CHAPTER ELEVEN

New Settlement Patterns

This [roadside demonstration] is a boil that has come to a head, indicating a widespread condition in the cotton region. It is probably that nothing less than a great resettlement campaign, involving both housing and land, could materially improve living conditions among these folk.

Report on the Missouri sharecroppers demonstration, 1939

We’ve become a much more segregated society now than we were 30 years ago. Then it was segregated on the basis of race. But the white and black folks worked in the same field and they rode in the same trucks and they toted the same watermelon.

. . . They knew each other.

Jimmy Carter, 1992

The decline and mechanization of the Southern cotton plantation was accompanied not only by significant migration of blacks from the plantation regions but also by redistribution of the black population that remained. Urban and rural nonfarm black populations increased while the farm population declined. Even in the Yazoo Delta and other regions where plantation agriculture remained viable, the black rural farm population decreased while the rural nonfarm and urban populations increased absolutely as well as relatively. The population figures imply much more than they reveal. Severing of blacks from the plantation was accompanied by profound changes in the settlement patterns. The new settlement patterns have not been fully studied, but rural hamlets, underbounded municipalities, and a new type of black municipal ghetto are among the spatial components.
RURAL HAMLETS

The New South settlement pattern of “scattered cabins,” which in 1950 David Cohn saw beginning to “give way to small villages as in European agriculture,” soon became a dominant geographical trend. By the 1990s, much of the rural black population in the countryside of the plantation South was concentrated in hamlets. Although some of the hamlets house employees on neoplantations, most are home to a rural nonfarm population that has little or no relationship to the old plantation landholdings that surround them.

Nucleation of the black population occurred in the countryside as households built dwellings close together on small lots, creating hamlets, groups of five or more dwellings, none of which is more than two-tenths of a mile from another.¹ This new pattern of rural settlement exists whether the plantation is viable, as in the Yazoo Delta, or extinct, as on the lower Georgia Piedmont. Two basic types of hamlets developed, unplanned assemblages of dwellings and planned subdivisions. Unplanned assemblages frequently evolve on farms owned by blacks, in some instances reinforcing and redefining traditional black enclaves. The first stage in their development usually is associated with an extended family through the laying out of lots as dwelling sites for family members. Parents who own a farm or small tract give children a plot on which to construct a house or locate a mobile home. In black enclaves that historically were composed of several farms, construction of two or three dwellings by children on each landholding can create a sizable hamlet. Large hamlets usually evolve beyond the extended family stage and enter a second one in which lots are sold to nonrelatives. Frequently, a black church that was the focus of the black farm enclave also serves as the nucleus of the new black hamlet. Larger rural hamlets usually have one or more stores and other businesses that include juke joints and motor vehicle repair shops. The role of farms owned by blacks in the development of hamlets is illustrated by eastern Tate County, Mississippi (maps 5.1, 11.1). Most of the hamlets in 1990 were enclaves of black landowners in 1940. Independent Tyro and New Hope were still in the extended family stage, but Freedonia had evolved into a large hamlet in which lots were sold to nonrelatives.

Although some unplanned assemblages are groups of well-kept, modern houses resembling suburban subdivisions, others contain a hodgepodge of dwelling types (figs. 11.1–11.3, map 11.1). Within a single unplanned hamlet may be relocated tenant shacks, mobile homes, shell frame houses completed by owners, and large brick-veneer houses with attached garages.
Houses usually are close to the road, and beside or behind the main structure may be one or two dwellings occupied by family members. Rural plantation counties, most of which had no building codes until the 1970s, were forced to enact laws to manage the newly emerging rural hamlets of blacks and whites. Most counties require a lot of 1 or 1.5 acres for each dwelling to accommodate the drainage field of a septic tank for sewage disposal. Rural hamlets with three or more dwellings per acre evidence either lack of adequate county building codes or failure to enforce them.

Planned rural subdivisions are hamlets in which lots are platted and the development officially registered at the county courthouse. Although profit from the sale of land often is not the primary factor in the development of unplanned assemblages of dwellings, it is fundamental to subdivisions. Subdivisions that are intended solely for blacks have been created across the plantation regions by white and black developers. Developers usually

MAP 11.1. The Modern South landscape. Distribution of dwellings occupied by blacks in eastern Tate County, Mississippi, 1990. Charles S. Aiken
FIG. 11.1. Transition from New South to Modern South landscape. Hopewell, eastern Tate County, Mississippi, in 1980. The new shell house replaced the abandoned dwelling, which was razed. The older dwelling was built as a tenant house prior to the Farm Security Administration’s purchase of the plantation in 1940 and subdivision of it into several small tracts that were sold to black farmers under the agency’s tenant-purchase program. Charles S. Aiken

FIG. 11.2. The Modern South landscape. Three houses of an eight-dwelling extended-family black rural hamlet in Tunica County, Mississippi, in 1985. The occupants commute 30 miles to employment in Memphis, Tennessee. The houses were financed by the Farmers Home Administration. Charles S. Aiken
are local entrepreneurs who perceive the market potential. The War on Poverty infused into the plantation regions large sums to replace and renovate housing. A special type of planned rural subdivision is one that is sponsored by the Farmers Home Administration or the Department of Housing and Urban Development (fig. 11.4). Although the FmHA was originally created to aid farmers, its role in rural nonfarm housing escalated after 1961 when the agency’s restriction to farm housing was removed by Congress and the number of nonfarm dwellings financed significantly surpassed the number of farm. 2 Because a large percentage of the nation’s low-income nonmetropolitan households are in the South, the FmHA’s housing programs have had the greatest relative importance in the Southern states. During the 1980s, Mississippi frequently received the greatest annual expenditures among the states. The New South furnish merchant stores and plantation commissaries are gone, but the rural store survives in a Modern South form to serve largely nonfarm black and white populations (fig. 11.5).

