CHAPTER TWO

From Old South to New South Plantation

Out of the North the train thundered. . . . The sun is setting, but we can see the great cotton country as we enter it. . . . This was indeed the Egypt of the Confederacy,—the rich granary whence potatoes and corn and cotton poured. . . . Sheltered and secure, it became the place of refuge for families, wealth, and slaves. . . . Then came the revolution of war and Emancipation, the bewilderment of Reconstruction,—and now, what is the Egypt of the Confederacy, and what meaning has it for the nation’s weal or woe.

W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk

The agriculture of a country is as dependent upon the knowledge and power of the people as it is upon the qualities and characteristics of the land. The boundaries of . . . agricultural regions . . . may not all be permanent. This is no detriment, however, for nothing is permanent in the world except change.

O. E. Baker, “Agricultural Regions of North America”

TENANCY AND THE PLANTATION

Because tenancy was a central component of the agricultural changes, the differences between tenant farmers and the degree of management landlords exercised over each were critical to the evolution and viability of the plantation system between the Reconstruction period and the Second World War (table 2.1). Since 1880, the Bureau of the Census has employed various terms and definitions for tenant farmers. In addition, colloquial terms and definitions for tenants have varied from the ones employed by the Bureau of the Census. Three basic types of farm tenants existed in the Southern plantation regions during the century following the Civil War—cropper, share, and cash. A cropper, also called a sharecropper, owned no
### Table 2.1. Types of Farm Tenants in the United States, 1880–1959

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>1940</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1920</th>
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<td>759,973</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Includes standing renters for North and West)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>132,524</td>
<td>193,141</td>
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<td>287,475</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>201,046</td>
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<td>346,765</td>
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<td>Croppers (South only)</td>
<td>Croppers (South only)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Standing renters (South only)</td>
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<td>48,333</td>
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* = For 1930, tenants other than cash tenants and croppers were included in "other tenants."
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<th>1880</th>
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<td>2,026,286</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Tenants</td>
<td>Rented</td>
<td>Rented</td>
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<td></td>
<td>tenants</td>
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<td>715,188</td>
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<td>Cash</td>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>Rented</td>
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<td>renters)</td>
<td>renters and</td>
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<td>unspecified</td>
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<td>840,254</td>
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<td>renters included</td>
<td>with cash</td>
<td>in above tenant</td>
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<td>tenants)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>cash tenants)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>113,993</td>
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farm implements or work stock. All that a sharecropper contributed to the production of a crop was labor, including that of his or her family. From a perspective that emphasized close supervision, sharecroppers were the preferred tenant farmers, for they worked under the immediate direction of a planter or a manager. Although called a tenant colloquially and defined and enumerated by the Bureau of the Census as a type of tenant, as explained in Chapter 1, legally sharecroppers were not tenants but laborers who were paid with a share of the crops. Under customary rental agreements the landlord and the sharecropper split the crop fifty-fifty. Each also paid for half of the fertilizer, insecticide, ginning, and other production costs. A comprehensive definition of sharecropper had evolved by the end of the New South era. In Mississippi a sharecropper was defined thus:

A member of the plantation labor force who rents a parcel of land from the owner or operator under an agreement to farm the land in accordance with the supervision, direction, and instruction of the owner or landlord, and who pays as rental for the land an agreed share (usually ½ but frequently ⅓ and ¼) of the crops. . . . The plantation operator provides a house, farm power and equipment, planting seed, and supervision, and he usually provides credit for the cropper’s current expenses up to harvest time, and . . . pays for one-half the fertilizer, insecticides, and ginning. The landlord retains a lien upon the sharecropper’s share of the crops to secure such indebtedness as may accrue. . . . The sharecropper in reality occupies an anomalous legal status . . . in that croppers are regarded as “tenants” in civil actions and “laborers” in criminal prosecutions.¹

A share tenant was a farmer who possessed farm implements and work stock. Because he provided more than a sharecropper to the production of a crop, a share tenant paid less rent, usually one-fourth or one-third of the crop. Production costs were likewise split between the share tenant and the landlord on a one-fourth/three-fourths or one-third/two-thirds basis. Ownership of implements and work stock and legal standing as a true tenant usually gave a share tenant greater flexibility and more freedom from supervision than a sharecropper. Possession of capital goods that could be used as collateral also made it easier for a share tenant to obtain an annual furnish from local merchants and even meant that he might be able to secure a small loan from a local bank.

A cash tenant was one who paid a pre-agreed amount in cash or agricultural commodities for use of land. Like the share tenant, a cash tenant owned farm implements and work stock, but because the amount he paid
was set at the beginning of the crop year, it was not tied to his success as a farmer. The arrangement between a cash tenant and a landlord might have been for lease of an entire landholding or for a specific acreage. Locally, the lease of a cash tenant sometimes was stated in terms of his farming capacity, such as number of mules or plows. A “one-mule farmer” might pay 1.5 bales of cotton and have use of 10 to 20 acres. A farmer who “ran one plow” was a one-mule farmer, for the conventional type of plow used during the New South era was pulled by a mule down one furrow, or half of a row. A cash tenant who “ran two plows” owned two mules, farmed 20 to 40 acres, and paid 2 to 4 bales of cotton as rent. The control management exercised over a cash tenant usually was minimal.

Although the distinctions between the three principal types of tenants and the terms used to identify each type were well defined by the end of the New South era, this was hardly the case during the first half of the period. In the agricultural censuses from 1880 through 1910, no distinction is made between a share tenant and a sharecropper (or cropper) (table 2.1). Sharecroppers were enumerated only from 1920 through 1959. Moreover, in several of the early-twentieth-century censuses a standing rent tenant, who paid rent in agricultural commodities, is distinguished from a true cash tenant, who paid in currency.

Within the early-twentieth-century literature on the alterations in Southern agriculture are discussions of the relationship of the three types of tenancy to the survival and viability of the plantation system. The key to seemingly contradictory statements by Phillips and other scholars on the survival of the plantation lies in this relationship. In his 1914 study of the post–Civil War agrarian revolution in Georgia, Brooks distinguished between the “share system” and the “renting system” of farm tenure. What he termed the “share system” was sharecropping because “the landlord supplies everything necessary to make the crop, except the manual labor, and the owner and tenant are in a sense co-partners in the undertaking.” In the “renting system” Brooks grouped both share and cash tenants, including those who paid standing rent. “Under the renting system the landlord furnishes only the land and house.” The tenant paid for use of the land either in a pre-agreed amount of cotton or in currency.

