

## REORGANIZATION OF THE INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM IN ALABAMA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

### ANTE-BELLUM SYSTEM

The cotton-planter of the South, the master of many negro slaves, organized what was probably the most efficient plantation labor system the world ever saw. Each plantation was an industrial community almost independent of the outside world, with a most minute division of labor, each servant being assigned a task suited to his or her strength and training. Nothing but the most skilled management could save a planter from ruin, for though the labor was efficient, it was the most costly ever known. The value of an overseer was judged by the general condition, health, appearance, and manners of the slaves; the amount of work done with the least punishment; the condition of stock, buildings, and plantation; and the size of the crops. All supplies were raised on the plantation—corn, bacon, beef, and other food-stuffs; farm implements and harness were made and repaired by the skilled negroes in rainy weather when no outdoor work could be done; clothes were cut out in the “big house” and made by the negro women under the direction of the mistress. There was much need for skilled labor, and this was done by the blacks. Work was often done by tasks, and industrious negroes were able to complete their daily allotment and have three or four hours a day to work in their own gardens and “patches.” They often earned money at odd jobs, and the church records show that they contributed regularly. Negro children were trained in the arts of industry and in sobriety by elderly negroes of good judgment and firm character, usually women.<sup>1</sup> Children too young to work were cared for by a competent mammy in the plantation nursery, while their parents were in the fields.

In the Black Belt there was little hiring of extra labor and

<sup>1</sup> The accounts of the wild and idle negro children of the rice and tobacco districts are not true of those in the Cotton Belt. The smallest tot could do a little in a cotton field.

less renting of land. Except on the borders, nearly all whites were of the planting class. Their greater wealth had enabled them to outbid the average farmer and secure all the rich lands of the black prairies, canebrake, and river bottoms. The small farmer who secured a foothold in the Black Belt would find himself in a situation not altogether pleasant, and, selling out to the nearest planter, would go to poorer counties in the hills or pine woods, where land was cheaper, and where most of the people were white.

In the Black Belt cotton was largely a surplus money crop, and once the labor was paid for, the planter was a very rich man.<sup>2</sup> In the white counties of the cotton states about the same crops were raised as in the Black Belt, but the land was less fertile and the methods of cultivation were less skilful. In the richer parts of these white counties there was something of the plantation system with some negro labor. But slavery gradually drove white labor to the hills and mountains, and to the sand and pine barrens. No matter how poor a white man was, he was excessively independent in spirit and wanted to work only his own farm. This will account for the lack of renters and hired white laborers in black or in white districts, and also for the fact that the less fertile land was taken up by the whites who desired to be their own employers. Land was cheap, and any man could purchase it.

There was some renting of land in the white counties, and the

<sup>2</sup> See J. W. DuBose, in *Birmingham Age-Herald*, March 31 and April 7, 1901; R. H. Edmonds, "The Cotton Crop of To-Day," *Review of Reviews*, September, 1903; Ingle, *Southern Sidelights*, p. 271; address of President Thach, of the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, before the American Economic Association, New Orleans, December 29, 1903; Tillinghast, *Negro in Africa and America*, pp. 126, 143; Mallard, *Plantation Life before Emancipation*; Washington, *Up from Slavery*, and *The Future of the American Negro*, *passim*. The immense cost of the slave labor is seen when the value of the slaves is compared with the value of the lands cultivated by their labor. In 1859 the cash value of the lands in Alabama was \$175,824,622, and that of the slaves was \$215,540,000. The larger portion of this land had not a negro on it and was cultivated exclusively by whites. (See the Census of 1860.) The effect of the loss of slaves on the welfare of a planter is shown in the case of William L. Yancey. His slaves were accidentally poisoned and died. The loss ruined him, and he was forced to sell his plantation and practice law. A farmer in a white county employing white labor would have been injured only temporarily by such a loss of labor.

form it took was that now known as "third and fourth." It was then called "shares." There was little or no tenancy "on halves" or "standing rent." But the average farmer worked his own land, often with the help of from three to ten slaves.

On the borders of the Black Belt in Alabama was a peculiar class, called "squatters." They settled down, with or without permission, on lots of poor and waste land, built cabins, cleared "patches," and made a precarious living by their little crops, and by working for wages as carpenters, blacksmiths, etc. Some bought the small lots of land on long-time payments and never paid for them, but simply stayed where they were. On the borders of the Black Belt in the busy season were found numbers of white hired men working alongside negro slaves;<sup>4</sup> for there was no prejudice against manual labor; that is, no more than anywhere else in the world.<sup>5</sup>

#### BREAKUP OF THE OLD SYSTEM

As soon as the war was over, the first concern of the returning soldiers was to obtain food to relieve present wants and to secure supplies to last until a crop could be made. In the white counties of the state the situation was much worse than in the Black Belt.

<sup>3</sup> The tenant furnished labor, supplies, and teams, and gave to the landlord a fourth of the cotton and a third of the corn produced.

<sup>4</sup> There was usually good feeling between the whites and blacks at work together, but the negroes at heart scorned the poor whites, and had to be closely watched to keep them from insulting or abusing them. The negro had little respect for the man who owned no slaves, or who owned but few and worked with them in the fields. To protect the slaves against outsiders was one reason why discipline was strict, supervision close, passes required, etc. When both white and black were allowed to go at will over the plantation and community, trouble was sure to result from the impudent behavior of the negro to "white trash," and the consequent retaliation of the latter. The whites often came to the master and wanted him to whip his best slaves for impudence to them. The master, to prevent this, regulated the liberty of the slave by passes, etc., and the whites, especially strangers, were expected not to trespass on a plantation where slaves were.

<sup>5</sup> The so-called "prejudice" against manual labor is perhaps due largely to abolitionist theories and arguments, which have been partially accepted since the war by some southerners who think it due to the old system to show its lofty attitude toward the common things of life. But the negro had, and still has, a certain contempt for a white who works as he does. And it has always been a custom of mankind — white, yellow, or black — to avoid manual labor if there is anything else to do.

The soil of the white counties was less fertile; the people were not wealthy before the war, and during the war they suffered from the depredations of the enemy and from the operation of the tax-in-kind which bore heavily upon them when they had nothing to spare. The white men went to the war, and there were only women, children, and old men to work the fields. The heaviest losses among the Alabama Confederate troops were from the ranks of the white-county soldiers. In all of these counties there was destitution after the first year of the war, and after 1862 from one-fourth to one-half of the soldiers' families received aid from the state. The bountiful Black Belt furnished enough for all. At the close of hostilities the condition of the people in the poorer counties was pitiable. Stock, fences, barns, and in many cases dwellings had disappeared; the fields were grown up in weeds; and no supplies of any kind were available. How many of the people managed to live was a mystery. Some walked twenty miles to get food, and there were cases of starvation. No seed of any kind and no farm implements were to be had. The best work of the Freedmen's Bureau was done in relieving these white people from want until they could make a crop.