Northern Tunica County, Mississippi, is representative of the new rural settlement landscape. In 1960, almost all of the area was cropland, and cotton was still the most important crop (map 11.2). Plantations dominated the area. Kirby, Abby-Leatherman, Bowdre (Owen Farm), and Holbert

![Fig. 11.3.](image_url) The Modern South landscape. An extended-family rural black hamlet between Thyatira and Hopewell in eastern Tate County, Mississippi, in 1985. Charles S. Aiken
FIG. 11.4. The Modern South landscape. A street in a Farmers Home Administration-sponsored subdivision in Jonestown, a black ghetto in Coahoma County, Mississippi. The houses were built in the 1980s. Charles S. Aiken

FIG. 11.5. The Modern South landscape. Patrick’s Store at Chulahoma, Marshall County, Mississippi, in 1993. The store is representative of the type of rural store found across the plantation regions in the late twentieth century. Although primarily a grocery that functions as a convenience market, the store stocks feed and other basic farm supplies and has a laundry. The furnish merchant tradition continues in the large credit business that such a store usually has, with bills paid on a weekly or monthly basis. Charles S. Aiken
were among the largest and were in various stages of transformation from the New South to Modern South plantation. In 1960, as in 1860, more than 80 percent of the area’s population was black. The only concentration of dwellings occupied by whites consisted of the houses of planters, merchants, and farm managers along the main street of Robinsonville, an unincorporated village. Except for several small, family-owned farms, blacks in the area lived on plantations or in Robinsonville. Most of the dwellings were tenant houses in various stages of repair. The houses in the fields, including those on Bowdre Plantation, were second-generation, post–Civil War ones. The dwellings removed from the fields and rebuilt along roads, together with a few new ones constructed among them during the first phase of plantation reorganization, constituted the third generation of post–Civil War housing. As a consequence of the decline of tenancy, Tunica County’s black population decreased 30 percent between 1940 and 1960, declining from 19,335 to 13,342. Some shacks stood vacant, falling into ruin. A number of the occupied dwellings housed families of machinery

operators, who were paid weekly wages, and day laborers, who barely subsisted on what they intermittently earned weeding and harvesting cotton. Churches and schools of blacks were prolific in the area. Most of the small one- and two-room public schools were closed when the large new consolidated Rosa Fort school for blacks was built in the 1950s just outside the town of Tunica as part of Mississippi’s effort to make black schools equal to white ones.

Twenty-five years later, by 1985, the landscape of northern Tunica County was fundamentally different. Mechanization of agriculture had been completed for two decades, and the end of de jure segregation, the Voting Rights Act, and the War on Poverty had made an impact on the landscape (map 11.3). Not only did the new settlement pattern depict the Modern South neoplantation, but it conspicuously portrayed the severance of blacks from the plantation. Although northern Tunica County was settled before the Civil War, no overt evidences of the Old South plantation remained. Catastrophic floods, the worst in 1927, intermittently erased the land. The once bustling river town Commerce, which was taken by the Mississippi more than a century ago, would be nothing but a name if Tunica County’s approval of legalized gambling had not reestablished the place in the early 1990s as a site for river-barge casinos. Even the relics and fossils of the New South era were rapidly vanishing. The giant mule barn on Abby-Leatherman Plantation, once one of the largest and tallest structures in Tunica County, was razed in the early 1980s. A few abandoned or converted commissaries and furnish merchant stores survived on some plantations and in Robinsonville and Hollywood, but even these structures were disappearing. The most prominent residuals of the New South plantation were a smattering of former tenant shacks and the churches and cemeteries of blacks. A few of the houses were still occupied, but most were empty, awaiting demolition. Churches, the only unyielding New South-era objects on some plantations, sat forlorn amidst soybean, cotton, and rice fields (fig. 11.6).

Almost all Tunica County’s 6,148 blacks in 1990 lived in nuclei of dwellings. Fewer than 10 percent still resided on farms and plantations. Rows of dwellings for wage employees on neoplantations were on Bowdre Farms, Abby-Leatherman Plantation, and Earnhart Farms and in Hollywood for employees of the Bibb planting company. Most of the blacks in northern Tunica County resided in the unincorporated villages of Robinsonville and Hollywood and in hamlets that developed after 1964 just beyond the boundaries of plantations. Hollywood became virtually extinct with the demise of the New South plantation, but the creation of Rainbow Subdivi-
sion for blacks by a white entrepreneur in 1965 redefined the place. Several hamlets of blacks developed in the countryside. The small hamlet at Corinth Church is that of an extended family; another extended-family hamlet is 2 miles west of the church. Hamrick is a subdivision that was created in 1970 on a quarter section owned by a black family. As Rainbow Subdivision, Hamrick evolved into an assortment of dwellings and contrasts sharply with the surrounding uninhabited expanses of fields. White Oak, an FmHA-sponsored subdivision occupied by blacks, is the largest and most prominent hamlet. Constructed in the late 1970s, this 180-house development, 3 miles from the town of Tunica, is isolated among cotton, soybean, and rice fields. In 1990, more than 900 persons, one-seventh of Tunica County’s black population, lived in White Oak.

