

## Sharecroppers, Evictions and the Farm Security Administration

*The New Deal resettlement communities were efforts to relieve the wretched condition of southern sharecroppers and tenants. However, those evicted to make way for the new settlers are almost invisible in the historic record. The resettlement projects were part of larger efforts to “modernize” rural America.*

The 12 mont 11 day 1937

Dear president Mr Roosevelt I wants you to help out I have lived it on Lakeview 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 oneelscce 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)*

In 1937 Lakeview, 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 flood plain, commonly called the “Delta.” Walter Wilson's letter and other similar letters from Lakeview Plantation to the US President, to Henry A. Wallace - the head of the USDA - and to 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 reverberated throughout the black press. And THAT was taken seriously by the New Deal. Otherwise, the eviction of croppers and tenants—black and white—from plantations purchased by the RA/FSA has been little noted.

There were many opponents of these government programs; they were vociferous and ultimately successful in dismantling the resettlement efforts. Those opponents maintained that the resettlement projects represented “socialistic” or “communistic” efforts to regiment and control the citizenry.

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?

Not all of the resettlement projects in the Delta involved dispossessing existing 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.

[The Greenfield Plantation project, on the Washington-Issaquena County Line, Mississippi. Greenfield had 200 units - with whites on the east side and a smaller black section just behind the Mississippi River levee.]

But most of the land was being worked already, and worked intensively. To bring this reality into focus, one may read

1) The memoir by 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). It recounts the establishment of Transylvania Project, Louisiana, (review [here](#)) and

2) 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 (near Itta Bena)

Johnston managed the transnational [Delta and Pine Plantation](#) (Scott, Mississippi) – about thirty-eight thousand acres; he headed the Finance Division of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and managed the AAA cotton pool; he 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 discernible patterns, and were embedded in larger modernizing discourses and practices embodied in the New Deal.

[\* Lawrence J Nelson, *King Cotton's Advocate: Oscar G. Johnson and the New Deal*, 1999, University of Tennessee Press. ([Excerpts on the web](#))]

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 (acreage allotments). The RA, created in 1935 by executive decree, aimed to reduce 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. Sharecropping was officially looked on as the bottomless pit of everlasting, inescapable poverty.

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. Although Dyess Colony (home of Johnny Cash) in Arkansas was the only FERA community project established in the lower Mississippi Valley, 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.

[Lake Dick](#) Cooperative Project, Altheimer, Arkansas (near Pine Bluff) was one of the few RA projects that modeled itself on the industrialized plantation. The “clients” lived in houses built around Lake Dick, and farmed the land collectively under the direction of a farm manager. While each family had four acres for a home, yard, and small vegetable garden, the crop-producing land itself was jointly owned and jointly cultivated by all resident families. A cooperative work system was arranged whereby each farmer was assigned a job by the Association’s elected officials. Whether a man worked in cultivation of the land, raising livestock, cutting timber, or operating one of the community services, he received cash wages bi-weekly from the Association. The Lake Dick Project was not successful.

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. [*Option: a contract conveying a right to buy or sell designated securities, commodities, or property at a specified price during a stipulated period.*] 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 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.

Tenants were evicted from newly acquired RA/FSA lands for two reasons: because they were of the wrong race in the segregated communities, or 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.”

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 (and just across the river from Vicksburg). 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.

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.

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 fallin.” 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. Then the images of white FSA clients sitting in well-used homes (Figure 2) make sense: these white families were moving into houses recently vacated by African-American residents. None of the Transylvania FSA clients, white or black, received the new homes idealized in so many other FSA photographs—at least not right away. Eighteen months later, however, [Marion Post Wolcott](#) was able to show remarkable progress at both Transylvania and at Thomastown (Ladelta Farms).

**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. [A very high resolution version of this photo may be found [here](#).]



**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.



[To see the entire series of photos Russell Lee took of this family, see, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/seach/?q=Transylvania%20Jan%201939&co=fsa>]

{The photo, "The Rain Are Fallin'" has achieved a degree of fame. A book is named for it ( ), and other references can be found to it on the Web.}

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 as a modern, industrial facility. It had about 125 African-American families\*\* in reasonably sound houses. The owners also provided the resident workers with a school, church buildings, and a store.