The Black Belt was the richest, as well as the least exposed, section of the state, and fared well until the end of the war. The laborers were negro slaves, and these worked as well in war time as in peace. Immense food crops were made in 1863 and 1864, and there was no suffering among whites or blacks. Until 1865 there was no loss from Federal invasion, but with the spring of 1865 misfortunes came. Four large armies marched through the central portions of the state, burning, destroying, confiscating. In June, 1865, the Black Belt was in almost as bad condition as the white counties. All buildings in the track of the armies had disappeared; the stores of provisions were confiscated; gin-houses and mills were burned; cattle, horses, and mules were carried away; and nothing much was left except the negroes and the rich land. The returning planter, like the farmer, found his agricultural implements worn out and broken, and in all the land there was no money to purchase the necessities of life. But in the portions of the black counties untouched by the armies there were

supplies sufficient to last the people for a few months. A few fortunate individuals had cotton, which was now bringing a fabulous price, and it was the high price received for these few bales not confiscated by the government that saved the Black Belt from suffering as did the other counties.

Neither master nor slave knew exactly how to begin anew, and for a while things simply drifted. Now that the question of slavery was settled, many of the former masters felt a great relief from responsibility, though for their former slaves they felt a profound pity. The majority of them had no faith in free negro labor, yet all were willing to give it a trial, and a few of the more strenuous ones said that the energy and strength of the white man that had made the savage negro an efficient laborer could make the free negro work fairly well; and if the free negro would work, they were willing to admit that the change might be beneficial to both races.

During the spring, summer, and fall of 1865 the masters came straggling home, and were met by friendly servants who gave them cordial welcome. Each one at once called his slaves and told them that they were free; that they might stay with him and work for wages, or that they might find other homes. Except in the vicinity of the towns and army posts, the negroes usually chose to stay and work; and in the rural districts affairs were little changed for several months after the surrender. There the surrender hardly caused a ripple on the surface of society. Life and work went on as before. The staid negro coachmen sat upon their boxes on Sunday as of old; the field hands went regularly about their appointed tasks. Labor was cheerful, and the negroes went singing to the fields. "The negro knew no Appomattox. The revolution sat lightly, save in the presence of vacant seats at home and silent graves in the churchyard, in the memorials of destructive raids, in the wonder on the faces of a people once free, now ruled, where ruled at all, by a bureau agent." Here it was that the master-race believed that, after all, freedom might be well.<sup>6</sup> In other sections, where the negro was more exposed to outside influences, the whites were not hopeful. The common

<sup>6</sup> Accounts from old citizens, former planters.

opinion was that with free negro labor cotton could not be cultivated with success. The northerner thought that it was a crop made by forced labor, and that no freeman would willingly perform such labor; the southerner believed that the negro would neglect the crop too much when not under strict supervision. Yet later years have shown that free white labor is most successful in the cultivation of cotton because of the care now expended on farms in the white counties; while cotton is the only crop that the free negro has cultivated with any degree of success, because some kind of a crop can be made on the fertile soils of the Black Belt by the most careless cultivation.

At first no one knew just how to work the free negro. Innumerable plans were formed, and many were tried. The old patriarchal relations were preserved as far as possible. Truman,<sup>7</sup> who made a long stay in Alabama, reported that in most cases there was a genuine attachment between masters and negroes; that the masters were the best friends the negroes had; and that, though they regarded the blacks with much commiseration, they were inclined to encourage them to collect around the big house on the old slavery terms, giving food, clothes, quarters, medical attendance, and some pay.<sup>8</sup> At that time no one could understand the freedom of the negro.<sup>9</sup> As one old master expressed it, he saw no "free negroes"<sup>10</sup> until the fall of 1865, when the bureau began to influence the blacks. But with the extension of the bureau and the spread of army posts, the negroes, who for a while had been taking freedom on faith, now determined to enjoy the reality. Crops that had been planted in the spring were neglected in the summer and fall, while the darky moved away from

<sup>7</sup> The agent of President Johnson.

<sup>8</sup> Report to the President, April 9, 1866.

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Saunders, a noted slaveholder in one of the white counties in north Alabama, established a patriarchal protectorate over his former slaves. He built a church for them, and organized a monthly court, presided over by himself, in which the old negro men tried delinquents. It is said that the findings of this court were often ludicrous in the extreme, but order was preserved and for a long while there was no resort to the bureau. (See Saunders, *Early Settlers*, p. 31.) Many similar protectorates were established in the remote districts, but the policy of the bureau was to break them up.

<sup>10</sup> A term of contempt.

his slave quarters, changed his name, probably deserted his family, joined a new church and attended many revivals, bought a gun and acquired a dog, and went hunting and fishing to his heart's content.<sup>11</sup> The house servants and the artisans, who were the best and most intelligent of the negroes, began to go to the towns. Many were attracted by the reports of confiscation and division of property, and stopped working. Negro women, desiring to be as white ladies, refused to work in the fields, to cook, wash, or to perform other menial duties. It was years before this "freedom" prejudice of the negro women against domestic service died out. The precarious support offered by the bureau attracted many negroes to town and made agricultural labor unreliable. The negro would work one or two days in the week, go to town two days, and wander about the rest of the time. Under such conditions there was no hope of continuing the old patriarchal system, and new plans, modeled on what they had heard of free labor, were tried by the planters. In the white counties the ex-soldiers went to work as before the war, but they had come home from the army too late to plant full crops, and few had supplies enough to last until the crops should be gathered. In the white counties the negroes were so few as to escape the serious attention of the bureau, and consequently they worked fairly well at what they could get to do.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU SYSTEM

The first work of the bureau was to break up the labor system that had been partially constructed, and to endeavor to establish a new system based on the northern free-labor system and the old slave-hiring system, with the addition of a good deal of pure theory. The bureau was to act as a labor clearing-house; it was to have entire control of labor; contracts must be written in

<sup>11</sup> The crop of cotton in 1865 was 75,305 bales; in 1866, 429,102 bales; in 1867, 239,516 (showing influence of political agitation); in 1868, 366,193 bales; and in 1869, 429,482 bales. (See Hodgson's *Manual*, 1869 and 1871, and the Census of 1870.) In 1849 the crop was 564,429 bales, and in 1859, 989,955 bales.