The late-twentieth-century landscape and economy of the lower Georgia Piedmont differ substantially from those of Tunica County, Mississippi. The area surrounding the site of the Barrow Sylls Fork Plantation is dominated by pine forest (map 11.4). Pastureland is infrequent, cropland exceptional, and the plantation extinct. Scattered through the forests are relics and fossils of both the Old and the New South plantations, which survive largely because, rather than remaining viable, the plantation and crop agriculture perished. Ironically, this area from which the plantation has vanished appears more stereotypical Deep South than Tunica County, where the plantation survives and the Modern South landscape of industrial agriculture resembles California’s Great Valley. Decaying and restored antebellum big

FIG. 11.6. The vanishing New South landscape. Morning Star Church, northern Tunica County, Mississippi, in 1985. Charles S. Aiken
houses, forsaken by the slave quarters, barns, and other buildings that once surrounded them, are the most prominent remnants of the Old South era. Philomath and Woodville have concentrations of such dwellings. Slave burial grounds and artifacts at the sites of slave quarters are the principal remnants of the first period of black settlement. The landscape residuals from the New South plantation are more numerous. Relic store buildings of furnish merchants are in Philomath, Woodville, and the countryside. Remnants of tenant farmer shacks rot away in the woods. The few that are still occupied house the poorest black households in the area. As in Tunica County, the most significant New South residuals are the churches that were organized by former slaves shortly after freedom. A mile from the highway in the pine forest, a small group of elderly blacks still meet occasionally at Spring Hill Baptist Church, which was rebuilt in 1937 on the site given to the congregation by David Barrow in 1870 (fig. 11.7).

More prominent than the landscape residuals of the Old and New South eras is the new pattern of black settlement which emerged after 1964. Although the plantation is extinct, its cultural traditions and landscape influences survive. The settlement pattern of blacks differs little from that of northern Tunica County. Most blacks live in five unplanned hamlets and in Woodville, which has a small FmHA subdivision. The hamlets of Daniel Springs and Springfield began on the farms of blacks who sold lots to relatives. The large hamlet at Philomath is the creation of an elderly planter...

FIG. 11.7. The vanishing New South landscape. In 1985, Spring Hill Church still occupied the site given to the congregation by David C. Barrow shortly after the Civil War. The original building was replaced by a new one in 1937. The cemetery behind the church includes the graves of former Barrow slaves and members of tenant families on Sylls Fork. Charles S. Aiken
The Modern South landscape. New Spring Hill Church is the focus of a large black hamlet of more than thirty dwellings which developed after 1967 on the eastern margin of the old planter village of Philomath. The site of Sylls Fork Plantation, the area’s most famous historic feature, and the new black hamlet, the most significant modern link to the past, are prominently excluded from the Philomath historic district. Charles S. Aiken

and his wife who in 1967 began selling inexpensive 1-acre lots to their former tenant farmers as the final act of the old paternalism. The hamlet, which contains more than thirty dwellings that range from neat brick-veneer houses to mobile homes to shacks, developed around New Spring Hill Baptist Church, which was built in 1977 to replace the 1937 building. The original location had become almost inaccessible by the old road that crossed Sylls Fork Plantation. The present church building is an imposing air-conditioned brick-veneer structure with Sunday school rooms and a large auditorium (fig. 11.8). Among the deacon names on the cornerstone are Pope and Maxey, names of tenants on Sylls Fork in 1881 who had been Barrow slaves. The new edifice evidences socioeconomic improvement in the condition of many rural blacks and confirms their commitment to their historical home.

UNDERBOUNDED MUNICIPALITIES: SOUTHERNTOWN REVISITED

Whereas in metropolitan areas the majority of the black population is confined to inner cities, for numerous small municipalities across the plan-
FIG. 11.9. The vanishing New South landscape. Housing along infamous Sugar Ditch in the old black residential area of Tunica, Mississippi, in 1985. These dwellings were razed and the occupants relocated to an FmHA apartment complex and a line of new mobile homes on the abandoned railroad grade outside the Tunica corporate limits. Charles S. Aiken

FIG. 11.10. Dwellings at the edge of Tunica North Census Designated Place, Mississippi, in 1987. These dwellings, which were constructed circa 1945–64 by blacks displaced from plantation agriculture, are representative of the third generation of housing occupied by blacks after the Civil War. Charles S. Aiken
The reenfranchisement of blacks created a new spatial dimension to local politics in which annexation of black residential areas is opposed by whites who fear loss of political control of municipalities. An ironic geographical situation has developed in some plantation counties where blacks are a political majority, and whites have attempted to retain political rule in municipal enclaves where they are a plurality of voters. Describing Eutaw, Alabama, after blacks assumed political control of Greene County, a white patrician jestfully told a journalist, “We are proud of our Greek revival and our white survival.”

Frequently cities seek annexation of territory only to be opposed by suburbanites. For many small municipalities in the plantation regions a reverse situation has developed, for blacks in the suburban fringes seek annexation only to be resisted by white-controlled governments. Though some towns and cities have readily annexed black residential areas, others either have refused to annex any new territory or have selectively expanded the corporate boundaries to exclude blacks. That municipal underbounding involving discrimination against blacks became a problem in the wake of the Voting Rights Act is evidenced by federal court cases seeking annexation of black residential areas.

