "possessed a strong sense of community." Scott, *Seeing Like a State,* 311–16.

37. Scott, *Seeing Like a State.*

38. On vote-buying, see, Ethel Cowart Smith's recollections of her mother selling her vote so she could go to business college in Memphis. Interior page, http://home.cablelynx.com/~jrcowart/cowarthi1.htm; on "Julian's Place" http://home.cablelynx.com/~jrcowart/ (accessed July 27, 2008). Whittington to Reid, Sept. 25, 1936, File 714-06, Box 408, Mississippi MS23–MS56, PR, RG 96, NARA II.

39. The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, primarily supported by the Socialist Party and various liberal leaders and organizations, made tenant evictions a cause célèbre in 1934 and again in 1939. See, Donald H. Grubbs, *Cry from the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971); Howard Kester, *Revolt among the Sharecroppers* (1936, repr., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997). The 1939 roadside demonstration in the Missouri Bootheel protesting the evictions was extensively documented by FSA photographer Arthur Rothstein (Library of Congress). On the Bootheel demonstrations, see, Bonnie Stepenoff, *Thad Snow: A Life of Social Reform in the Missouri Bootheel* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

40. Salamon, "Time Dimension in Policy Evaluation"; Spencer D. Wood, "The Roots of Black Power: Land, Civil Society, and the State in the Mississippi Delta, 1935–1968" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2006).