[\* To understand about Rosenwald Schools, see [here](#).]

[\*\*Horace Taylor, in a Nov. 14, 1938 history reproduced by Peggy Moore, ed., *Sunflower Plantation Part I: A History*, pamphlet, nd, states that “at one time [Sunflower Plantation] accommodated 170 or more Negro families.” You may find a copy [here](#).]

It seems there were 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 (James William Riddell, 1868-1948), 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:

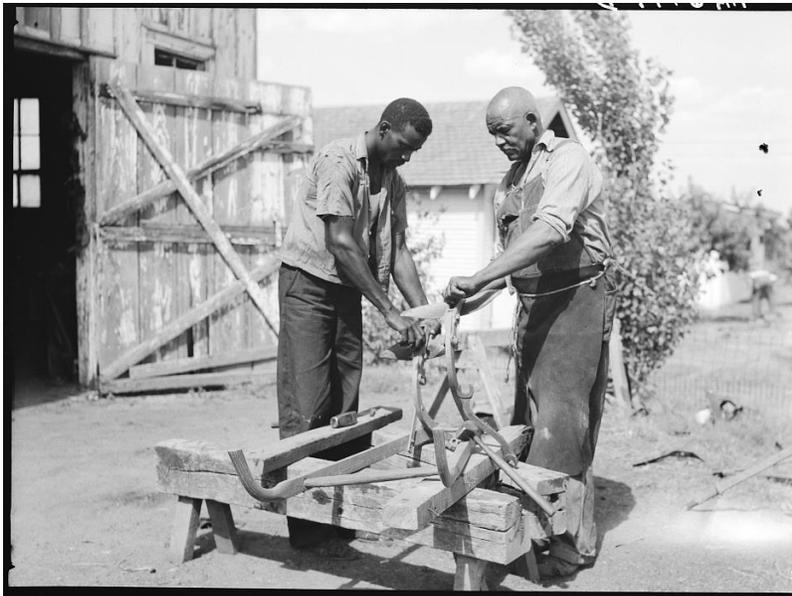
We have a Masonic Lodge there with a membership of more than 30. I am reliably informed that the Government Agent there is trying to bring pressure to bear and frighten these Negroes and cause them to throw up their contracts [to purchase] and move away and thus make this a white project. As their Grand 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.

From the regional headquarters office in Little Rock, FSA 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.”

Indeed, the federal government did not alter its plans in response to 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’ June 1936 FSA photographs of the plantation center for the RA, show only black people working on the place (Figure 3). 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.

**Figure 3.** “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.



Transylvania and Sunflower Plantations appear to be the only racially segregated government projects which generated organized protest by their long-established communities when their land was converted.

This is likely because Transylvania and Sunflower Plantations were both unusually large, at several thousands of 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 who were sharecroppers had not created stable communities, forming a largely transient labor force, sometimes moving every year – partly driven by the sharecropper’s search for a better deal (or a better plantation owner) and partly by the vicissitudes of the Depression itself.

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—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.

There was, indeed, racial prejudice in the selection process. The rehabilitation clients selected were exclusively African-American. 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.”

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.”

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. \*

[\*Letter from thirty-two signatories to W. M. Whittington, Dec. 17, 1938, File 910, Box 410, Mississippi MS23–MS56, PR, RG 96, NARA II and Taylor, Horace F, “Sunflower Plantation – A History.”]

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 necessarily have been displaced. Twenty-acre farms were being replatted into forty-acre farms. 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 whatever power the local actors had to influence federal policies in their region.

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](#) in New Orleans. 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.

The FSA's goals to establish racial equity, however, did not imply integration. There seems to be 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.

The racial and ethnic integration many sharecroppers had experienced ended with their access to federal programs.

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 Lee O. 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.

[This writer does not know if this Lee O. Sumrall – Louisiana tenant security project community manager – is related to Otha E. Sumrall, Sunflower Plantation FSA office manager.]