In the Yazoo Delta, municipal underbounding for racial reasons is a regional problem. As blacks surged toward the municipalities of the Yazoo Delta, the residential areas grew in stages. Three distinct types of black residential areas can be identified. First is the traditional black residential area (map 5.2, fig. 11.9). Older dwellings in this area belong to the second generation of black housing following the Civil War. In some municipalities, the traditional black residential area, even in the 1990s, differed little from that of Indianola described by Powdermaker and Dollard more than half a century earlier. Shacks still dominated. The number of dwellings and population density were actually greater than in the 1930s. A second type of residential area is evidenced in the dwellings constructed between 1935 and 1965 to harbor the blacks who moved to the municipalities during the great exodus initiated by the federal crop reduction programs and mechanization of cotton production. In part the growth in housing occurred by infilling vacant tracts and by crowding additional dwellings onto the small lots in traditional black residential areas. Development also was by outward expansion, with the black residential areas frequently growing beyond the political boundaries of municipalities (fig. 11.10). New black residential areas also evolved just beyond the political boundaries but spatially isolated from the older municipal black sections.
The substantial number of dwellings beyond municipal borders constructed between 1935 and 1965 are the result of the failure of municipal leaders to create new black residential territories within corporate boundaries to meet the increased demand for housing. Initially, unresponsiveness of the white leadership was largely due to the decline of traditional interdependence of whites and blacks. With passage of the New South plantation economy and alteration of municipal businesses that required large amounts of cheap black labor, whites no longer needed to make provisions for increasing numbers of blacks in towns. Even with out-migration, too many blacks remained for the available jobs. Alteration of the age structure to a population with large numbers of the elderly and the young contributed to some white leaders increasingly viewing blacks as an economic liability.

Most of the dwellings in the second type of black residential areas are similar to traditional ones. Municipal dwellings constructed and relocated between 1935 and 1965 belong to the third generation of post–Civil War housing. Many are shacks, including old tenant houses that were either given away or sold for a few dollars by planters who removed them from fields as mechanization of cotton production proceeded. Deteriorated mobile homes are occasionally jammed beside and behind some of the houses. The young Northern urbanites who descended into the Yazoo Delta during the 1964 Freedom Summer saw the black municipal residential areas near the end of the third era of housing. Their letters to parents and friends are filled with graphic descriptions. Of Itta Bena a civil rights worker wrote: “The Negro neighborhood is literally ‘on the other side of the railroad tracks.’ . . . [It] hasn’t got a single paved street. . . . It’s all dirt and gravel roads. The houses vary from really beat-up shacks to fairly good looking cottages. The beat-up places predominate. There are lots of smelly outhouses and many of the houses have no inside water.”

The War on Poverty created a third area of municipal housing for blacks. Despite the initial apathy of many Delta white leaders, a combination of greed, altruism, and, especially, the fear that civil rights agencies and blacks would assume local control of the new federal programs caused whites to take interest. In 1960, 48 percent of the housing units in the Yazoo Delta were deteriorating or dilapidated. Between 1968 and 1981 more than two hundred million dollars was spent on housing in the region under the auspices of the FmHA and HUD. The new housing was constructed primarily within and on the fringes of municipalities and was part of the fourth generation of post–Civil War housing for blacks (figs. 11.4, 11.11). The impact on the quality of housing was profound. Nearly half of the
37,398 housing units occupied by blacks in the Yazoo Delta in 1980 were built after 1960. A number of blacks were able to make quantum leaps from tenant shacks without plumbing to new dwellings with air-conditioning and other modern conveniences. A destitute day laborer with several children who received national publicity when Robert Kennedy visited her two-room shack in the Yazoo Delta in 1967 moved thirteen years later into a new housing development.

The populations of the fifty-seven Delta municipalities in 1980 ranged from Glendora with 220 persons to Greenville with 40,613. For thirty-six of the fifty-seven, the fringe population was one-third or more the size of the municipal; twenty-two had fringe populations that were 50 percent or more the size of those within the corporate limits. Ten had a fringe population greater than the municipal. Although concentration of a significant black population on the fringe of municipalities evolved through the continual construction of dwellings in traditional black residential areas just beyond the corporate limits, a major factor in the growth of the fringe populations after 1964 was the federal housing programs.

Indianola, Dollard’s “Southerntown,” and Tunica and Belzoni are illustrative of the municipal underbounding that had developed by 1980. For all three municipalities the proportion of the white population was

FIG. 11.11. The landscape of the War on Poverty. South Gate, a Department of Housing and Urban Development Section 23 leased public housing project just beyond the southern boundary of Indianola, Mississippi, two years prior to its federal court-ordered annexation in 1989 under the provisions of the Voting Rights Act. Charles S. Aiken
larger within the corporate limits than without. The black fringe population of Tunica was larger than the entire municipal population. After 1940, the small Tunica Colored Subdivision grew and became the Census Designated Place of North Tunica (map 11.5). Although the ratio of fringe population to municipal was smaller for Indianola than for Tunica, three thousand blacks were concentrated on the southern fringe of the city. Belzoni, site of Marion Post Wolcott’s infamous movie theater photograph that so graphically and symbolically portrayed segregation (fig. 5.5), depicted the new type of residential segregation in the age of integration. The fringe population of Belzoni was almost equal to that within the corporate limits, but whereas blacks constituted 54 percent of the municipal population, they were 79 percent of that in the fringe. Large black residential areas were immediately west of the corporate limits. The Crescent Theater survived federal mandated social changes and was still in business in the late 1980s. Seating was desegregated, blacks were hired, and the balcony was converted into a small, second-screen theater. The facility was patronized almost entirely by black teenagers and young adults.

The role of federally financed housing in the concentration of blacks on the fringes of the three municipalities was highly significant. Thirty-four percent of the housing units on the fringe of Tunica and 64 percent on the fringe of Belzoni were constructed between January 1960 and March 1980. For the fringe of Indianola, the figure was an astounding 98 percent. Most of the housing was sponsored by the FmHA, but part of it was funded by HUD. The new housing included subdivisions of single family dwellings for home ownership built by the FmHA under Section 502 and HUD under Section 235 of the Federal Housing Acts. In addition, HUD Section 8 (new construction) and FmHA Section 515 multifamily rental complexes were scattered through the fringes. Also, large HUD Section 23 privately owned public housing projects leased to the South Delta Housing Authority were in the fringes of Indianola and Belzoni (fig. 11.11).