Because centralized management is a critical component of the plantation system, to both Phillips and Brooks deterioration of a landowner’s close supervision of farm operations meant demise of the plantation. Estates that were worked by sharecroppers and/or wage employees required close supervision and were plantations. The turning of landholdings over to share and cash tenants, a form of agriculture reminiscent of the medi-
eval feudal estate in which the landlord exercised little supervision of farming, meant that the renters had primary management responsibility. In the post–Civil War South the practice was regarded as evidence of poor farming, demise of the plantation, and agricultural decline. According to Phillips, the “concentration of labor under skilled management made the plantation system . . . practically the factory system applied to agriculture,” but “the counter replacement of the plantation system by peasant farming” was “an industrial counter-revolution.” Writing of the changes in plantation agriculture in Georgia during the half century following the Civil War, Brooks stated, “Planters have been virtually unanimous during the entire post-bellum period in resisting the growth of renting [share tenancy and cash tenancy]. They feel that where the laboring class is of such a low order, complete control should remain in the hands of the capitalist class.” From interviews with post–Civil War planters, Brooks concluded that “renting” developed because of “the negroes’ desire for complete emancipation from control. By reason of the scarcity of labor they were able to realize their wishes. When the movement was once begun, it grew with great rapidity, for as soon as the negroes who were working as day laborers [wage workers] or as share hands [sharecroppers] saw the large degree of personal liberty enjoyed by those who had succeeded in attaining the position of renters, they speedily demanded like privileges, and, in a number of cases, the planters were not in a position to refuse.”

A planter who witnessed the post–Civil War labor situation on Georgia and Alabama plantations told Brooks that “the negro would rather be his own master on scant rations than to have a white man supervise him on full rations. . . . In their effort to gain still ‘more independent position,’ [Negroes] began demanding rent privileges where they could enforce it.”

Because of labor problems, some landowners abandoned attempts to reorganize their landholdings as closely supervised plantations. A group of planters actually left their estates and moved to towns and cities. The absentee owners rented to share and cash tenants who worked their farms with little or no supervision. In his first major plantation paper Phillips wrote: “The present system of renting, or cropping, can be but temporary. Under it the negro is superintended in but a half-hearted way. Whenever he fails to raise a good crop and to sell it at a good price, he involves his landlord and his creditor with himself in a common embarrassment. . . . The most promising solution for the problem is the re-establishment of the old plantation system, with some form of hired labor instead of slave labor.”

The growth of share and cash tenancy was facilitated by the widespread development of town and country merchants from whom renters could
obtain their annual furnish. Some merchants became quasi managers of plantations, collecting the annual rent for absentee landlords as well as providing the annual furnish to tenants. The merchants sometimes employed “riders” who visited the tenants periodically and reported on the condition of the crops. Some cash tenants even became managers. They paid a set annual rent to landowners and then subleased to share tenants or to sharecroppers. A former slave in Greene County, Georgia, rented the entire plantation on which he was born for ten bales of cotton. He purchased farm implements and six mules and as a tenant manager subleased the plantation to six sharecropper families.

Gavin Wright emphasized that after the Civil War control of land more than control of labor was the critical measure of a planter. “Before they were laborlords, now they were only landlords.” But with the reorganization of plantations following the war, many planters were still laborlords, farming their closely managed estates with hordes of sharecroppers and wage hands. Only those who refused to govern their holdings carefully, those who leased to “renters,” were just landlords.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE NEW SOUTH PLANTATION

Despite census statistics, which indicated the disintegration of the plantations following the Civil War, by 1900 a group of Southern scholars had begun to argue that the large farms survived. In 1901, Alfred E. Stone, who owned a plantation in the Yazoo Delta in Mississippi, wrote that “the census rule treating every tract of land on which agricultural industry [was] conducted as a farm . . . [was] misleading” and continued with a discussion of the renaissance of the plantation system. The census office eventually acknowledged that post–Civil War alterations in Southern agriculture were obscured by the data collected. To remedy the situation, a special study was made of plantation farming as part of the 1910 Census of Agriculture. The investigation was focused on the regions where black tenants were concentrated and designed principally to address how tenant farming concealed the survival of plantation agriculture (map 2.1). It was not comprehensive in either geographical extent or definition of plantation. The survey was confined to 325 counties in the South where plantations were thought to exist in greatest number and was limited to tenant plantation, which was defined as “a continuous tract of land of considerable area under the general supervision or control of a single individual or firm, all or part of such tract being divided into at least five smaller tracts, which are leased to tenants.” Large estates composed of noncontiguous
MAP 2.1. Distribution of “colored” tenants in 1910. Although the map reveals the extent of traditional plantation agriculture in the South, by 1910 several of the older plantation regions were in decline (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1913a).

MAP 2.2. Plantations with five or more tenants in 325 Southern counties in the cotton regions in 1910 (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture 1918, 11)
tracts were excluded. Blacks constituted 50 percent or more of the population in most of the counties surveyed.

The special census was confined primarily to cotton regions of the South. The sugarcane region of Louisiana, the rice region of the South Carolina–Georgia coast, and most of the tobacco region of Virginia were not included. The Census Bureau’s definition of plantation incorporated three critical elements that historically distinguished it from other types of farms: a large landholding, a large labor force, and centralized management. The 1910 census also attempted to enumerate the extent of the “wage-labor plantation system” for the entire country. Farms on which one thousand dollars or more was spent on “wage laborers” were considered “nearly comparable with tenant plantations operated by five or more tenants.” Combined, the bureau’s three sectional divisions that comprised the thirteen Southern states had the largest number of wage plantations, 18,043. But by sectional division, the three Pacific Coast states with 16,231, primarily California, together with the four western Midwest and four northern Great Plains states with 12,495, had the largest number of farms that spent one thousand dollars or more on wage labor. That the North and West had 58,708 of the nation’s 76,751 farms that paid one thousand dollars or more in wages is evidence that the transformation of American agriculture from family farms to large-scale plantation-like operations was well advanced by 1909.13

The 39,073 tenant plantations enumerated in 1910 extended in a crescent across the South from southern Virginia into eastern Texas (map 2.2).14 More than half, 68 percent, were relatively small with an average of 495 acres farmed by five to nine tenants. Only 4,102, 10.5 percent, were great plantations with an average of 3,535 acres and fifty or more tenants. Tenant plantations made up 31.5 percent of the land in farms and accounted for 32.8 percent of the value of land and buildings in the 325 counties surveyed. Variations existed among the Southern states in the relative importance of the plantation system. Mississippi, with 7,960 plantations, had the largest number; Alabama and Georgia followed with 7,280 and 6,627.15 The special census confirmed the change in settlement pattern from a nucleated one of the Old South to a dispersed one of the New. Thirty-seven schedules from across the Georgia plantation regions survive in the Brooks Papers at the University of Georgia. On all of the thirty-seven, “grouped quarters” had been replaced by houses at “scattered sites.”16

