



The Sharecrop System, Yesterday and Today

About the plan

EDUCATOR'S NAME	Sandra Mazingo
SCHOOL	Horn Lake High School
DISTRICT	DeSoto County School District
GRADE LEVELS	11
SUBJECT	History / Government
UNIT/THEME	Sharecrop System
COMPETENCY NUMBER	U. S. History 1 and 3 United States History: 1877 to the Present Strands: Civics, History, Geography, and Economics <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Explain how geography, economics, and politics have influenced the historical development of the United States in the global community. (History, Geography, and Economics)3. Describe the relationship of people, places, and environments through time. (Civics, History, Geography, and Economics)
OBJECTIVES	The students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define sharecropping, wage labor, and labor gangs• Identify races and economic classes of people involved in sharecropping• Determine the economic and physical geographic circumstances that led to the establishment of the sharecrop system• Compare and contrast the sharecrop system as it existed in the early 20th Century, and as it exists today• Discuss whether the sharecrop system was based primarily on race or economic class <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Apply economic concepts and reasoning when evaluating historical and contemporary social developments and issuesb. Explain the emergence of modern America from a domestic perspective (e.g., organized labor)c. Explain the changing role of the United Statesd. Trace the expansion of the United States and its acquisition of territory

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. Analyze human migration patterns (e.g., rural to urban) f. Analyze how changing human, physical, geographical characteristics can alter a regional landscape
INSTRUCTIONAL FORMAT	Individual and class discussion
PRIOR PREPARATION	Search MAGNOLIA website to help students with their searches.
MATERIALS NEEDED	Internet and MAGNOLIA access
DURATION OF ACTIVITY	3 hours
FORMAL ASSESSMENT	Students will be assessed based on their fact-finding, idea production, and class participation.

Activity

In the 1910 Mississippi census, 92 percent of all the farmers in the Yazoo Delta were listed as tenants (sharecroppers), and 95 percent of those tenant farmers were black. The same census noted that the average non-Delta farm was 38.3 acres, and the average Delta tenant farm was 23.1 acres. The Delta tenant farms, although smaller in acreage, were more productive. In 1913, a study by the U. S. Office of Farm Management stated that 88 percent of all sharecropped land was in cotton. Sharecroppers as a special category had disappeared from census records by 1954.

The usual arrangement for tenant farming was for the planter to divide his land into small units of "farms" and rent them to individual (usually black) families. In return for sharing the crop on an equal basis, the landlord provided the sharecropper with land, a house free of charge, tools, woodstock, seed, work animals, and fuel. If a tenant supplied his own tools and animals, he generally paid one-fourth to one-third of his crops instead of the customary one-half.

Sometimes a tenant and his family required food goods, clothing or other items that had to be purchased from the plantation store, which was owned by the landlord. Cash money was not used for these transactions, but they were noted on the tenant's account, or bill. Medicine and doctor's care were also provided by the landlord under the same terms. It was almost impossible for the sharecropper to stay out of debt, and when his bills were added up at the end of the year, he often had to pledge future crops against his debts.

Procedures

Under MAGNOLIA, go to [EBSCOhost](#): keyword "sharecropping." Select the following:

- "Community Insights: Phillips Countians Discuss the Elaine Riots," [Arkansas Review](#)
- "Profile: Hispanic Farmers Getting Trapped in Business Deals Similar to the Days of Sharecropping," Morning Edition, [National Public Radio \(NPR\)](#)
- [Adjusting the Apocrypha: The Thirties and Faulkner's Radical Critique of the Old Plantation](#), by Charles A. Peek
- [The Origins of Black Sharecropping](#), by Wesley Allen Riddle

1. Have the students read "Community Insights," [The Origins of Black Sharecropping](#), and [Adjusting the Apocrypha](#), keeping the following questions in mind:

- What was sharecropping?
- Why did many blacks continue to return to the areas of their Southern origins?
- Define: wage labor, labor gangs
- Which was preferred by the landowner: wage labor or sharecropping? Why?
- Which was preferred by the laborer: wage labor or sharecropping? Why?
- What control did sharecroppers have over their own lives and economic resources?
- What circumstances or events led to an increase in whites becoming sharecroppers?
- From the tones of their writing, compare and contrast the attitudes of William Faulkner and William Alexander Percy toward the sharecrop system.

After students have read the selections, lead a class discussion in which the above questions are answered and debated.

2. Have students read "Profile: Hispanic Farmers Getting Trapped in Business Deals Similar to the Days of Sharecropping." Using a Venn Diagram, have students compare and contrast current sharecropping with the system that evolved after the Civil War:

- In what aspects has the system changed in regards to race?
- In what aspects has the system changed in regards to geography?
- In what ways has the system remained the same?

Explore activity

1. Visit a person who was a sharecropper, or who grew up on a tenant farm, and invite him to talk with you about what growing up on a tenant farm was like. Have your teacher help you draw up a list of questions for the interview, and ask permission to tape your conversation so that it may be shared with the class.

2. Have students write and present a soliloquy on one of the following:

- A sharecropper, after his account has been settled and he realizes that he has fallen deeper into debt

- A sharecropper's daughter, as she dreams about her future
- A Hispanic sharecropper's son, as he helps his father harvest their crop, and ponders what his future will be like

3. After reading and discussing the selected items, have students construct and conduct "interviews" of classmates who assume the roles of white, black, and Hispanic sharecroppers.