<sup>12</sup> New York *Herald*, July 17, 1865; Reid, *After the War*, pp. 211, 218, 219; Tillet in *Century*, Vol. XI; reports of General Swayne, 1865, 1866; Van de Graaf in *Forum*, Vol. XXI, pp. 330, 339; *DeBow's Review*, February, 1866, p. 220; oral accounts.

accordance with the regulations of the bureau, and must be registered by the agent, who charged large fees. Unskilled labor was classified into three grades, and men and women were to be paid \$10, \$8, and \$6 per month, according to the grade, and half-grown children \$6.<sup>13</sup> In addition, they were to have food, full quarters, clothing, medical attendance, and schooling for their children. The working-day was ten hours from April to October, and nine hours from November to March. The task system, as well as the overseer, was forbidden, and the "share" system was discouraged. Wages were secured by a lien on crops or land, and this was prior to any other lien. Breach of contract was tried by bureau agent, bureau court, provost-marshal, or military commission. No contract for a longer time than six months was approved. The chain-gang hard labor system of punishment of convicts was abolished. Where the laborer received no supplies his pay was fixed at the rate of wages paid for able-bodied slaves before the war. If a negro was found working under a verbal contract, his employer was arrested or warned to conform to regulations. Planters were continually in trouble with the bureau agent, who summoned them before him on the slightest pretexts. The lien on the crop prevented the moving or sale of the crop, unless the negro consented; yet the planter had to sell before he could pay wages.<sup>14</sup>

The result of these regulations was to destroy industry where an alien bureau agent was stationed, unless the agent was purchasable; for the planters could not afford to have their land worked on such terms. In some of the counties, where the native magistrates served as bureau agents, no attention was paid to the rules of the bureau, and the people floundered

<sup>13</sup> Skilled labor should receive \$2.50, \$2, or \$1.50 per day.

<sup>14</sup> *Montgomery Mail*, May 12, 1865; *Howard's Circular*, May 30, 1865; Circular No. 11, War Department, July 12, 1865; *Huntsville Advocate*, July 26, 1865; Swayne's reports, 1865, 1866; General Order No. 12, Department of Alabama, August 30, 1865; General Order No. 13, September, 1865; *Selma Times*, December 4, 1865. While General Howard was in Mobile, some of the planters asked him to bind to them for a term of years their former slaves, in case the latter were willing. Howard was, of course, horrified at such a proposal. The so-called "black laws" passed by the legislature in 1865-66 were scarcely heard of by the people who hired negroes, and were never in force.



along trying to develop a workable basis of existence. In the districts infested by the bureau agents the negroes had fantastic notions of what freedom meant. On one plantation they demanded that the plantation bell be no longer rung to summon the hands to and from work, because it was too much like slavery.<sup>15</sup> In various places they refused to work, and congregated about the bureau offices, awaiting the expected division of property, when they would get the "forty acres and one old gray mule." When wages were paid, they believed that each should receive the same amount, whether his labor had been good or bad, and whether the laborer was present or absent, sick or well. In one instance a planter was paying his men in corn according to the time each had worked. The negroes objected and got an order from the bureau agent that the division should be made equally. The planter read the order (which the negro could not read), and at once ordered the division as before. The negroes, thinking the bureau had ordered it, were satisfied. In the cane-brake region the agents were afraid of the great planters, and did not interfere with the negroes except to organize them into Union Leagues; but elsewhere in the Black Belt the planter could not afford to hire negroes on the terms fixed by the bureau.<sup>16</sup>

#### NORTHERN AND FOREIGN IMMIGRATION

With the breakup of the slave system the planter found himself with much more land than he knew what to do with. He could get no reliable labor, he had no cash capital, and in many cases he offered his best lands for sale for low prices. The planters wanted to attract northern and foreign immigration and capital into the country; the cotton-planter sought for a northern partner who could furnish the capital. Owing to the almost religious regard of the negro for his northern deliverers, many white landholders thought that northern men, especially discharged soldiers, might be able to control negro labor better than southern men. General Swayne, the head of the bureau in the state, said

<sup>15</sup> Somers, *Southern States*, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup> *Southern Magazine*, January, 1874; *Selma Messenger*, November 15, 1865; *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, January, 1874; *Selma Times*, December 4, 1865; oral accounts; *DeBow's Review*, February, 1866.

that the negroes had more confidence in a "blue coat" than in a native, and that among the larger planters northern men, as partners or overseers, were in great demand.<sup>17</sup>

For a short time after the close of the war northern men in considerable numbers planned to go into the business of cotton-raising. DeBow<sup>18</sup> gives a description of the would-be cotton-planters who came from the North to show the southern people how to raise cotton with free negro labor. They had notebooks and guidebooks full of close and exact tables of costs and profits, and from them figured out vast returns. They acknowledged that the negro might not work for the southern man, but they were sure that he would work for them. They were self-confident, and would listen to no advice from experienced planters, whom they laughed at as old fogies, but from their notebooks and tables they gave one another much information about the new machinery useful in cotton culture, about rules for cultivation, how to control labor, etc. They estimated that each laborer's family would make \$1,000 clear gain each year. DeBow would not say that they were wrong, but he said he thought they should hasten a little more slowly. Northern energy and capital flowed in; plantations were bought and the various industries of plantation life started; and mills and factories were established. Because of the paralyzed condition of industry, the southern people welcomed these signs of prosperity, but they were very skeptical of their final success. The northern settler had confidence in the negro, and gave him unlimited credit or supplies; consequently, in a few years, he was financially ruined and had to turn his attention to politics and to exploiting the negro in that field in order to make a living.<sup>19</sup> Both as employer and as manager the northern man failed to control negro labor. He expected the negro to be the equal of the Yankee white. The negroes themselves were dis-

<sup>17</sup> Swayne to A. F. Perry, New York *Herald*, August 28, 1865; New York *Herald*, July 17, 1865; Reid, *After the War*, pp. 211-19; DeBow's *Review*, February, 1866, pp. 213, 220; Somers, *Southern States*, p. 131.

<sup>18</sup> DeBow's *Review*, February, 1866.

<sup>19</sup> Many of the carpet-bag statesmen were northern men who had failed at cotton-planting or as overseers.

gusted with northern employers. Truman reported, after an experience of one season, that "it is the almost universal testimony of the negroes themselves, who have been under the supervision of both classes—and I have talked with many with a view to this point—that they prefer to labor for a southern employer."<sup>20</sup>

Northern capital came in after the war, but northern labor did not, though the planters offered every inducement. Land was offered to white purchasers at ridiculously low rates, but the northern white laborer did not come. He was afraid of the South with its planters and negroes. The poorer classes of native whites, however, profited by the low prices and secured a foothold on the better lands. So general was the unbelief in the value of the free negro as a laborer, especially in the bureau districts, and so signally had all inducements failed to bring native white laborers from the North, that determined efforts were made to obtain white labor from abroad. Immigration societies were formed, with officers in the state and headquarters in the northern cities. These societies undertook to send south laboring people in families—especially German—at so much per head. The planter turned with hope to white labor, of the superiority of which he had so long been hearing, and he wished very much to give it a trial. The advertisements in the newspapers read much like the old slave advertisements: so many head of healthy, industrious Germans of good character delivered f.o.b., New York, at so much per head. One of the white labor agencies in Alabama undertook to furnish "immigrants of any nativity and in any quantity" to take the place of negroes. Children were priced at the rate of \$50 a year; women, \$100; men, \$150; they themselves providing board and clothes. One of every six Germans was warranted to speak English.<sup>21</sup> Most of these agencies were

<sup>20</sup> Report to the President, April 9, 1866; also *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, January, 1874; Mrs. Leigh, *Ten Years in a Georgia Plantation*; oral accounts. On account of the general failure of the northern men who invested capital in the South in 1865 and 1866, there grew up in the business world an unfavorable feeling against the South, which for the remainder of reconstruction days had to struggle against adverse business opinion. (*Harper's Magazine*, January, 1874.)