A number of technical studies of plantation agriculture conducted by state agricultural colleges, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and other federal agencies followed the 1910 special census.17 Several problems were
dealt with in the definition of *plantation*, including whether wage laborers should be counted as part of the labor force and whether farms that met all criteria except that the land was in dispersed parcels were plantations. By the end of the Great Depression of the 1930s, Southern cotton plantations had been comprehensively analyzed. Two studies conducted by Thomas Jackson Woofter Jr. and his associates for the Works Progress Administration were the apogee of a genre of technical plantation studies. In *Landlord and Tenant on the Cotton Plantation* (1936), which built on the part of the definition in the 1910 special census, a minimum of five “tenant families” was modified to “five resident families of any type,” including the landlord or manager. This change recognized the significant role of wage labor on large commercial farms and also marked a distinct break with the limitations imposed by interpretation of the plantation in the context of post–Civil War adjustments from slave to tenant labor. The Woofter studies also dealt with the vagueness of “tract of land of considerable area.” The minimum acreage of a cotton plantation was set at 260 acres. The 1936 study found that 39 percent of the cotton planters owned noncontiguous tracts and that there was a tendency to enlarge the size of plantations by leasing additional land, which in turn was rented to tenants. The definition of *plantation*, however, was not modified to include tracts that were not contiguous to the principal one.

A more comprehensive attempt to enumerate plantations in the United States was conducted in 1940 as part of the sixteenth census. The definition of *plantation* was broadened from that for the 1910 census to include farms composed of dispersed tracts that were managed from a central headquarters. The more comprehensive definition was an improvement, but the limitations imposed by the controversy over the relation of tenant farms to reorganization of plantations following the Civil War were still quite evident. Any farm operation that had five or more families was considered a plantation if at least one was a tenant family. Not only was the definition of plantation modified, but the area for the study was considerably enlarged from that in 1910. Plantations were enumerated in 1,382 counties, including the 372 used for the 1910 census. In addition to counties in fifteen Southern states, several in Arizona, California, and New Mexico were included. In 1940, 24,199 plantations were enumerated in the United States. Mississippi, with 7,485, had nearly one-third of the large farms. The closest rivals were Arkansas with 2,744 and Louisiana with 2,670.

At the local scale, no effort was made to accurately distinguish plantations from large farms that did not meet a precise definition. In some areas the term *plantation* was not even used or by the early twentieth century had
faded from the provincial lexicon. Across the South the expression *place* with an attached family name came to be used as a synonym for *plantation*. That certain families, through their control of land and the agricultural infrastructure, were locally powerful and composed the upper or planter class is what was implied by plantation and place. William Faulkner, perhaps, best captured who this illusive, but locally overt, group was through Gavin Stevens’ view of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi’s plantation country: “the same fat black rich plantation earth still synonymous of the proud fading white plantation names whether we—I mean of course they—ever actually owned a plantation or not: . . . generals and governors and judges, soldiers (even if only Cuban lieutenants) and statesmen failed or not, and simple politicians and over-reachers and just simple failures.”

**TRANSFORMATION OF THE COTTON PLANTATION LANDSCAPE**

Although some scholars have dismissed the agricultural technology and infrastructure of the plantation regions as essentially static between the Civil War and the depression, significant changes occurred both in the spatial organization of farms and in the processing and marketing of cotton and other agricultural commodities, illustrated by the lower Georgia Piedmont (fig. 2.1). These modifications in turn greatly altered the landscape of the plantation regions. So sweeping were the changes that by 1910 the New South cotton plantation landscape had few features that survived from the Old South era. The landscape was reordered, not only by the transition of the plantation system from a slave to a tenant labor force, but also by the emergence of a railroad network, a central place hierarchy, and a new, more complex agricultural infrastructure. Even some plantation big houses that might appear “antebellum” are actually from the New South era.

Historians have paid significant attention to the crop-lien system and the rise of furnish merchants in the plantation regions following the Civil War. Furnish stores appeared in towns and at strategic locations in the countryside, such as at crossroads, and also on a number of plantations (fig. 2.2). Essentially overlooked is the important revolution in the technology and spatial organization of cotton ginning which occurred following the war. As important as furnish merchants were to the agrarian economy of the New South, cotton gins were more fundamental than stores to the spatial reorganization of the landscape. Large, centrally located community cotton gins, known at the time as *ginneries*, replaced small plantation gin houses of the Old South era. In almost every instance the new cotton
Expanding plantation agriculture
Slaves
Gang system
Aggressive plantation management
Nucleated plantation settlement pattern
Plantation cotton gins
Increasing cotton acreage
Embryonic railroad and road network
Embryonic central place network
Embryonic agricultural infrastructure:
  Cotton factors
  Banks
  Guano companies
Decline of white yeoman farmers
Freedmen
Squad and gang systems
Cash wages
Tenant farmers
Management alterations
Disintegration of nucleated plantation settlement pattern
Expanding railroad network
Expanding central place network
Newly emerging agricultural infrastructure:
  Furnish merchants
  Banks
  Public cotton ginneries
  Fertilizer plants
  Cotton factors

**FIG. 2.1.** Changes in the agricultural infrastructure of the lower Piedmont cotton plantation region, 1800–1940

**FIG. 2.2.** The emerging New South landscape. The rural store owned by the Cornwell brothers in Jasper County, Georgia, in the 1890s is representative of ones that developed during the early part of the New South era. Simple Greek Revival architecture for such structures was common throughout the period. Like the Cornwell store, many rural stores were not painted. Courtesy of the Georgia Department of Archives and History
ginneries were allied with merchandising and farming, and frequently they were associated with other businesses that included buying cotton, mixing and selling fertilizer, and processing cotton seed. Ownership of a store did not necessarily identify an individual or family as prominent in a plantation community, but ownership of a cotton gin meant command of a small domain.