Most of the housing units occupied by blacks in North Tunica are not new, nor are they federally sponsored. New federally financed dwellings are, however, scattered among the old shacks, and in 1975 the 29-house Park North Subdivision was built under the auspices of the FmHA. In 1986 a 40-unit multifamily FmHA 515 rental project was constructed in a former cotton field just beyond the Tunica corporate limits south of a collection of shacks known as Sunrise, and another 36-unit 515 apartment complex was completed next to Park North Subdivision in 1991. Other black households that remained in the worst of Tunica’s housing along Sugar Ditch, a place that became infamous in the 1980s when the living conditions along the
MAP 11.5. Tunica and Tunica North Census Designated Place, Mississippi, 1981. Although Tunica and Tunica North are functionally one place, the boundary of Tunica (dashed line) encloses only the area that contains most of the businesses and white population. In 1990, Tunica was 73 percent white and Tunica North 96 percent black (U.S. Geological Survey, 1982, Tunica, Miss.–Ark. Quadrangle, 1:24,000).
open sewer received national media attention, were relocated to a 36-unit HUD Section 8 project and 17 FmHA-sponsored mobile homes placed in a tight line along the abandoned railroad grade north of the municipal limits.\textsuperscript{17} The western fringe of Belzoni includes a hodgepodge of black-occupied federally sponsored housing built since the commencement of the War on Poverty. In addition to FmHA-sponsored subdivisions, the area contains two Section 23 public housing projects leased to the South Delta Housing Authority and two large HUD Section 8 apartment complexes. The largest subdivision is Westgate, a 136-house development that was begun in 1971.\textsuperscript{18}

Nowhere in the Yazoo Delta is the impact of the federal housing programs more evident than on the southern fringe of Indianola. During the two decades following the initiation of the War on Poverty, large numbers of shacks in the black residential area of Dollard's Southerntown were razed and the occupants relocated. Subdivisions of small, new brick-veneer houses, including those of a 264-dwelling Section 23 leased public housing project, sprawl across the landscape, interspersed with FmHA Section 515 apartment complexes (fig. 11.11). Although built largely under Republican administrations, symbolically the south side of Indianola is Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. The names of the subdivisions—Grove Park, South Gate, and Green Acres—are those of suburban America. But economically and socially the area is not the suburban stereotype. The population is all black, and in 1980, 40 percent of the inhabitants were poor, 11 percent of the labor force was unemployed, and the majority of the housing was subsidized.

Several factors contribute to the location of much of the new, federally sponsored housing in the Yazoo Delta and other plantation areas on the fringes rather than within municipalities. In some instances, lack of space, especially for large housing projects and subdivisions, prevented their construction within corporate boundaries. The major factor, however, is fear by white-controlled municipal governments that increases in housing for blacks within corporate limits will dilute white voting strength. Testimony given in a lawsuit in which the mayor of Lula, Mississippi, tried to block construction of an FmHA apartment complex reveals this phobia. A prominent white businessman and planter who was willing to sell land on which the project was to be built testified that the mayor said to him: “Bill, what in the world are you trying [to do] to Lula? . . . You are absolutely going to ruin the town and destroy the voter ratio, the Blacks are going to take over. My wife and I have spent considerable money remodeling and
refurbishing our house, we will be forced to sell it at a sacrifice and move to Clarksdale.”

Acceptance of housing for blacks in the fringe rather than within the corporate limits is a compromise. Even dwellings built just beyond the corporate boundaries require a degree of approval by municipal governments, for water and sewer lines must be extended to them. Persons who work to improve housing of blacks in the plantation regions accept the fringe locations because they realize insistence that projects be located within municipal boundaries usually results in new dwellings not being constructed. For merchants, who are among the political leaders, a principal motivation for acceptance of the new housing in the fringe is that increases in the local black population mean growth of retail sales without growth of black political strength. Almost all of the retail businesses of the municipalities with large fringe populations are within corporate limits, and retail sales within the municipalities are substantially greater than the size of the municipal populations indicate.

The resistance of whites to annexation of black residential areas has resulted in court suits under the Voting Rights Act to force annexation and efforts to incorporate the fringe as a separate municipality. In 1984, after several years of litigation, Indianola was ordered by the federal district court to annex the southern fringe by January 1, 1989. Although in 1985 a similar case in Alabama was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court, no sweeping order mandates annexation, and each annexation case must work its way through the courts.

A NEW TYPE OF BLACK GHETTO

The new racial dynamics in the plantation regions resulted not only in whites of some municipalities seeking to maintain political control by refusing to annex black residential areas but also in the concentration of blacks in other municipalities. As blacks in the plantation regions became increasingly urbanized, changes occurred in the racial percentages of municipal populations. Restoration of the franchise to blacks and desegregation of public facilities, including massive desegregation of public schools in 1970, caused whites to retreat from municipalities in which blacks were perceived a threatening majority, especially if they began to make significant gains in election to municipal offices. At the opposite extreme from municipalities that underbound part of their black populations are historical and newly incorporated all-black towns and municipalities in which
the white population has drastically declined relative to the black population. Analysis of population redistribution in the Yazoo Delta also revealed the development of *ghetto towns*, places with relatively large black populations which have traits common to black ghettos in the nation’s metropolises.23

