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Paternalism in Agricultural Labor Contracts in the U.S. South: Implications for the Growth of the Welfare State

By LEE J. ALSTON AND JOSEPH P. FERRIE*

We examine paternalism as an implicit contract in which workers trade faithful service for nonmarket goods. Paternalism reduced monitoring and turnover costs in cotton cultivation in the U.S. South until the mechanization of the cotton harvest in the 1950's. Until then, the effectiveness of paternalism was threatened by government programs that could have substituted for paternalism; but large Southern landowners had the political power to prevent the appearance of such programs in the South. With mechanization, the economic incentive to provide paternalism disappeared, and Southern congressmen allowed welfare programs to expand in ways consistent with their interests. (JEL N42, N52, O33, P16)

Economists generally treat institutions as exogenous and examine their impact on the economy. But institutions, which define the “rules of the game” in an economy and the payoffs to pursuing different strategies, can change over time. Understanding the forces that prompt changes in institutions and how the payoffs to strategies change in response to institutional changes is important for un-

derstanding the developmental pattern of societies.¹ For example, explicit contracts may be the most efficient means of structuring transactions under one institutional regime, but less formal agreements with entirely different enforcement mechanisms may be most efficient under another. Different ways of structuring transactions may lead to different growth paths.

In this paper we examine the rise and decline of paternalism in Southern labor relations. By “paternalism” we mean an implicit contract whereby workers exchange dependable labor services for a variety of goods and services. “Dependable” implies a long-term commitment to an employer that transcends the textbook notion of spot-market exchange. In return, workers receive such goods and services as credit, housing, medical and old-age assistance, and most importantly, protection from acts of violence. Paternalism, we argue, emerged along with a particular institution—the system of social control that emerged in the late 19th

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¹In the 1980's, scholars devoted increasing attention to the importance of institutions. Douglass C. North (1981, 1990) and Oliver Williamson (1985) sparked this revival. Their predecessors included Ronald H. Coase (1937, 1960) and Joseph Schumpeter (1950).

century and characterized the American South during the first half of the 20th century. The South's system of social control, we have suggested elsewhere (Alston and Ferrie, 1989 pp. 133–4), comprised

a variety of laws and practices, the effect of which was the dependence of blacks and poor whites on the white rural elite. Examples include low levels of expenditure on education, old-age security, and welfare, the exclusion of blacks and many poor whites from the electoral process, a pronounced lack of civil rights, and the tolerance of violence.

A large body of circumstantial evidence is consistent with the view that technological forces caused paternalism to be adopted as a means to secure labor in the climate fostered by the institution of social control, while technological changes and the erosion of social control in the 1950's and 1960's combined to lead the South to abandon paternalism.² This change, we argue, in turn allowed for the expansion of the American welfare state in the 1960's. Central to our argument is the role played by the political power of Southern congressmen and their principals, the Southern rural elite.

I. Some Historical Background on Paternalism in the South³

The system of paternalism in place in the 1930's was not a simple extension of the antebellum master–slave relationship into the postbellum Southern economy. It was instead the product of the dislocation occasioned by the Civil War and the actions of

²By examining both the rise and the fall of paternalism in Southern agricultural contracts, we are less open to the criticisms that plague functionalist explanations: much work in the applied analysis of contracting suffers from explaining the existence of a contract solely by an appeal to its functions.

³We are grateful to Robert Higgs for providing much of the primary source material on which this section is based.

planters trying to secure an adequate labor supply in these circumstances.

The initial response of planters to the difficulties of keeping laborers in the immediate postwar period was to offer former slaves a variety of nonmonetary inducements to remain at least through the harvest of the present crop. The rise of virulent racism in the post-Reconstruction period presented planters with an opportunity to offer to their workers protection from racist violence and the capricious judgments of a racist legal system, in exchange for continued dependable service in the planters' fields. Their role as protector of the physical safety of their workers evolved in the 20th century into a more general role as protector of workers in commercial and legal transactions and in many dealings with the world outside the plantation. That role ensured the opposition of planters to federal interference in Southern labor and race relations in the first half of the 20th century.