The fall of slavery and the emergence of tenant farming caused serious problems in preparation of cotton for shipment to market. On an Old South plantation the entire cotton crop belonged to the planter. Before cotton was ginned, it was sorted by color and trash content. The development of tenant farming resulted in a decline in quality control, for each renter on a plantation picked his own cotton and had it ginned. Moreover, the tenant system did not provide labor for ginning. Shortly after the war, recommendations were made that large public gin plants replace the small
plantation gins. In the 1866 report of the United States commissioner of agriculture, one correspondent wrote, “Another radical modification of the former system, which ought to be made immediately, . . . is the building of neighborhood gin-houses in well-chosen locations, so as to be central to large farming communities.” Henry Grady, a major advocate of a “New South,” thought that the gin was “the pivotal point around which the whole of manufacture of cotton revolve[d].” He estimated that improvements in ginning could add thirty million dollars to the annual value of the Southern crop. The increased value could be achieved by the removal of greater amounts of dust and trash and by the reduction of labor costs through the construction of larger, more automated plants.\(^{25}\)

Significant innovations in the technology of cotton ginning were made by several persons during the two decades following the Civil War. Robert Munger of Mexia, Texas, was one of the most important. Between 1883 and 1885 Munger developed an automated steam-powered “ginning system” with a “battery” of two to six gin stands, which moved cotton by air, gravity, and belts from the time it left the wagon until the lint was baled (fig. 2.3).\(^{26}\) Using fewer laborers, a Munger ginning system could produce twenty-four to forty 500-pound bales of lint cotton in the time that the Old South plantation cotton gin could process three or four 400-pound bales. By the turn of the century small, labor-intensive cotton gins were being rapidly replaced by larger, more automated “ginneries” (figs. 2.4 and 2.5). Between 1898 and 1903 the number of small cotton gins decreased more than 50 percent. In 1905, only 587 of the South’s 28,757 cotton gins were still propelled by animals, and only 1,905 were water-powered. Approximately one-half were modern, steam-powered ginning systems.\(^{27}\)

By the 1880s, the agricultural infrastructure of the plantation regions was rapidly evolving to a new, more extensive and complex stage (fig. 2.1). Steam engines, whose numbers multiplied rapidly after the Civil War, were central to the new infrastructure. In addition to the gin, a cotton ginner usually owned a plantation and a furnish store. Although on the larger landholdings the gin and store were primarily company-oriented, most were community enterprises that served surrounding tenant plantations and yeoman farms. In larger rural communities and in towns, additional enterprises were associated with cotton gins. Within small domains, ginnerers were the most powerful individuals. Frequently, their authority extended to banks on whose boards of directors they sat and to school, county, and town governing bodies to which they were elected members.

Prior to 1916, most farmers sold their cotton as soon as it was ginned, even if prices were not favorable. The crop-lien system was not conducive
FIG. 2.3. New South cotton ginnery. This type of two-story cotton gin plant was built from the late 1880s into the 1930s. Pneumatic suction lifted the seed cotton from the wagon to a cleaning device called a separator. A conveyor belt delivered the cotton to the feeders of a battery of two to six seventy- or eighty-saw gin stands. To permit continuous ginning, Robert Munger, inventor of the ginning system, devised a revolving double-box up-packing press to bale the lint. Additional trash was removed in the feeders and in the condenser, from which fine trash was blown through flues. A single-battery, steam-powered cotton ginnery required a minimum of seven adults to operate it, but in a twelve-hour period it could process enough cotton to make twenty-four to forty 500-pound bales of lint. A structure that was one story on the end with the gin stands and two story on the one with the up-packing press was a variation of the two-story building (Tompkins 1901).

to deferred sales, and baled cotton was accepted as security for loans only if it was properly stored and insured. High storage and insurance rates suppressed most advantages to be gained by holding baled cotton and awaiting improvements in market prices. The difficulties in farmers’ holding cotton and other agricultural commodities caused the National Farmers’ Alliance and the Populist Party, both of which developed from agrarian discontent during the latter part of the nineteenth century, to advocate a “sub-treasury” plan. The plan called for the creation of government-sponsored warehouses and grain elevators in which farmers could store non-perishable crops such as cotton, tobacco, corn, and wheat and use the storage receipts to obtain loans of up to 80 percent of the market value. Although the Populist Party failed in its bid for national sanction, many of
FIG. 2.4. The vanishing Old South landscape. Ruins of the abandoned gin house and press on the Toombs Plantation, Wilkes County, Georgia, in 1902. By 1900, the principal components of the Old South plantation landscape were rapidly disappearing. Only a few hundred of these obsolete facilities were still in operable condition across the cotton plantation regions. Courtesy of the Georgia Department of Archives and History

FIG. 2.5. The mature New South landscape. Cotton ginnery of J. S. Clifton at Siloam in Greene County, Georgia, circa 1920. The suction pipe of this two-story ginnery was on the end rather than the side of the building, an arrangement used for ginning systems manufactured by the Gullett Gin Company. Courtesy of the Georgia Department of Archives and History
its goals, including the creation of a system of government-sponsored warehouses, eventually were enacted into law. In recognition of the shortages of adequate storage facilities and the difficult problems of farmers in obtaining credit, the United States Warehouse Act was passed in 1916. The principal advantage of the warehouses was that the uniform receipts they issued could be converted at any time into liquid assets.

In the cotton regions of the eastern South, including the Piedmont and the Black Belt, numerous small warehouses were constructed. Almost every town had at least one of the storage facilities, most of which were allied with a cotton ginnery. However, few small warehouses developed in the South’s central and western cotton regions. In the Loess Plains and the alluvial Mississippi Valley, compresses developed. These were large warehouses that had special machinery for compressing cotton bales to a smaller size to facilitate storage and shipment. Most compresses were owned by large corporations, such as the Federal Compress Company with headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee.

Although in the central and western regions of the South manufactured fertilizer was not used in large quantities until the 1930s, farmers and planters in the eastern regions began spreading imported guano on their fields before the Civil War, and the use of manufactured fertilizer increased rapidly after the conflict. Growth of the commercial fertilizer industry in the Piedmont, the Alabama Black Belt, and other agricultural regions of the eastern South was characterized by the development of numerous small plants. Local firms, such as the Blue Eye Oil and Fertilizer Company in Lincoln, Alabama, and the Chipley Home Mixture Guano Company in Chipley, Georgia, purchased phosphate, potash, and nitrite in bulk and mixed and sold their brands of guano, as all purchased fertilizer continued to be called in the eastern South. At the time of the First World War, more than one hundred brands of fertilizer were sold in Georgia alone. Many of the small fertilizer mixing plants were components of cotton ginning firms, and some ginner agents for large fertilizer corporations such as the Royster Guano Company.