<sup>21</sup> *Selma Times*, December 4, 1865. Nearly all the newspapers printed advertisements of the immigration societies.

great frauds, and only wanted an advance payment on a carload of Germans who did not exist. In a few instances some laborers were actually shipped in; but they at once demanded an advance of pay, and then deserted. Like the bounty jumpers, they played the game time and time again. The influence of the radical northern press was also used to discourage emigration to the South;<sup>22</sup> consequently white immigration into the state did not amount to anything,<sup>23</sup> and the Black Belt received no help from the North or from abroad, and had to fall back upon the free negro.

In the white counties there had been no hope or desire for alien immigration. The people and the country were so desperately poor that the stranger would never think of settling there. Many of the whites in moderate circumstances living near the Black Belt took advantage of the low price of rich lands and acquired small farms in the prairies, but there was no influx of white labor to the Black Belt from the white counties.<sup>24</sup> Nearly every man, woman, and child in the white districts had to go to work to earn a living. Many persons—lawyers, public men, teachers, ministers, physicians, merchants, overseers, managers, and even women—who had never before worked in the fields or at manual occupations, were now forced to do so because of loss of property, or because they could not live by their former occupations.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Northern Alabama Illustrated*, p. 378.

<sup>23</sup> *Selma Times*, December 4, 1865; *New York Times*, July 2, 1866.

<sup>24</sup> The greatest evil of slavery was its tendency to drive the whites who were in moderate circumstances away from the richer lands of the prairie and canebrake, leaving that section to the few slaveholders and the immense number of slaves. Emancipation thus left on the finest lands of the state a shiftless laboring population, which still retains possession. Now, as in slavery times, the white prefers not to work as a field hand in the Black Belt when he can get more independent work elsewhere. And, besides, he does not wish to live among the negroes. Negro slavery kept whites from settling on the fertile lands; the negro keeps whites from taking possession now.

<sup>25</sup> *Mobile Daily Times*, October 21, 1860; *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 21, 1866; *DeBow's Review*, March 18, 1866.

A number of young women of Montgomery, who were once wealthy, worked in the printing-office of the *Advertiser*. One of them was a daughter of a former president of the United States. Many women became teachers, displacing men who then went to the fields. Disabled soldiers generally tried teaching.

There seems to be a belief that emancipation had a good effect in driving to

While the number of white laborers had increased somewhat, negro labor had decreased. Several thousand negro men had gone with the armies; many of the most intelligent had drifted to town to earn a precarious living at their trades; great numbers congregated in the towns where bureau supplies were doled out; and in the vicinity of the larger towns there was a general disposition among the blacks to crowd into the outskirts of the towns, where the sanitary arrangements were bad and where thousands died. The rural negro had a promising outlook, for at any time he could get more work than he could do; the city negro found work scarce even when he wanted it.<sup>26</sup>

#### ATTEMPTS TO ORGANIZE A NEW SYSTEM

Several attempts were made by the negroes in 1865 and 1866 to work farms and plantations on the co-operative system—that is, to club work—but with no success. They were not accustomed to independent labor; their faculty for organization had not been sufficiently developed; and the dishonesty of their leading men sometimes caused failures of the schemes.<sup>27</sup>

In the summer of 1865 the Monroe County Agricultural Association was formed to regulate labor and to protect the interests of both employer and laborer. It was the duty of the executive

work a certain "gentleman-of-leisure" class that had been supported by the work of slaves and had scorned labor. (See W. B. Tillett in the *Century*, Vol. XI, p. 769.) It is a mistake to regard the slaveholding, planting class as in any degree idle, unless from the point of view of the negro or the ignorant white who believed that any man who did not work with his hands was a gentleman of leisure. The Alabama planter was, and had to be, a man of great energy, good judgment, and diligence. It was a belief that a man who could not successfully manage a plantation or other business should not be intrusted with an official position. One of the most serious objections made by the cotton planters to Jefferson Davis as president was that he had failed to manage his plantation with success. (See also Somers, *Southern States*, p. 127.)

<sup>26</sup> *DeBow's Review*, February and March, 1866; *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 21, 1866; *New York Herald*, July 17, 1866. It was estimated that in the fall of 1865 the negro male population of the state was reduced by 50,000 able-bodied men who were hanging around the cities and towns doing nothing. At Mobile there were 10,000; at Montgomery, 10,000; at Meridian, Miss., 5,000; at Selma, 5,000; and at various smaller points, 20,000. (*Mobile Times*, October 21, 1865.)

<sup>27</sup> See also Reid, *After the War*, p. 221.

committee to look after the welfare of the freedmen, to see that contracts were carried out and the freedmen protected in them, and, in cases of dispute, to act as arbitrator. The members of the association pledged themselves to see that the freedman received his wages, and to aid him in case his employer refused to pay his wages. They were also to see that the freedman fulfilled his contract, unless there was good reason why he should not. Homes and the necessities of life were to be provided by the association for the aged and helpless negroes, of whom there were several on every plantation. The planters declared themselves in favor of schools for the negro children, and a committee was appointed to devise a plan for their education. Every planter in Monroe County belonged to the association.<sup>28</sup> An organization in Conecuh County adopted, word for word, the constitution of the Monroe County association. In Clarke and Wilcox Counties similar organizations were formed, and in all counties where negro labor was the main dependence some such plans were devised.<sup>29</sup> But it is noticeable that in those counties where the planters first undertook to reorganize the labor system there were no regular agents of the Freedmen's Bureau and no garrison.