Although in the Yazoo Delta the movement of blacks from plantations to local municipalities began during the 1930s with cotton acreage reductions under the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the adoption of tractors, the principal surge to the region’s towns and cities occurred after 1950. In 1950, the black population surpassed the white in slightly more than half of the Yazoo Delta’s fifty-two incorporated places. The black population was 75 percent or greater in only three, two of which were the historic all-black towns Mound Bayou and Winstonville. By 1980, blacks were in the majority in all but eleven of the fifty-eight incorporated places, and they accounted for 75 percent or more of the population in twenty municipalities. Although the proportion of the population which is black might seem high in 1950 as well as near the twentieth century’s close, within the local context the alterations in the racial composition of municipalities are profound. That 75 percent or more of a municipality’s population is black is significant because this is the figure used to define the core of the metropolitan black ghetto.24

The concept of “black ghetto,” or “Negro ghetto,” has several geographical meanings in the United States, but the principal use is in reference to black population concentrations in American metropolises.25 In the plantation South the term *ghetto* has rarely been used to refer to the residential territories to which blacks have been confined in towns and small cities. But the territories are ghettos, and the labels that have been given to them, including *quarter*, also have meant places to which blacks are restricted. Recent redistribution of the black population has created a new type of black municipal ghetto in the Yazoo Delta and other plantation regions. As the black ghettos of Chicago and other large metropolises have become cities in themselves,26 so certain small municipalities in the plantation regions have become ghettos in themselves. By 1980, in the Yazoo Delta the black population was 75 percent or more in the two historic “all-black” towns, four newly incorporated places, and twelve municipalities in which the number of whites declined as the number of blacks increased. These ghetto towns mimic large metropolitan ghettos in particular characteristics. Like metropolitan black ghettos, ghetto towns are places in which a poor minority population is concentrated and segregated. Redistribution of blacks in the Yazoo Delta has resulted not only in concentration of
New Settlement Patterns • 329

blacks in particular municipalities but also in increased segregation among the region's municipalities.27

The increase in segregation occurred, in part, through incorporation of new towns with predominantly black populations. Municipal government allows citizens of a densely populated place to deal more effectively with problems and to qualify for state and federal funds. In the Yazoo Delta, four municipalities—Falcon, Renova, Metcalf, and Mayersville—were incorporated during the 1970s, and one town, Coahoma, was incorporated in the 1980s. However, the increase in segregation among the Yazoo Delta’s municipalities occurred primarily because, in certain towns, growth in the black population was accompanied by decline in the white. The changes in racial composition, in turn, produced significant alterations in the geography of municipalities. Small municipalities in plantation regions were traditionally characterized by the three major spatial components: the white residential area, the black residential area, and the business district (map 5.2). Since 1965, two additional components have emerged in ghetto towns that have lost white population and grown in black: a zone of encroachment by blacks into the white residential area and an area of new federally sponsored housing.28 Shelby, an 87 percent black municipality of 2,806 in the heart of the Yazoo Delta, illustrates the five spatial components (map 11.6). Although Shelby’s total population increased 11 percent between 1980 and 1990, its white population decreased 36 percent.29

The first spatial component, the core of the white residential area, is shrinking as blacks move into the margins of the traditional white area. The core is the part of the area which historically contained the dwellings of the white elite. Some of the dwellings are large, quaint two-story ones, but others are modern ranch-style houses built during the two decades following the Second World War (fig. 11.12). The core usually contains the white churches and may contain the building that was the white school during the era of segregation. The school building may be abandoned or may have been converted to other uses, including a private academy for whites. Population density in the core of the white residential area is low, averaging fewer than two persons per dwelling in many of the blocks. The population is composed primarily of middle-aged and elderly persons. In 1990, 44 percent of the whites in Shelby were sixty-five and older. Because the area is one of white flight, the number of houses available for sale to whites is greater than demand. Several of the houses are vacant, and a few dwellings may even have begun to fall into genteel ruin, but they usually are not overtly for sale, with signs in the yards and advertisements in newspapers (fig. 11.13). Houses that must be sold sometimes are bought by
residents of the core to prevent the possibility of blacks occupying the dwellings. Vacant lots with concrete house foundations and sidewalks evidence places where dwellings have been razed to protect the core from incursion by blacks (fig. 11.14).

The old black residential area is the second component of black ghetto towns (map 11.6). The area contains many substandard dwellings, some of which date from the establishment of the town and others that were built during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s when the black population began to surge in municipalities. Some dwellings, however, may have been renovated with federal funds. Major improvements have been made in the infrastructure of the old black residential area. Federal grants and loans have been used to expand and rebuild the infrastructure, including installation of water and sewage systems and paving of streets. Empty areas and new parks evidence the use of federal funds to raze the worst of the old housing and relieve residential crowding. Population density is high in the old black residential area. In Shelby in 1990, it averaged more than four persons per dwelling in some of the blocks. The area contains the churches of blacks and may include the former school for blacks from the era of segregation. Though the school may still be virtually all black, since desegregation it has been the town’s only public school. It may have been enlarged one or more times, an indication of the large proportion of the black population who are children.