The cotton seed oil industry is a significant by-product business associated with cotton production. This industry developed after the Civil War, stimulated by growth in markets for cotton and other vegetable oils. Its development was made economically feasible by the emergence of large ginneries and expansion of the railroad network, which facilitated the collection of cotton seed. In 1860, there were only 7 small cotton oil mills in the United States. By 1880, the number had increased to 45, and at the turn of the century there were 369. The number more than doubled between
1900 and 1909, a decade when 448 new cotton oil mills were built. Nearly all cotton oil mills, except those in the larger cities, had ginneries at the plant, and most owned additional ones in the surrounding towns and countryside. Allied activities included the manufacture of ice in summer and the sale of coal in winter, which provided employment and income throughout the year. Other firms had gristmills and sawmills and sold horses, mules, and farm implements. The industry consisted of local oil mills, small regional companies that owned several mills, and large interregional corporations with many. The Macon County Oil Company in Tuskegee in the Alabama Black Belt was a locally owned firm that had six ginneries and a fertilizer mixing plant. The Hodson Oil and Refining Company in Athens, Georgia, had a refinery, three oil mills, and eight cotton ginneries on the lower Piedmont. Hodson manufactured soap stock, “compound lard” (vegetable shortening), cooking oil, fertilizer, and livestock feed. The Southern Cotton Oil Company, which was organized in 1887, was one of the most important interregional corporations and eventually became nationally known by its Wesson Oil and Snowdrift Shortening. Although parts of a large corporation, Southern Cotton Oil mills in small towns across the cotton regions were operated as though they were community-owned enterprises. Each mill had a local manager, one or more cotton ginneries, and fertilizer and farm supply businesses.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, cotton ginning was less of the plantation-oriented activity than it was in 1860. Across the maturing New South landscape under the umbrella titles “ginner” and “planter” were a cluster of business activities in which the gin, while central, was not always monetarily dominant. Northern Morgan County on the lower Georgia Piedmont illustrates the New South landscape at the beginning of the twentieth century (map 2.3). The area was dominated by a few white families who owned a cotton ginery or a furnish store, or both. The small agribusiness complexes at strategic locations in the countryside included those of the Nolans, the Ponders, and the Malcoms. The largest complex was at the emerging hamlet of Bostwick, much of which was owned by John Bostwick, an especially ambitious New South entrepreneur. By 1910, the hamlet had a small cotton oil mill, a ginnery, a hotel, and three stores. The railroad network in northern Morgan County had evolved to one that included the mainline of the Georgia Railroad and a short line built by John Bostwick from Monroe in adjoining Morgan County through Bostwick to Appalachie, a hamlet a few miles to the east. Most farmers in northern Morgan County were less than 2.5 miles from a cotton gin or a store or 4 miles from a railroad.
Ginning firms in towns were usually larger and more complex than those in the countryside. From companies that owned cotton warehouses and fertilizer mixing plants, the level of integration of ancillary enterprises grew to include cotton oil mills, ice plants, and farm implement businesses. The complexes were concentrated along the railroad and formed the industrial section of an agrarian town. Even small New South municipalities often had an impressive array of enterprises that drew hordes of wagons, farmers, and laborers; belched smoke, dust, and cotton linters; and noisily droned with steam engines and machinery from late summer into winter. Clustered about the railroad depot in Washington, Georgia, were two major agribusinesses, a branch of the Southern Cotton Oil Company, and the local Pope Manufacturing Company (map 2.4). The Southern complex consisted of a cotton oil mill, a double-battery ginnery (a building with
two ginning systems powered by one engine), a fertilizer mixing house (guano house), and a coal yard. The Pope Manufacturing Company operated a cotton oil mill, a double-battery ginnery, a gristmill, an ice plant, and a fertilizer mixing house. Two cotton storage companies, the Wilkes-Lincoln Ware House and the Planters Ware House, a subsidiary of the Pope Manufacturing Company, were also major components of Washington's industrial district.

That cotton ginneries were more central to the economic spatial organization of the New South landscape than furnish-merchant stores is supported by the work of the early location theoreticians. In his innovative work on the economics of location, Lösch used the spatial distribution of cotton gins as an example of a belted market network in which the centers of service areas were close but did not coincide. According to Lösch, the market areas of cotton gins might "rub shoulders on every side with their neighbors," but the pattern was dominated, not by overlapping, but by
dispersion and separation.\textsuperscript{35} In another early work on location theory, Hoover recognized that cotton gins were components of more than one segment of the agricultural infrastructure. They were collection points for unprocessed cotton and units in the systems that supplied ginned cotton to the textile industry and cotton seed to oil mills. Cotton gins also were parts of agribusiness firms that supplied farmers in well-defined local markets.\textsuperscript{36}

The actual sizes of cotton gin service areas varied. A 1920 study found that the average distances over which Piedmont farmers hauled cotton ranged from 2.5 to 5.1 miles.\textsuperscript{37} In an ideal situation the sizes of cotton ginnery supply areas were adjusted to capital investment and operation expenditures in such a manner as to maximize profits. Whereas the Old South-era plantation cotton gins needed to process 100 to 250 or more bales annually to be economical, the larger public ginneries that emerged early in the New South era required 500 to 1,500 or more bales. However, across the cotton regions during the New South era greater ginning capacity developed than was needed.\textsuperscript{38} The overbuilding of ginneries can be explained in part by the economic, political, and social power and prestige that were associated with ownership of the plants.

\textbf{THE MATURE NEW SOUTH COTTON PLANTATION}

The dwellings that initially composed the dispersed settlement pattern of the New South plantation were the first of four generations of housing which rural blacks occupied in the cotton plantation regions between the Reconstruction period and the end of the twentieth century. The first-generation housing consisted both of newly constructed dwellings and ones relocated from slave quarters. Although it might seem that former slaves would have sought to exert more self-expression in their dwellings, paintings and photographs of first-generation postwar houses reveal that they were primarily copies of houses in slave quarters (figs. 2.6 and 2.7). African architectural designs transferred to North America by slaves found expression in the buildings on Southern plantations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most overt African influences, however, were suppressed and destroyed as blacks increasingly submitted to the ways of their masters, and they had practically disappeared by the last decades of slavery.\textsuperscript{39} The use of the yard as an extension of the house for cooking, washing, and socializing was a primary way in which African influences survived.