The average negro, quite naturally, had little or no sense of the obligation of contracts. He would leave a growing crop at the most critical period and move into another county, or, working his own crop "on shares," would leave it in the grass and go to work for someone else in order to get small change for tobacco, snuff, and whisky. After three years of experience with such conduct, a meeting of citizens at Summerfield, Dallas County, decided that laborers ought to be impressed with the necessity of complying with contracts. They agreed that no laborers discharged for failure to keep contracts would be hired again by

<sup>28</sup> Trowbridge, *The South*, pp. 431 ff.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431; reports of General Swayne, December 26, 1865, and January, 1866, in House Executive Document, No. 70, Thirty-ninth Congress, First Session. General Swayne strongly approved the objects of these societies. He said there was not, and never had been, any question of the right of the negro to hold property. Free negroes had held property before the war. The creoles of Mobile had all the rights of citizens by the treaty of cession of west Florida.

other employers. They declared it to be the duty of the whites to act in perfect good faith in their relations with freedmen, to respect and uphold their rights, and to promote good feeling.<sup>80</sup>

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHARE SYSTEM

At first the planters had demanded a system of contracts, thinking that by law they might hold the negro to their terms. But the bureau contracts were one-sided, and the planters could not afford to enter into them. General Swayne early reported<sup>81</sup> a general breakdown of the contract system, though he told the planters that in case of dispute, where no contract was signed, he would exact payment for the negro at the highest rates. The "share" system was discouraged, but where there were no bureau agents it was developing. And so bad was the wage system that even in the bureau districts share-hiring was done. The object of share-renting was to cause the laborer to take an interest in his crop and to relieve the planter of disputes about lost time, etc. Some of the negroes also decided that the share system was the proper one. On a plantation near Selma the negroes demanded shares, threatening to leave in case of refusal. General Hardee, who was living near, proposed a plan for a verbal contract: wages should be one-fourth of all crops; meat and bread to be furnished to the laborer and his share of the crop to be paid to him in kind, or the net proceeds in cash; the planter to furnish land, teams, wagons, implements, and seed to the laborer, who, in addition, had all the slavery privileges of free wood, water and pasturage, garden lot and "truck patch," teams to use on Sundays and for going to town. The absolute right of management was reserved to the planter. It was understood that this was no copartnership, but that the negro was hired for a share of the crop; consequently he had no right to interfere in the management.

On another plantation, where a share system similar to Hardee's was in operation, the planter divided the workers into squads of four men each. To each squad he assigned one hundred acres of cotton and corn, in the proportion of five acres of cotton

<sup>80</sup> *DeBow's Review*, February, 1868.

<sup>81</sup> January 31, 1866.

to three of corn, and forty acres of cotton for the women and children of the four families. The squads were united to pick the cotton, because they worked better in gangs. Wage-laborers had to be kept to look after fences and ditches, and perform odd jobs. A frequent source of trouble was the custom of allowing the negro, as part of his pay, several acres of "outside crop" to be worked on certain days of the week, as Fridays and Saturdays. The planter was supposed to settle disputes among the negroes, give them advice on every subject except politics and religion, pay their fines or get them out of jail when arrested, and sometimes to thrash the recalcitrant.<sup>82</sup>

Several kinds of share systems were finally evolved from the industrial chaos. They were much the same in black as in white districts, and the usual designations were: "on halves," "third and fourth," and "standing rent." The tenant "on halves" received one-half the crop, did all the work, and furnished his own provisions. The planter furnished land, houses to live in, seed, plows, hoes, teams, wagons, ginned the cotton, paid for half the fertilizer, and went security for the negro for a year's credit at the supply store in town, or else furnished the supplies himself and charged them against the negro's share of the crop. The "third and fourth" plan varied according to locality and time, and depended upon what the tenant furnished. Sometimes the planter furnished everything, while the negro gave only his labor and received one-fourth of the crop; again, the planter furnished all except provisions and labor, and gave the negro one-third of the crop. In such cases "third and fourth" was a lower grade of tenancy than "on halves." Later it developed to a higher grade. The tenant furnished teams and farming implements, and the planter the rest, in which case the planter received a third of the cotton and a fourth

<sup>82</sup> Somers, an English traveler, thought that the economic relations of planter and negro were startling, and anywhere else would be absurd. The tenant, he said, was sure of a support and did not much care if the crop failed. Even his taxes, when he condescended to pay any, were paid by his master. For all work outside of his crop he had to be paid, and often he went away and worked for someone else for cash. And his privileges were innumerable. "The soul is often crushed out of labor by penury and oppression. Here a soul cannot begin to be infused into it through the sheer excess of privilege and license with which it is surrounded." — *Southern States since the War*, pp. 128, 129.



of the corn raised. "Standing rent" was the highest form of tenancy, and only responsible persons, white or black, could rent under that system. It called for a fixed or "standing" rent for each acre or farm, to be paid in money or in cotton. The unit of value in cotton was a five-hundred-pound bale of middling grade on October 1. Cotton rent practically amounted to a money rent, since price and grade had to be guaranteed. Tenants who had farm stock, farming implements and supplies, or good credit would nearly always cultivate for "standing rent." The planter exercised a controlling direction over the labor and cultivation of a crop worked "on halves;" he exercised less direction over "third and fourth" tenants, and was supposed to exercise no control over tenants who paid "standing rent." In all cases the planter furnished a dwelling-house free of rent, wood and water (paid for digging wells), and pasture for the pigs and cows of the tenants. In all cases the renter had a plot of ground of from one to three acres, rent-free, for a vegetable garden and "truck patch." Here could be raised water-melons, sugar cane, potatoes, sorghum, cabbages, and other vegetables. Every tenant could keep a few pigs and a cow, chickens, turkeys, and guineas, and especially dogs, and could hunt in all the woods around and fish in all the waters. "On halves" was considered the safest form of tenancy for both planter and tenant, for the latter was only an average man. This method allowed the superior direction of the planter.<sup>33</sup> Many negroes worked for wages; the less intelligent and the unreliable could find no other way to work; and some of the best of them preferred to work for wages paid at the end

<sup>33</sup> My father's tenants, white and black, rented on all systems. The negroes usually began as wage-laborers or as tenants "on halves," for they had no supplies when they came. Then the more industrious and thrifty would save and rent farms for "third and fourth" or for "standing rent." The whites usually attained the highest grade of tenancy, and the average white man would save enough of his earnings to purchase a team, wagon, buggy, farm implements, and a year's supply, and then spend all else, though some would save enough to buy land of their own in cheaper districts, or to support themselves for a year or two while opening up a homestead in the pine woods. The negro, as a rule, rented "on halves," for he spent all his earnings and required supervision. The average negro stays only a year or two at one place before he longs for change and removes to another farm. About Christmas time, or just before, the negroes and many of the whites begin to move to new homes.

of each week or month. Wage-laborers worked under the immediate oversight of the farmer or tenant who hired them. They received \$8 to \$12 a month, and were "found," that is, given their rations. In the white counties the negro hired man was often fed in the farmer's kitchen. The laborer, if hired by the year, had a house, vegetable garden, "truck patch," chickens, a pig perhaps, and always a dog, and he could hunt and fish anywhere in the vicinity. Sometimes he was "found;" sometimes he "found" himself. When he was "found," the allowance for a week was three and a half pounds of bacon, a peck of meal, half a gallon of sirup, and a plug of tobacco; his garden patch furnished vegetables. This allowance could be varied and commuted. The system worked out in the few years immediately following the war and has lasted almost without change. In the negro districts the large plantations have not been broken up into small farms, the census statistics to the contrary notwithstanding.<sup>34</sup> The negro tenant or laborer had too many privileges for his own good and for the good of the planter. The negro should have been paid more money or a larger proportion of the crop, and given fewer privileges. He needed more control and supervision, and the result of giving him a vegetable garden, a "truck patch," a pasture, and the right of hunting and fishing was that the negro took less interest in the crop. The farming system was never brought to a real business basis.<sup>35</sup>

#### CREDIT OR SUPPLY SYSTEM

The universal lack of capital after the war forced an extension of the old ante-bellum credit or supply system. The merchant, who was also a cotton-buyer, advanced money or supplies until the crop was gathered. Before the war his security was both crop and slaves; after the war the crop was the principal security, for land was a drug on the market. Consequently, the crop was more important to the creditor. Cotton was the only

<sup>34</sup> In the census each person cultivating a crop is counted as a farmer and the land he cultivates as a farm. Thus a plantation might be represented in the census statistics by from five to twenty-five farms.