After the Civil War, Southern agriculture faced enormous difficulties. The abolition of slavery, the coercive system which had organized labor relations before the war, was clearly the greatest problem. Though the South suffered tremendous physical destruction, including the loss of livestock, fences, and barns, and though many of its fields had been neglected throughout the war, what most concerned planters was the lack of a system to assure an adequate supply of labor (N. B. Cloud, 1867; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1867). Fields could be rehabilitated and new workstock and animals purchased after a season or two of hardship—farmers had often been forced to do so in the past after natural disasters—but replacing slavery with a new system was a more daunting task. Some former masters, those “who had dealt honorably and humanely towards their slaves,” were able to retain many of their former fieldhands (U.S. Congress, 1866 p. 125).⁴ Most planters,

⁴Most of those hiring large numbers of hands after the war were the same planters who had controlled the largest plantations before the war. For evidence on the lack of turnover in the “plantation elite” as a result of

though, particularly those who were not so highly regarded by their former slaves, had great difficulty in satisfying their demand for labor (see Freedmen's Bureau, 1866 p. 95).⁵

Into this chaos stepped the Freedmen's Bureau as an intermediary, at least for a short time. The Bureau, an agency of the federal government, initially enjoyed the trust of the freedmen. As a repository of their trust, it could "disabuse them of any extravagant notions and expectations... [and] administer them good advice and be voluntarily obeyed" (Carl Schurz, 1866 p. 40). The Bureau had the power to compel the observance of labor contracts and for this earned the early respect of planters. The Freedmen's Bureau had done nothing to change the fact that the abolition of slavery had raised the cost of labor.⁶ During the period of excess demand for labor which existed until the adjustment to this new, higher equilibrium wage, some planters raided their competitors for labor and bitterly complained as their own work forces were raided.

By 1869, the Bureau had ceased to function as a go-between and guarantor. Both planters and freedmen seem to have seen less need for the offices of the agency after

only three years experience with it, perhaps because of a desire for greater flexibility than the Bureau-approved contracts allowed (Ralph Shlomowitz, 1978 p. 35). The Bureau had attempted to stabilize the agricultural labor market in the first confused years after emancipation.⁷ The demise of the Freedmen's Bureau left planters and freedmen to contract among themselves directly. Writing in 1872, one observer noted conditions much like those in the immediate aftermath of the war: workers were being hired away by competing employers, leaving planters with insufficient labor to bring in the crop, and employers were failing to fulfill the terms of their contracts with their workers (Charles Stearns, 1872 pp. 107–8). Securing adequate labor was described as "a matter of grave uncertainty and deep anxiety" for every planter (Southerner, 1871 p. 329).

In these circumstances, some planters chose a new course, turning to honesty, fair-dealing, and a host of nonwage aspects of their relationship with their workers as additional margins for competition (see Phillip A. Bruce, 1889 pp. 180–1; H. C. Taylor, 1925 p. 329).⁸ The amenities which

the war, see Jay R. Mandle (1973), Jonathan M. Wiener (1978), and Michael Wayne (1983). After Reconstruction, it was the planter elite rather than the petty merchants who retained the greatest political and economic power in the rural South. For example, crop lien laws gave planters rather than merchants first claim on the output of sharecroppers indebted to both (Harold D. Woodman, 1979 p. 328). Woodman has also shown that laws relegated sharecroppers to the legal status of wage workers, enhancing the power of landlords (Woodman, 1979 pp. 324–6).

⁵See Leon F. Litwack (1979) and Gerald D. Jaynes (1986 pp. 207–23) for a discussion of the disorder in agricultural labor markets immediately following the Civil War.

⁶Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch (1978) argue that emancipation decreased the labor supply of former slaves, who in effect bought greater leisure. Robert W. Fogel (1989) suggests that planters increased their demand for labor after emancipation, because more workers were needed to do the work that had previously been done under the onerous gang system. In either case, the result would have been an increase in the price of labor.

⁷The Bureau's legacy was its intermediation—the first by any federal agency and the last for a long time—in the South's evolving system of labor relations. Though such intervention was attempted again by the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration in the 1930's, the context had changed considerably by then, and the results were altogether different (see Alston and Ferrie, 1985b).

⁸Jaynes (1986 pp. 78–9, 104–6, 121) describes the introduction of such arrangements between planters and their wage workers in the immediate antebellum period, even before the demise of the Freedmen's Bureau. He does not explore the persistence of these relationships into the post-Reconstruction period or into the 20th century as we have elsewhere (Alston and Ferrie, 1989). Jaynes views "market paternalism"—his term for these arrangements—and tenancy and share contracts as substitutes used by planters for reducing monitoring costs. We believe that such paternalistic arrangements were not only complementary to tenancy and share contracts in reducing monitoring costs, but were actually *more* likely to be given to tenants and croppers than to wage workers. A long-term relationship like that between planters and their tenants and croppers made such arrangements more effective as monitoring devices. Such arrangements were also in-

employers offered their workers included improved housing, garden plots, firewood, and plantation schools and churches (J. R. Godwin, 1900 p. 476; U.S. Industrial Commission, 1901 p. 778; Alfred Holt Stone, 1902 p. 250; W. E. B. DuBois, 1906 p. 514; Taylor, 1925 p. 337; C. W. Tebeau, 1936 p. 138; T. J. Woofter, 1938). These perquisites were seldom explicitly stipulated; planters continued to prefer verbal rather than written leases (U.S. Industrial Commission, 1900–1902 pp. 437–8; E. V. Wilcox, 1918 pp. 2–4; Harold Hoffsommer, 1950 p. 389).