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, the mission shifted to enabling those most likely to succeed.

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-the-farm work. Hence all the chicken yards, smoke houses, pasture fences, garden plots, instruction on preserving food, etc. evident at all the resettlement communities. The government managers were determined that the clients were not going to plant their entire acreage in a cash crop and then buy food.

Agricultural experts and those concerned with the acute poverty of southern rural laborers understood this poverty to be rooted in "the problem of tenancy" and sharecropping. 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.

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. A scant two cases can be named: 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 can be discovered, 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.

It is believed that the FSA's modernizing mission provided at least some fuel for the voting rights and civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, African-American Mileston Plantation, Holmes County, Mississippi, was a center of civil rights activism in the 1960s.

### **Afterword**

To explicitly recognize the “elephants in the room,” a closing two remarks:

- 1) The racial and ethnic integration many sharecroppers had experienced ended with their access to federal programs.
- 2) Tenancy and sharecropping did not really end until mechanization took command, the fields did not demand so many human hands and there was a mass exodus of people from the farms.

### **NOTES**

Resettlement 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 Agriculture,” *Hearing on the Farm Security Administration*, 78th Cong., 1st sess., 1943–44, [http://www.newdeallegacy.org/table\\_communities.html](http://www.newdeallegacy.org/table_communities.html).

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. So Sunflower Plantation is not on these lists.

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 got around that by simply acting as intermediary between clients and the landowner. So these lands, although technically not administered by the FSA, were effectively FSA projects. See, Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration*, pp205–207 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); 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.

More on [Delta and Pine Land Company](#).

[A good web read on the FSA](#).

The [New Deal Network](#) is an educational guide to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

### **Rural Development:**

[Introduction](#)

[The Country Life Movement](#)

[The New Deal](#), a good summary by Dennis Roth]

[There are more chapters to this work (through year 2000) but only these chapters relate to our subject. If you are interested in the subject for the whole of the twentieth century, see [here](#).]

### **Pride, Prejudice, and Politics: Roosevelt versus Recovery, 1933-1938** – By Gary D Best

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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 sub-marginal land, begun in 1934, with the Department of Interior's Division of Subsistence Homesteads established under the National Industrial Recovery Act.

Concerned that criticism of him as "Rex the Red" had made him a liability, Tugwell resigned in 1936. After the triumph of the Democrats in elections later that year, Congress passed the Farm Security Act in 1937, which transformed the RA into the Farm Security Administration, with broader powers to aid poor farmers. Eventually, the staff of the FSA reached 19,000 and was deployed in nearly 2,300 county offices to aid 800,000 client families. With funds provided by the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, some 12,000 tenant families became landowners, loans totaling \$100 million reduced farm debt by nearly 25 percent, and a medical care program for borrowers grew to include clinics in thirty-one states. In order to give small farmers greater stability and control over the market, the FSA also encouraged the formation of 16,000 cooperatives with 300,000 members willing to pool their resources.

These measures eventually stirred up a backlash. The Farm Bureau, which had acquiesced in the creation of the RA as an emergency relief measure, denounced the FSA as "government bureaucracy gone mad"; in Congress the return of most Midwestern farmers to the Republican party by 1940 (once Depression hardship had subsided because of war material production) emboldened critics to mount attacks on the FSA as wasteful and "Un-American." By 1943 the program had lost most of its funding and three years later was revamped into a weak Farmers' Home Administration.

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The **Farmers Home Administration (FmHA)** was established in August 1946 to replace the Farm Security Administration. FmHA mission and programs involved extending credit for agriculture and rural development. Direct and guaranteed credit went to individual farmers, low-income families, and seniors in rural areas. Loans were authorized for housing, farm improvement, water systems, and emergency relief. FmHA also gave loans and grants for rural development. Between 1947 and 1994, the FmHA expanded the availability of credit and the size of loans.

In the later years, the FmHA extended credit to individuals and communities for non-farm use. In 1994, the USDA was reorganized and the functions of FmHA were transferred to the [Farm Service Agency](#). In 2006, the FmHA was fully terminated, and to date, no other program has replaced it.