<sup>35</sup> See also Otken, *Ills of the South*; Somers, *Southern States since the War*, p. 281; *Harper's Monthly*, January, 1874; *DeBow's Review*, February, 1868.

good cash crop, and the high prices encouraged all to raise it. It was to the interest of the merchant, even when prices were low, to insist upon his debtors raising cotton to the exclusion of food crops, as much of his money was made by selling food supplies to them. Before the war only the planter had much credit, and even then a successful one did not make use of the system, but after the war all classes of cotton-raisers had to have advances of supplies. The credit or crop-lien system was good to put an ambitious farmer on the way to independence, but it was no incentive to the shiftless. Cotton became the universal crop under the credit system, and even when the farmer became independent he seldom planted less of his staple crop or raised supplies at home.

#### WHITE FARMERS AND NEGRO FARMERS

At the end of the war everything was in favor of the negro cotton-raiser, and everything except the high price of cotton was against the white farmer in the poorer counties. The soil had been used most destructively in the white districts, and it had to be built up before cotton could be raised successfully.<sup>36</sup> The high price of cotton caused the white farmer who had formerly had only small cotton patches to plant large fields, and for several years the negro was hardly a competitor to be considered. The building of railroads through the mineral regions afforded transportation for crops and fertilizers—an advantage that before this time had been enjoyed only by the Black Belt—and improved methods gradually supplanted the wasteful frontier system of

<sup>36</sup> Any stick is good enough to beat slavery with, so it is usually stated that slavery was responsible for the wasteful methods of cultivation that prevailed in the South before the war. That can be true only indirectly, for the soil always received the worst treatment in the white counties. Like frontiersmen everywhere, the Alabama white farmers found it easier to clear new land or to move west than to fertilize worn-out soils. The lack of transportation facilities in the white districts made it impossible to bring in commercial fertilizers or to transport the crops when made. If there had not been a negro in the state, the frontier methods would have prevailed, as they still do among the farmers in some parts of the West. On the other hand, the rich lands worked by slave labor were kept in good condition. Under free negro labor they are in the worst possible condition. Experience, necessity, the disappearance of free land, and the increase of transportation facilities have caused the white-county farmer to employ better methods and to keep up and increase the fertility of his land by using fertilizers.

cultivation. The gradual increase<sup>37</sup> of the cotton production after 1869 was due entirely to white labor in the white counties, the black counties never again reaching their former production, though the population of those counties doubled. Governor Lindsay said in 1871 that the white people of north Alabama, where but little had been produced before the war, were becoming prosperous by raising cotton, and at the same time raising supplies that the planter on the rich lands with negro labor had to buy from the West. This prosperity, he thought, had done more than anything else to put an end to Ku Klux disturbances. Somers reported in 1871 that the cotton crop in the Tennessee valley was made by white labor, not by black.<sup>38</sup> As long as there was plenty of cheap, poor land to be had, the poor but independent white would not work the rich land belonging to someone else; and, before and long after the war, there was plenty of practically free land.<sup>39</sup> Therefore the tendency of the whites was to remain on the less fertile land. Dr. E. A. Smith in the *Alabama Geological Survey* of 1881-82, and the *Report on Cotton Production in Alabama* (1884), shows the relation between race and cotton production, and race location with respect to fertility of soil: (1) On the most fertile lands the laboring population was black; the farmers were shiftless, and no fertilizers were used; the credit evil was worse; the yield per acre was less than on the poorest soils cultivated by whites. (2) Where the

<sup>37</sup> But it was nearly forty years before the entire cotton crop of the state was again as large as in 1859.

<sup>38</sup> *Southern Magazine*, January, 1874; *Ku Klux Report*, Alabama testimony (Lindsay), pp. 206, 207; Somers, *Southern States*, p. 117. In 1860 it was estimated that of the whole cotton crop 10 to 12 per cent. was produced by white labor; in 1876 the proportion of whites to blacks in the cotton fields was 30 to 51; in 1883 white labor produced 44 per cent. of the cotton crop; in 1884, 48 per cent.; in 1885, 50 per cent.; in 1893, 70 per cent. And this was done by the whites on inferior lands. (See W. B. Tillett in *Century*, Vol. XI, p. 771; Hammond, *The Cotton Industry*, pp. 129, 130, 182.)

<sup>39</sup> DeBow estimated that the entire acreage of the cotton crop was as follows: 1836, 2,000,000 acres; 1840, 4,500,000; 1850, 5,000,000; 1860, 6,968,000. The commissioner of agriculture in 1876 estimated that the acreage in 1860 was 13,000,000. Taking this estimate, which, while probably too large, is more nearly correct, only 4 per cent. of the arable land was planted in cotton—the staple crop. (Hammond, *The Cotton Industry*, p. 74.)

racess were about equal the best system was found; the soils were medium; the farms were small, but well cultivated, and fertilizers were used. (3) On the poorest soils only whites were found; these by industry and use of fertilizers could produce about as much as the blacks on the rich soils.

The average product of the Black Belt is lower than the lowest in the poorest white counties. Only the best of soil, as in Clarke, Monroe, and Wilcox Counties, is able to overcome the bad labor system and produce an average equal to that made by the whites in Winston, the poorest county in the state. In white counties where the average product per acre falls below the average for the surrounding region the fact is explained by the presence of blacks, segregated on the best soils, keeping down the average production. For example, Madison County in 1880 had a majority of blacks, and the average production of cotton per acre was 0.28 bales, as compared with 0.32 for the Tennessee valley, of which Madison was the richest county; in Talladega, the most fertile county of the Coosa valley, the average production per acre was 0.32, as compared with 0.40 for the rest of the valley; in Autauga, where the blacks outnumbered the whites two to one, the average fell below that of the country around, though the soil was the best in the region. The average product of the rich prairie cultivated by the blacks is 0.27 bale per acre; the average product in the poor mineral region cultivated by whites was 0.26 to 0.28; in the short-leaf-pine region the whites outnumber the blacks two to one, and the average production of 0.34, while in the gravelly hill region, where the blacks are twice as numerous as the whites, the production is 0.30, the soil in the two sections being about equal. In general, the fertility of the soil being equal, the production varies inversely as the proportion of colored population to white. Density of colored population is a sure sign of fertile soil; predominance of whites, a sign of medium or poor soil. Outside of the Black Belt white owners cultivate small farms, looking closely after them. The negro seldom owns the land he cultivates, and is more efficient when working under direction on the small farm in the white county. In the Black Belt nearly all land is capable of cultivation, but in the white counties a large percentage is

rocky, in hills, forests, mountains, etc. But many soils in south-east and north Alabama, formerly considered unproductive, have been brought under cultivation by the use of commercial fertilizers, hauled, in many cases, from twenty to a hundred miles. Fertilizers have not yet come into general use in the Black Belt. In the negro districts are still found horse-power gins and old wooden cotton compresses; in the white counties, steam and water power and the latest machinery. In the white counties it has always been a general custom to raise a part of the supplies on the farm; in the Black Belt this has not been done since the war.