The third component of municipalities in which the white population is decreasing while black is increasing is one of the new elements that spatially

![Fig. 11.12. The house of an affluent white family in the core of the white residential area of Shelby, Mississippi, in 1987. Charles S. Aiken](image-url)
FIG. 11.13. The aftermath of the civil rights movement. Vacant house in a state of deterioration at the edge of the white residential core of Friars Point, Mississippi, in 1987. Initially, evidence of vacancy is subtle, but after several years of neglect dwellings begin to deteriorate. Charles S. Aiken

FIG. 11.14. The aftermath of the civil rights movement. House being razed in the white residential area of Tchula, Holmes County, Mississippi, in 1986. The house, which was vacant, was torn down to prevent the possibility of blacks occupying it in the shrinking white residential core. Charles S. Aiken
distinguish them (map 11.6). Whereas the traditional pattern of municipalities in the plantation regions was one in which the boundary between the black and white areas was sharply defined, a zone of encroachment of blacks into the old white residential area has developed. The zone is similar to that found at the fringe of black ghettos in metropolises. In 1980, the index of dissimilarity was 82.6 for Shelby, which had a well-developed zone

of encroachment of blacks into the white residential area. Although it might seem that the movement of blacks into white residential areas has been produced by federal fair-housing legislation, the principal factor is an economic one. Urban housing models assume that older dwellings filter down to a less affluent population. However, this is not the case in small Southern municipalities where race historically has been all consuming. Housing either does not filter to blacks, or the process is controlled and retarded. Because there is essentially no market among whites for dwellings in municipalities with significant black populations, buying houses to prevent blacks from doing so and leaving them vacant eventually becomes an economic burden. Finally a stage is reached when houses on the fringe of the white residential area are sold to blacks. “Block busting” tactics used by metropolitan realtors, however, in the nonmetropolitan South are constrained as much by social and economic controls as by legal measures that realtors confront in nonmetropolitan areas.

If significant numbers of whites begin to leave a municipality, panic flight by whites occurs similar to that which sometimes happens in metropolitan neighborhoods in racial transition. “For Sale” signs even appear in yards of houses in the core of the white residential areas. The exodus of whites has reached a critical stage, and it seems to the ones remaining that the town is lost to blacks. This stage was reached in Shelby in the mid-1980s. One of the principal factors that produce panic among whites is blacks using political power that was restored by the 1965 Voting Rights Act to elect black municipal officials. By the mid-1980s, Shelby had a black mayor and a black alderman.

The fourth component of ghetto towns is also one not traditionally found in municipalities of plantation regions. Growth in population occurs in part by movement of blacks into new federal housing. The new housing usually is built close together and as additions to the old black residential areas. In Shelby, the federal housing in 1990 consisted of a twenty-four-unit HUD public housing project and forty-unit Section 8 apartment complex, together with an FmHA section 501 subdivision and two Section 515 apartment complexes (fig. 11.15).

The fifth component of the ghetto towns is the business district. New housing and growth in population normally contribute to viable retail business, but in municipalities where the white population is rapidly decreasing while the black is increasing, the opposite happens. The business districts are in decline, and retail trade has both deteriorated and changed. In general, businesses in the nation’s small towns, especially those with populations less than twenty-five hundred, have declined during recent
decades. Factors that produced the declines nationally, including decreases in the rural population and competition from larger municipalities, also have been important in the plantation South. In the plantation regions, however, the role of racial changes in the municipal population is also a factor in the decline and alteration of the retail structure. Shelby and other municipalities that lost significant numbers of whites have visual evidences of retail decline, including vacant store buildings and buildings with lower-order businesses than previously. The retail decline in Shelby began during the 1970s and accelerated during the 1980s. In 1970, Shelby had a strong, diversified business structure of 110 firms that included specialty shops, building materials companies, new automobile dealers, and professional services. Between 1980 and 1990 actual dollars of retail sales declined 24 percent, and by 1990 the number of firms had decreased to 63. Both the Ford and the Chevrolet dealerships closed (figs. 11.16, 11.17). The greatest relative declines were in “miscellaneous retail,” the category that includes specialty shops, and in “miscellaneous services,” the one that incorporates physicians, lawyers, and accountants.

Increase in the black population and decrease in the white is accompanied not only by a decline in retail trade but also by its restructuring from one partly oriented to relatively affluent whites to one that almost exclusively serves low-income blacks. In Friars Point, an old Mississippi River port town of 1,334 which in 1990 was 90 percent black, the alteration of the business district is complete (map 11.7). The role of the federal
FIG. 11.16. The aftermath of the civil rights movement. A variety store in Shelby, Mississippi, in the process of going out of business, in 1986. Charles S. Aiken

FIG. 11.17. The aftermath of the civil rights movement. A closed motor vehicle dealership in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, in 1986. Charles S. Aiken
government in the transition is evidenced by the vacant space on the town’s main street where store buildings that formed the heart of the business district were razed with HUD grants and in the new federally funded city hall and fire and police station. The used furniture and clothing stores, the small independent groceries, the juke joints, and the storefront church are among the types of establishments found in low-income metropolitan areas dominated by blacks. A small branch bank survives in Friars Point only because of the infusion of Social Security, AFDC, and other types of transfer payments. Though not as numerous as in the Yazoo Delta, black ghetto towns are distributed throughout the plantation regions.

Ghetto towns are but extreme versions of particular geographical characteristics that are depicted more subtly in municipalities where the relative black population is less than 75 percent but where serious racial discord exists. Selma, Alabama; Albany, Georgia; and Greenwood, Mississippi, are places where white resistance and racial unrest continued long after the cities disappeared from national television and newspapers. A result is the exodus of whites. Selma’s white population dropped from 51 percent in 1960 to 42 percent in 1990. The white population of Albany declined from 64 to 45 percent and that of Greenwood from 49 to 41 percent between 1960 and 1990. In all three cities, the white population decreases were absolute as well as relative. Almost a third of Selma’s whites left between 1970 and 1990.