Although house designs, construction methods, and room dimensions remained those of the pre–Civil War era, freedmen introduced certain
FIG. 2.6. The emerging New South landscape. An example of the first generation of housing occupied by blacks following the Civil War about 1890. The windowless, one-room log dwelling and a detached kitchen are similar to the types of homes of former slaves described by David Barrow Jr. on his family’s Sylls Fork Plantation in Oglethorpe County, Georgia. The detached kitchen was an exception to the types of dwellings constructed. The photograph is from Union Point in Greene County, Georgia, less than 5 miles from the site of Sylls Fork Plantation. Courtesy of the Georgia Department of Archives and History.

FIG. 2.7. The emerging New South landscape. William Aiken Walker’s composite painting from the 1880s is representative of tenant farms of former slaves within plantation landholdings during the three decades following the Civil War. Private collection.
modifications to tenant dwellings. On the Barrow family’s Sylls Fork Plantation, the houses that the freedmen built on their tenant farms were single-pen log cabins with chimneys made of sticks and clay. A “separate kitchen,” which in “architectural design” was “a miniature of the house,” was built next to each (fig. 2.6). The small kitchen was apparently detached from the dwelling because kitchens of plantation big houses were commonly separate. David Barrow Jr. thought that the kitchen, which was about the size of a “chicken coop,” was “really ridiculous in its pretentiousness.”

The first generation of post–Civil War housing of blacks was transitional, and by the 1890s it had begun to give way to a second generation of dwellings (fig. 2.8). Whereas former slaves appear to have had considerable authority in the selection of sites and construction of first-generation houses, by the last decade of the nineteenth century planters who operated closely managed landholdings had begun to exercise more authority in the spatial arrangement. The second generation of housing was part of the maturing New South plantation infrastructure. Log construction was prominent in the first generation of black housing, but second-generation dwellings were primarily frame. Technological advances in sawing technology lowered the cost and increased the number of sawmills, which often were powered by the same steam engine or used the same boiler as the ginner. A 1913–14 study of blacks in rural Clarke County, Georgia, under the direction of David Barrow Jr., who had risen to chancellor of the University of Georgia, found that “the old style of Negro cabin, built of hewn logs . . . was passing out of existence.” The typical house was a “boarded up” one. The 1910 plantation census schedules included questions on the type, condition, and features of houses. Almost no log houses remained on the thirty-seven Georgia plantations for which schedules survive. Recent construction of tenant dwellings is indicated by most being in “new” rather than “medium” or “old” condition. Like indoor plumbing a half century later, in 1910 glass windows were regarded an index of improved housing for farm laborers. Nearly all of the “new” tenant houses and most of the ones in “medium” condition on the thirty-seven plantations had glass windows rather than wooden shutters. From the Georgia schedules, Brooks selected an example of a newly reorganized and carefully managed plantation on the lower Piedmont which had “been cultivated for many years”:

The present owners are two young men, both of whom live on the place, giving their entire time to the work of supervision. The total acreage is 3,750, of which 2,500 acres are improved. The two residences of the owners, set in a fine oak grove, are modern structures,
FIG. 2.8. The mature New South plantation landscape. The dwelling, in Clarke County, Georgia, 1925, is an example of the second generation of housing occupied by blacks following the Civil War. By 1900 the first generation, built mostly of logs, had begun to be replaced by the second generation of dwellings, constructed primarily of rough-sawn planks. Although the house was a single-family dwelling, its design, with a front door for each of the two principal rooms and a single flue to serve fireplaces in each, is a replica of a two-compartment slave dwelling. Houses built on roads usually had little space between the dwelling and the thoroughfare. Hargrett Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Courtesy University of Georgia Libraries

with every convenience, such as screens, waterworks, and acetylene lights. . . .

Scattered over the plantation at convenient places are the tenant houses, eighty-six in number. All are comparatively new frame structures, costing on the average $300. No log houses were seen.42

The 1936 study directed by Woofter summarized the spatial characteristics of the well-managed, mature New South cotton plantation with a map (map 2.5). With a commissary, which was found on 25.9 percent of the plantations, and a ginnery, the plantation of the 1930s had evolved well beyond the embryonic stage depicted by the Barrow family’s Sylls Fork Plantation in 1881, but the elemental geography was the same. Tenant house, church, and school had come to occupy their ordered places on the landscape. As on Sylls Fork half a century earlier, tenant families were
MAP 2.5. The mature New South tenant cotton plantation. A cotton ginnery and commissary, which were found on larger plantations, are not included (Woofter et al. 1936).

FIG. 2.9. The mature New South plantation landscape. Dispersed houses on tenant tracts, St. Francis Basin, Arkansas, 1938. Dorothea Lange, FSA Collection, Library of Congress
dispersed across the plantation in small dwellings (map 2.6; fig. 2.9). Churches and schools, which had begun to emerge on plantations by 1881, were present in greater numbers fifty years later. In 1936, as in 1881, schools for blacks rarely went beyond the fourth grade. Wage hands, who were paid by the day, lived in houses that were grouped near the store or the cotton ginnery or at the edge of the fields. Management’s control was exercised in three ways, each symbolized by a prominent landscape feature. Financial control was through the company store, which secured the annual “furnish” with liens on the crop (fig. 2.10). Day-to-day supervision of work in the fields was through allocation of work stock and farm implements. The central mule barn and the equipment sheds were near the owner’s or
manager’s residence. Each morning sharecroppers had to come to the barn to obtain mules and implements for the day’s work and had to return them in the evening. Command of marketing was exercised through the ginnery, where cotton was prepared for sale. Harvested cotton was temporarily stored in cotton houses, small sheds in the fields. To haul cotton from the field to the ginnery, a sharecropper had to obtain mules and a wagon from the central barn. Once the cotton was sucked from the wagon into the gin, the commodity passed into the control of the planter. Sharecroppers and, often, share tenants did not see their cotton again. The tenants were paid their percentages after the planter had sold the cotton and deducted their debts. For blacks, footpaths, more than roads, were the thoroughfares of their small insular worlds. The paths connected tenant house, church, and school, landscape symbols of their freedom, to big house, commissary, mule barn, and ginnery, visual reminders of their servitude.

UPPER COUNTRY TO ALLUVIAL EMPIRE

If there ever was a Southern “cotton belt,” it existed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The land of cotton, 30 million acres of the staple, stretched for more than 1,000 miles across the South from southern


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Virginia to the Rio Grande (map 2.7). Not only was the crop the foundation of the economy in the plantation regions, but legions of white yeomen farmers grew cotton in areas that bordered them. A cotton civilization to which life and social institutions, including churches and schools, were geared was firmly established. But significant variations existed among, as well as within, the regimented cotton plantation regions. The agrarian New South often is presented as a homogeneous place without significant economic, cultural, or geographical differences. However, the cotton plantation regions differed considerably in their origin, evolution, and spatial characteristics. Although the basic landscape components were similar, subtle variations existed in topography, soil, settlement patterns, associated crops, and the viability of the plantation system. The cotton plantation regions of the central South—Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi—illustrate the diversity (map 1.1).