Though many of the white farmers remained under the crop-lien bondage, there was a steady gain toward independence on the part of the more industrious and economical. But not until toward the close of the century did emancipation come for many of the struggling white farmers.

#### WHITES IN OTHER INDUSTRIES

In other directions the whites did better. They opened the mines of north Alabama, cut the timber of south Alabama, built the railroads and factories, and to some extent engaged in commerce.<sup>41</sup> Market gardening is now a common occupation. Negro labor in factories failed. It was the negro rather than slavery that prevented, and still prevents, the establishment of manufactures.<sup>42</sup> The development of manufactures in recent years has benefited principally the poor people of the white counties. "For this mill people is not drawn from foreign immigrants nor from distant states, but it is drawn from the native-born white population, the poor whites, that belated hill-folk

<sup>40</sup> See also Kelsey, *Negro Farmer*—a valuable monograph on present conditions in the Black Belt. A pamphlet on cotton published by the *Manufacturers' Record* shows that conditions in Mississippi are similar.

<sup>41</sup> So poor were the people after the war that, even though the worth of the mineral and timber lands was well known, there was no native capital to develop them, and the lion's share went to outsiders, who bought the lands at tax and mortgage sales during and after the carpet-bag régime.

<sup>42</sup> Slavery or negroes prevented the establishment of manufactures by crowding out a white population capable of carrying on manufactures. The census shows that in 1860 the white districts had a fair proportion of manufactures for a state less than forty years old.

from the ridges and hollows and caves of the silent hills. The negro artisan is giving way to the white; even in the towns of the Black Belt the occupations once securely held by the negro are passing into the hands of the whites.

In the white counties during Reconstruction the relations between the races became more strained than in the Black Belt. One of the manifestations of the Ku Klux movement in the white counties was the driving away of negro tenants from the more fertile districts by the poorer classes of whites who wanted these lands. For years immigration was discouraged by the northern press. Aliens were afraid to come to the "benighted and savage South."<sup>44</sup> But in the eighties the railroad companies began to induce Germans to settle on their lands in the poorest of the white counties. Later there was a slow movement from the Northwest. As a rule, where the northerner and the German settle the wilderness blossoms and the negro leaves.

After plowing their hilltops until the soil was exhausted, the whites, even before the war, decided that only by clearing the swamps in the poorer districts could they get land worth cultivating. This required much labor and money. After the war, with the increase of transportation facilities, fertilizers came into use, the swamps were deserted, and the farmers went back to the uplands.<sup>45</sup>

#### DECADENCE OF THE BLACK BELT

The patriarchal system failed in the Black Belt, the bureau system of contracts and prescribed wages failed, the planters' own

<sup>43</sup> Address of President C. C. Thach, December 29, 1903.

<sup>44</sup> *Northern Alabama Illustrated*, p. 378.

<sup>45</sup> By the use of commercial fertilizers, vast regions once considered barren have been brought into profitable cultivation, and really afford a more reliable and constant crop than the rich alluvial lands of the old slave plantations. In nearly every agricultural county in the South there is to be observed, on the one hand, this section of fertile soils, once the heart of the old civilization, now largely abandoned by the whites, held in tenantry by a dense negro population, full of dilapidation and ruin; while, on the other hand, there is the region of light, thin soils occupied by the small white freeholder, filled with schools, churches, and good roads, and all the elements of a happy, enlightened country life. (Address of President C. C. Thach, December 29, 1903.)

wage system failed,<sup>46</sup> and finally all settled down to the share system. In this there was some encouragement to effort on the part of the laborer; and in case of failure of the crop he bore a share of the loss. After a few years' experience the negroes were ready to go back to the wage system, and labor conventions were held demanding a return to that system.<sup>47</sup> But whatever system was adopted, the work of the negro was unsatisfactory. The skilled laborer left the plantation, and the new generation knew nothing of the arts of industry. Labor became migratory, and the negro farmer wanted to change his location every year.<sup>48</sup> Regular work was a thing of the past. In two or three days of a week a negro could work enough to live, and the remainder of the time he rested from his labors, often leaving much cotton in the field to rot.<sup>49</sup> He went to the field when it suited him to go, gazed frequently at the sun to see if it was time to stop for meals, went often to the spring for water, and spent much time adjusting his

<sup>46</sup> The value of the wage-laborer is shown by the following table of wages:

Year	Men	Women	Youths over 14
1860.....	\$138	\$ 89	\$66
1865-66.....	150-200	100-150	75-100
1867.....	117	71	52
1868.....	87	50	40

The figures for 1860 are based on the hire of an able-bodied negro. The statistics of 1867 are taken from tables of wages prescribed by the Freedmen's Bureau; those for 1867 and 1868 show the decline caused by the worthlessness of the negro laborer. Yet the demand for labor was greater than the supply. In 1860 clothing and rations were also given; in 1866-68, rations and no clothing. In 1866-68 the currency was inflated, and the wages for 1868 were really much lower. (Hammond, *The Cotton Industry*, p. 124; *Montgomery Mail*, May 16, 1865; *Freedmen's Bureau Reports*, 1865-70.)

<sup>47</sup> A convention held in Montgomery in 1873 recommended that the share system be abolished and a contract-wage system be inaugurated; wages should be secured by a lien on the employer's crop; separate contracts should be made with each laborer, and the "squad" system abolished. In this way the laborer would not be responsible for bad crops. To aid the laborers, Congress was asked to pass the Sumner Civil Rights Bill providing for the recognition of certain social rights for negroes, to exempt homesteads from taxation, and to increase the tax on property held by speculators. And the President was asked to supply bread and meat to the negro farmers. (*Annual Cyclopædia*, 1873, p. 19; *Tuscaloosa Blade*, November 20, 1873.)