BEYOND THE PLANTATION

Within the span of a little more than a century, the local distribution and the settlement pattern of blacks in the plantation regions of the American
South dramatically changed twice. Blacks were nucleated in slave quarters during the Old South era, dispersed across the countryside during the New South period, and in the modern South are again nucleated. The blacks who inhabit municipalities, their fringes, and rural hamlets often live within view of the sites of slave quarters where their ancestors dwelled. Although there are superficial spatial parallels between the modern rural hamlets and Old South slave quarters, there also are profound geographical differences. With each of the two major changes in settlement pattern, blacks in the plantation regions made further progress in their prolonged journey toward freedom. As the dispersed settlement of the New South plantation was an expression of a severely circumscribed freedom, so the new nucleated pattern may be interpreted as an expression of a newly augmented, but in certain respects a still restricted, freedom.

For numerous blacks, local population redistribution has meant exchange of shacks isolated among fields and forests for modern dwellings. However, the rural hamlets, municipal fringes, and ghetto towns in which rural blacks now live are not parts of the plantation system but lie beyond the margins of the old landholdings. This same marginal pattern of settlement exists whether the plantation is extinct, as it is on the lower Georgia Piedmont, or whether it survives in modern spatial form, as in the Yazoo Delta. Literally, and symbolically, most blacks in the plantation regions of the American South are now beyond the plantation.

As blacks have undergone recent microscale population redistribution, they have left behind the agrarian objects of white domination and control. Missing from their new settlements are the big house, the furnish store, and the old plantation paternalism. With each year, remembrance of these objects recedes further into history. At the close of the twentieth century more than three-fourths of the blacks in the plantation regions are too young to have known the agricultural system. The New South era of tenant farming is just as obscure to them as the Old South era of slavery.

In the process of settlement change, new types of important, but obscure, black enclaves have been created. Some of the new places inhabited by blacks, such as Woodville, Daniel Springs, and Hollywood, are built on the ruins of a past that persists only in names on the landscape. Though Philomath is protected by a historical district that overtly excludes the new hamlet of blacks but encloses a house touted as the site of the last meeting of cabinet members of the Confederate States government and what may be the Great Buffalo Salt Lick described by William Bartram, the place is more synonymous with the present than the past and is known locally for its large black population. Other new black hamlets, such as Hamrick, are
unnamed, while the names of extinct places like Carter’s Grove and Banks, which were important in the bygone eras of plantation agriculture, continue to be printed on maps. Whether or not the new places where blacks reside are officially named, they are important local concentrations of black political strength.

Even municipal black ghettos are obscure places. They are concealed by spatial distribution and by environment. Small corporate nuclei of poor blacks spread over a large agricultural region such as the Yazoo Delta hardly have the geographical impact, visually or statistically, of black ghettos in metropolises. Environment further obscures the Delta’s black ghettos. In the lush farmlands, even rural slums such as Falcon and Mayersville lose part of their shocking conspicuousness and become merely quaint places on the American rural landscape. Towns such as Shelby, Friars Point, and Sunflower, which are greatly ameliorated by the federal impress initiated by the War on Poverty, appear nothing like stereotypical metropolitan black ghettos. Despite a population that is 83 percent black and a poverty rate of 55 percent, at first glance Sunflower, with its new subdivisions and apartment complexes, is reminiscent of a prosperous agricultural town or a metropolitan suburban community in an idyllic agrarian setting. Superficially, it seems actually to be the amenity village that is advertised on a large highway sign—“Sunflower, Country Living on the Sunflower River.”

Although the new settlement pattern represents for blacks a new freedom, it also displays the problems they confront at the end of the twentieth century. Lost are the historical, paternalistic rights of blacks to hunt and fish on surrounding land once farmed by them and their ancestors. A type of enclosure movement, similar in some ways to that which occurred in Europe more than a century earlier, commenced in the plantation regions as the New South era waned and the Modern South era emerged. New dwellings in rural hamlets, ghetto towns, and just beyond the boundaries of municipalities have helped to ameliorate certain problems of blacks, but they also have contributed to the creation of new ones. From a public policy perspective, the locations of many of the new dwellings of blacks illustrate the consequences of federal programs introduced and administered without adequate geographical perspective and policy. Although federal programs alone did not create rural hamlets, ghetto towns, and underbounded municipalities, they are important to their sustenance and growth. A few federal officials were wise enough to foresee long-range repercussions of unguided federal programs, especially the housing programs, in plantation regions designed, in part, to decrease migration of blacks to Northern and Western metropolises. In 1967, Robert E. Levine,
deputy director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, advised Sargent Shriver: “The economic basis [of the South’s plantation counties] simply will not support the current population . . . . Neither will possible industrial development . . . . Given modern industry, which is not labor intensive, industrialization projects for such areas . . . . can use up an awful lot of money, create very few jobs and of those jobs they do create, reserve even fewer for the rural poor . . . . Housing programs for the poor in these areas where there are no jobs and will be none are the height of cruelty.”

However, Levine’s and a few other similar warnings concerning location decisions of federally sponsored housing in nonmetropolitan areas went unheeded.

Despite the problems, the new settlement patterns depict for a segment of the black population an ameliorated living standard and a new level of affluence which promises hope to the others who are now beyond the plantation. Historically, discrimination and poverty have been the overriding problems of blacks in the plantation regions. In the past, blacks had no potential to influence and change the difficulties they faced. The civil rights movement and the War on Poverty, federal court decisions, and congressional legislation took them additional steps toward control over their destinies. But adequate solutions to the economic problems that confront many of the blacks who still live in the old plantation regions as the twentieth century draws to a close remain elusive.