MAP 2.7. Cotton acreage in the United States in 1909. At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, cotton production was near its apex in the South. Not only did major regions such as the Southern Piedmont produce the staple, but cotton was an important crop in the areas on the periphery of them. Cotton was in only the initial stages of a major shift from the Southeast to the Southwest. Into the second decade of the twentieth century, the 23-inch precipitation line was thought to mark the westward limit of where the staple could be grown profitably (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture 1918, 9).
The lower Georgia Piedmont was a part of one of America’s earliest cotton regions. The problem of mechanically extracting seeds from the variety of cotton which could be grown on the Southern Piedmont, or Upper Country, which in elevation lay above the Coastal Plain, was the impetus for Eli Whitney’s invention of his gin. The first American cotton region, the Sea Island region, developed in the infant United States at the end of the eighteenth century. The commencement of the Industrial Revolution greatly increased the demand for cotton in Great Britain. During the 1780s, long-staple black seed cotton from the Caribbean began to be grown commercially along the South Carolina–Georgia coast. The cotton was processed using what was known as a gin, or roller gin, to remove the seed. This device originated in the Indian subcontinent in antiquity and diffused into the Mediterranean Basin, from where it was taken into the Caribbean and the subtropical fringe of the North American continent. Piedmont farmers, however, found that black seed cotton, a tropical variety, would not mature on the Piedmont. A cotton variety known as green seed could be successfully cultivated, but the seeds clung so tightly to the lint that roller gins could not remove them. In 1792 Eli Whitney, a Connecticut schoolmaster who had come south to be a tutor for a South Carolina planter’s children, invented another method of ginning cotton, which was based in part on modification of the roller principle. Although the Whitney gin, what became known as the saw gin, was never accepted in the Sea Island region and the western long-staple cotton regions because it short-ened the fibers, it opened the Piedmont, the Upper Country, and other interior regions of the South to cotton production. The term upland cotton superseded green seed as the name for the heartier varieties of the staple.

By 1860, the Southern Piedmont was one of the major agricultural regions of the South and the nation. The lower Piedmont had evolved into a cotton plantation region of the Lowland South, while the upper Piedmont had developed as part of the Upland South, which was dominated by white yeoman farmers. Wilkes County on the lower Piedmont in 1860 had 7,953 slaves and ninety-eight farms with 500 or more acres. In contrast, nearby Hall County on the upper Piedmont had only 1,216 slaves and two farms with 500 or more acres. Although after the Civil War cotton became a major crop on the upper Piedmont, the cultural differences between the plantation and yeoman farmer sections persisted. The differences took various forms in their landscape expressions. In 1922, Roland Harper reported that white women could be seen “working in the fields almost any day in the upper Piedmont, but rarely if ever in the lower Piedmont.”

By 1860, the political, economic, and cultural heart of Georgia had
shifted from Savannah and the Atlantic coast inland to the lower Piedmont. The state capital was at Milledgeville and the state university in Athens. The lower Piedmont also was a culture hearth of major splinter church denominations, including the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Southern Baptist Convention, which originated in sectional controversy over slavery. Well before the Civil War, capital created by plantation agriculture began to be invested in an infant manufacturing complex that consisted principally of textile mills at scattered sites on rivers of the lower Piedmont. To facilitate the region’s cotton economy and infant textile industry, in the 1830s planters and industrialists chartered one of the world’s first railroads, which began laying track along a carefully surveyed route from Augusta on the Savannah River westward across the lower Georgia Piedmont. Although the Georgia Railroad originally was intended to run from Athens to Augusta, one of the world’s first railroad junctions was created at Union Point in Greene County. From Union Point, the Georgia Railroad was extended westward to Madison and then farther westward to meet the state-owned Western and Atlantic, which was built southward from Chattanooga to a place on a Piedmont interfluve called Terminus. By the outbreak of the Civil War, the importance of the lower Georgia Piedmont extended well beyond the state, for it was one of the significant regions in the creation and leadership of the Southern Confederacy. Terminus, under its new promotional name Atlanta, had become a strategic railroad hub.

The rapid early growth of Atlanta and its strategic importance during the Civil War forecast a significant future. The quick rebuilding of the city following its burning by Federal troops in 1864 and its rapid postwar growth signified that Atlanta had superseded the rural plantation Piedmont as Georgia’s economic and political heart. The state capital was relocated from Milledgeville to Atlanta in 1868, and in 1916 the Presbyterians reopened in the city Oglethorpe College, which had closed in Milledgeville in 1872. Subsidized by a large endowment from the Candlers, the first family to make a fortune in Coca-Cola, a beverage that an Atlanta pharmacist originally concocted as a tonic, the Methodists relocated Emory College from Oxford in Newton County to the city’s suburbs in 1924 and upgraded it to university status. Although the legislature left the University of Georgia in Athens, the university’s engineering college, the School of Technology, which opened in 1888 and was a critical part of the state’s industrial New South strategy, was built in Atlanta because of the city’s promise of $2,500 annually for twenty-five years.
At the time the lower Piedmont achieved its apex, early in the twentieth century, it was an old cotton kingdom by American precepts of “old” (map 2.7). Four hundred miles to the west was a new kingdom, the alluvial Mississippi Valley, the Delta, a rapidly emerging plantation region. The Old South plantation did not develop in most of the Delta; the region was a cotton kingdom of the New South. In 1910, only 52 percent of the alluvial valley in Mississippi, the Yazoo Delta, was in farms, and only 38 percent was improved for agriculture. With its fertile soils, the alluvial plain of the Mississippi River and its tributaries was potentially “the cream jug of the continent,” but poor drainage, devastating floods, and debilitating malaria made the region “terra incognita.” Despite the agricultural potential, the environmental hazards, especially the “miasma,” made the region uninviting to white yeomen. Much of the Delta was developed by persons who acquired large tracts on which they cut the hardwood timber, dug drainage canals, and created plantations. During the Old South era, the settled areas were along the Mississippi River on the west and the bluffs of the Loess Plains on the east. The interior of the basin remained a wilderness, one of North America’s great cypress-tupelo forests, which was destroyed as the plantation advanced. Federally funded drainage projects and great levees along the Mississippi River and the Yazoo, Tallahatchie, and other tributaries, together with the construction of railroads, encouraged agricultural development. The railroads shifted the regional foci from the region’s margins to its interior.