<sup>48</sup> Willets, *Workers of the Nation*, Vol. II, pp. 701, 702.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 714.



plow or knocking the dirt and pebbles from his shoes. The negro women refused to work in the fields, and yet did nothing to better the home life; the style of living was "from hand to mouth." Extra money went for whisky, snuff, tobacco, and finery, while the standard of living was not raised.<sup>50</sup> The laborer would always stop work to go to a circus, election, political meeting, revival, or camp-meeting. A great desolation seemed to have passed over the Black Belt country.<sup>51</sup>

In the interior of the state the negroes worked better during and after Reconstruction than where they were exposed to the ministrations of the various kinds of carpet-baggers.<sup>52</sup> In the Tennessee valley, where the negroes had taken a prominent part in politics, and had not only seen much of the war, but had also in considerable numbers enlisted in the Federal army, cotton-raising almost ceased for several years. The only crops made were made by whites.<sup>53</sup> In Sumter County, where the black population was dense, it was in 1870 almost impossible to secure labor, and those who wished to work went to the railways.<sup>54</sup> A description of a "model negro farm" in 1874 was as follows: The farmer purchased an old mule on credit and rented land on shares, or for so many bales of cotton; any old tools were used; corn, bacon, and other supplies were bought on credit and a lien given on crop; a month later, corn and cotton were planted on soil not well broken up; the negro would not pay for "no guano" to put on other people's land; by turns the farmer planted, fished, plowed, hunted, hoed, and frolicked, or went to "meeting." At the end of the year he sold his cotton, paid part of his rent and some of his debt, returned the mule to his owner, and sang:

Nigger work hard all de year;  
White man tote de money.<sup>55</sup>

If the negro made anything, his fellows were likely to steal it. Somers said: "There can be no doubt that the negroes first steal

<sup>50</sup> Washington in *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. LXXVIII, pp. 324-26; oral accounts and personal observation.

<sup>51</sup> Somers, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>52</sup> *Southern Magazine*, January, 1874.

<sup>53</sup> Somers, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>55</sup> *Southern Magazine*, March, 1874.

one another's share of the crop, and next the planter's by way of general redress."<sup>56</sup> Crop-stealing was usually done at night. Stolen cotton, corn, pork, etc., was carried to the low doggeries kept on the outskirts of the plantation by low white men, and there exchanged for bad whisky, tobacco, and cheap stuff of various kinds. These doggeries were called "dead falls," and their proprietors often became rich.<sup>57</sup> So serious did the theft of crops become that the legislature passed a "sunset" law making it a penal offense to purchase farm produce after nightfall. Poultry, hogs, corn, mules, and horses were stolen when left in the open. During the decade from 1868 to 1878 it was estimated by several grand juries which investigated the matter that the cotton and corn stolen from the open fields amounted to more than one-fifth of the crops produced.

The negroes deteriorated much in personal appearance and dress; immorality increased; religion nearly died out; consumption and other diseases attacked the childish people who would not care for themselves; foeticide was common; negro children died in swarms when very young; there was a tendency to return to the barbarous customs of their African forefathers; witchcraft and hoodoo were practiced, and in some cases human sacrifices made.

Emancipation destroyed the agricultural supremacy of the Black Belt. The uncertain returns from the plantations caused an exodus of planters and their families to the cities, and many well-kept plantations were divided into one- and two-house farms for negro tenants who let everything go to ruin. The negro tenant system was much more ruinous than the worst of the slavery system, and none of the plantations again reached their former state of productiveness. Ditches filled up, fences down, large stretches of fertile fields growing up in weeds and bushes, cabins tumbling in, and negro quarters deserted, corn choked by

<sup>56</sup> Somers, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>57</sup> The prosperity of a number of large Hebrew commercial houses in Alabama is said to date from the corner groceries of the seventies.

<sup>58</sup> Somers, *op. cit.*; *Southern Magazine*, January and March, 1874; *Ku Klux Report*, Alabama testimony (Pettus).

grass and weeds, cotton not half as good as under slavery — these were the reports from travelers in the Black Belt toward the close of Reconstruction.<sup>59</sup> Other plantations were leased to managers who also kept plantation stores, whence the negroes were furnished with supplies. The manager has succeeded the planter; the great supply houses in the cities own numerous plantations. The money-lenders — often Jews — came into possession of many plantations. By the crop lien and blanket mortgage the negro became an industrial serf. The “big house” fell into decay. For these and other reasons, the former masters, who were the best friends of the negro, left the Black Belt, and the black steadily declined.<sup>60</sup> The unaided negro has steadily grown worse; but Tuskegee, Normal, Calhoun, and similar bodies are endeavoring to assist the negro of the black counties to become an efficient member of society. In the success of such efforts lies the only hope of the negro, and also of the white of the Black Belt, if the negro is to remain.<sup>61</sup>

WALTER L. FLEMING.

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY.

<sup>59</sup> Somers, *op. cit.*, pp. 159, 272; *Harper's Monthly*, January, 1874; King, *The Great South, passim*; C. C. Smith, “Colonization of Negroes in Central Alabama,” *Southern Magazine*, January, 1874; *Forum*, Vol. XXI, p. 341; Hoffman, *op. cit.*, 261; Hammond, *op. cit.*, 191.

<sup>60</sup> A northern traveler in the Alabama Black Belt in recent years says: “The white population is rapidly on the decrease and the negro population on the increase. . . . There are hundreds of the ‘old mansion houses’ going to decay, the glass broken in the windows, the doors off the hinges, the siding long unused to paint, the columns of the verandas rotting away, and the bramble thickets encroaching to the very doors. The people have sold their land for what little they could get, and moved to the cities and towns, that they may educate their children and escape the intolerable conditions surrounding them at their old beloved homes. . . . These friends have largely gone from the negro’s life, and he is left alone in the wilderness,” held down by crop liens and mortgages given to the alien. Land rent is half its value; the tenant must purchase from the creditor’s store, and raise cotton to pay for what he has already eaten and worn. (C. C. Smith, *Colonization of Negroes in Central Alabama*, published by the Christian Woman’s Board of Missions, Indianapolis, Ind.)

<sup>61</sup> See also Edmonds in *Review of Reviews*, September, 1900; Dillingham in *Yale Review*, Vol. V, p. 190; Stone, *The Negro in the Yazoo Mississippi Delta*; Dowd in *Guntton's Magazine*, September, 1902; *Census of 1900*, Vol. VI, Part 2, pp. 406-16; *Harper's Monthly*, January, 1874; Grady, *ibid.*, 1881; Kelsey, *The*

*Negro Farmer*; Hammond, *The Cotton Industry*. Another solution to the problem is often suggested, viz., the crowding out of the blacks from the Black Belt by the whites — especially northerners and Germans — who want to cultivate the Black Belt lands, who settle in colonies, and who have no place for the negro in their plans of industrial society. The Black Belt landlords are becoming weary of negro labor and are disposed to make special inducements to get whites to settle in the Black Belt. In Louisiana Italians have on many sugar and cotton plantations replaced negroes. Georgia and Alabama, in order to make the negro work, have recently passed stringent vagrancy laws. There is a general demand for foreigners who will work on the farms and plantations. The *Manufacturers' Record* during recent years has published much information in regard to industrial conditions in the southern states; its articles on immigration are especially interesting.