By 1940, more of the Mississippi alluvial valley’s land area was in plantations than that of any other part of the South, and the grandiose “Alluvial Empire” had been coined to convey the scale and perceived importance of the region. William Faulkner, one of the most perceptive and eloquent of the Yazoo Delta’s critics, described the mature New South landscape at the end of its era:

Now the land lay open from the cradling hills on the East to the rampart of levee on the West, standing horseman-tall with cotton for the world’s looms—the rich black land, imponderable and vast, fecund up to the very doorsteps of the negroes who worked it and of the white men who owned it; . . . the land in which neon flashed past them from the little countless towns and countless shining this-year’s automobiles sped past them on the broad plumb-ruled highways, yet in which the only permanent mark of man’s occupation seemed to be the tremendous gins, . . . the land across which there came now no scream of panther but instead the long hooting of locomotives: trains
of incredible length and drawn by a single engine, since there was no gradient anywhere.\textsuperscript{51}

Rupert Vance characterized the Alluvial Empire as “Cotton obsessed, Negro obsessed, . . . the deepest South, the heart of Dixie, America’s superplantation belt.”\textsuperscript{52} Over large expanses of the Yazoo Delta, blacks constituted 90 percent or more of the population. Although Alfred Stone, who owned Dunleith Plantation near Greenville, held traditional planter racial beliefs, he did comprehend the important role of blacks to the region:

The railroad rights of way through its forests have been cut out by the Negro, and every mile of track laid by his hands. These forest lands have been converted by him into fertile fields, and their subsequent cultivation has called for his constant service. The levees upon which the Delta depends for protection from floods have been erected mainly by the Negro, and the daily labour in field and town, in planting and building, in operating gins and compresses and oil mills, in moving trains, in handling the great staple of the country—all, in fact, that makes the life behind these earthen ramparts—is but the Negro’s daily toil.\textsuperscript{53}

A well-developed central place hierarchy of plantations, hamlets, towns, and small cities had evolved in the Delta by 1940. However, differences existed among the settlement patterns of the alluvial Mississippi Valley and older plantation regions to the east, illustrated by the Yazoo Delta and the lower Georgia Piedmont. The New South agribusiness structure of the lower Piedmont evolved, in part, to serve relatively large numbers of yeoman farmers and share and cash tenants. Because Delta plantations were larger, New South crossroad agribusiness complexes were less important than on the lower Piedmont. On the Piedmont, however, New South buildings were more substantially constructed than in the Yazoo Delta. As a consequence, more New South relic and fossil agrarian structures remained on the Piedmont than in the Delta at the close of the twentieth century.

To a greater extent than the lower Georgia Piedmont, the Yazoo Delta was a region whose landowners actively managed agriculture from without. Whether landlords were individuals who commuted to their plantations from Memphis or were corporations such as Fine Spinners, Ltd., the British company that owned the 37,000-acre Delta and Pine Land Company at Scott, from initial settlement the importance of alien proprietorship made the Yazoo Delta more like the typical world plantation region.
FIG. 2.11. The mature New South plantation landscape. “Main Street,” Woodville, Georgia, June 1941. Although Woodville is a municipality, it has never been more than a large hamlet. The population was 458 in 1940 and 415 in 1990. The brick building in the foreground housed the Bank of Woodville, which closed in the 1920s during the boll weevil depression. A two-story cotton ginnery is in the background. The smoke is billowing from the smokestack of the boiler for the steam engine that powered a planing mill, usually a winter business, which was still operating in June as the nation geared up for the Second World War. The Great Depression had ended; lumber and cotton were essential war materials. This scene was repeated without much variation at strategic crossroads throughout the cotton plantation landscape. Jack Delano, FSA Collection, Library of Congress

than the lower Piedmont. In addition, the average size of a plantation in the Yazoo Delta was larger than on the lower Georgia Piedmont. This does not mean that the Piedmont did not have large plantations. The 20,000-acre Smithsonia Plantation in Oglethorpe County, Georgia, just north of the Barrow family’s Sylls Fork Plantation, was farmed in 1910 by more than one thousand wage and leased-convict laborers and had its own cotton warehouses and short-line railroad. The R. E. Strickland Company in Concord, Georgia, owned 10,000 acres. Its agribusiness complex, which included a cotton ginnery and a “cradle-to-the-grave” store built in 1908 at the apex of the New South era and operated until 1992, dominated the town
of Concord, located a few miles south of the Atlanta’s Hartsfield International Airport.\textsuperscript{55}

Whereas an important diversified socioeconomic structure that included the state capital and university, factories, and regional cities developed within the lower Georgia Piedmont, beyond its agriculture and a few unique cultural attributes, the Yazoo Delta was never a prominent region. The Delta was the heart of Dixie in a locational sense but not in cultural or economic ones. The region had no major cities, universities, or corporate headquarters. In the heyday of the nation’s and the region’s rail net, no mainline crossed the Delta, and the Delta’s two largest cities, Memphis and New Orleans, lay beyond its borders. David Cohn declared that the “Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of Hotel Peabody in Memphis,”\textsuperscript{56} but the region was more a part of the city than the city a part of the region. The Delta was an important source of a few prominent aspects of black culture. For the blacks entrapped in the backbreaking toil of Delta plantations, blues music became an expressive release from their hardships. Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield), B. B. King, and other legendary artists took the blues from the Delta to urban America, where the music had profound repercussions in the nation and eventually the world.\textsuperscript{57}

Over the years the geographical characteristics and relative importance of the South’s cotton plantation regions changed. At the time of the depression, the cotton plantation regions had many similarities, but significant differences also existed (fig. 2.11). In addition to the emphasis given to one dominant crop, in cotton plantation counties blacks made up a high proportion of the population, agriculture was the dominant occupation, the rural nonfarm population was relatively small, and farm tenancy and poverty rates were exorbitant.\textsuperscript{58} There also were a number of contrasts between the cotton plantation regions. Most significant were differences in the viability of agriculture and the plantation system. By the 1930s, the Georgia Piedmont plantation region was in chronic demise. In contrast, the Yazoo Delta was a viable, innovative plantation region that was still expanding agriculturally. Other Southern cotton plantation regions depicted various stages of agricultural vigor which ranged between that of the Piedmont and that of the Delta.