By the end of the 19th century, another role, in addition to that of provider of these amenities, had been assumed by large planters: that of protector of their workers. As early as the 1880's, landlords were willing to offer their advice to their workers and to protect them from exploitation at the hands of the local merchants (U.S. Senate, 1885 p. 164). By the turn of the century, the role of protector expanded to include protection from violence.

White hostility toward freed blacks had been evident since the end of the war but had to some extent been kept in check by the Reconstruction governments (Benjamin C. Truman, 1866 p. 10; Schurz, 1866 pp. 47–105; Stearns, 1872 p. 103). The end of Reconstruction saw such hostilities emerge into the open (Tebeau, 1936 p. 139).⁹ For

creasingly important as wage workers in gangs were replaced by geographically dispersed tenants and croppers. The assignment of tenants and croppers to specific plots created an incentive for planters to reduce turnover and prevent the departure of tenants and croppers in possession of location-specific farming knowledge. The literature on paternalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (cited in Alston and Ferrie [1989]) is the basis for our view that these arrangements continued with the transition away from an exclusive reliance on wage labor, and that these arrangements were in fact of even greater value to planters when they employed tenants and croppers than they had been when only wage workers were employed.

⁹For a more general view of the experience of blacks in the post-emancipation Southern economy, see Robert Higgs (1977).

example, "white-capping," driving blacks from their homes and forcing them off the lands owned by the largest landowners and merchants, was reported in several Mississippi counties in the early 1890's (Charles H. Otken, 1894 pp. 86–8; William F. Holmes, 1969 pp. 166–9). With disfranchisement, the entire machinery of the state became an instrument with which to coerce blacks. For example, the South's judicial system displayed a clear bias, meting out sentences to blacks in the South far more severe than those given for corresponding crimes in the North (Woofter, 1920 p. 143).

The disfranchisement of blacks and poor whites that helped create the South's regime of social control could not have occurred without the cooperation of the white rural elite. Indeed, J. Morgan Kousser (1974 p. 238) argues convincingly that the new political structure in the South was shaped by Black Belt socioeconomic elites:

The new political structure was not the product of accident or other impersonal forces, nor of decisions demanded by the masses, nor even the white masses. The system which insured the absolute control of predominantly black counties by upper-class whites, the elimination in most areas of parties as a means of organized competition between politicians, and, in general, the nonrepresentation of lower class interests in political decision-making was shaped by those who stood to benefit most from it—Democrats, usually from the Black Belt and always socioeconomically privileged.

This is the sense in which we view the institution of social control in the South as "endogenous": it was the product of decisions made by the white rural elite.¹⁰ The

¹⁰Gavin Wright (1986 p. 122) argues that disfranchisement "was a by-product of the agrarian movement," a movement which he describes as a result of weak world cotton demand in the 1890's. Kousser (1974 pp. 6–8) provides a similar explanation for the disfranchisement of both blacks and poor whites, though one that does not rely on the impact of world

rise of the institution of social control led in turn to the increased use of protection in paternalistic contracts. Planters increasingly offered protection to their faithful black workers as the social and legal environment became more hostile toward blacks—a hostility which, over several decades, the white rural elite was instrumental in creating.

Thus, to limit the departure of their own workers from the South, many planters came to serve as the protectors for their workers as well as the providers of many of their material needs. Planters had posted bond for their workers and accompanied them to court before, but with the pronounced change in the political, legal, and social climate at the turn of the century, such practices took on added importance.¹¹

In the following years, the scope of planters' paternalism expanded, until planters had come to act as intermediaries between their workers and much of the outside world. Planters exercised control over the credit extended to their workers, but they were also willing to "stand good" for their workers' debts with local merchants.¹² Planters reported significant out-

lays for the payment of doctors' bills, the establishment and maintenance of schools and churches, and various unspecified forms of entertainment (Woofter, 1936 table 14-A); and planters commonly paid legal fines incurred by workers and served as parole sponsors for their workers (Woofter, 1936 table 14-B).

The result was a system of thorough paternalism in which planters looked after most aspects of their workers' lives, and workers responded by offering their loyalty to their patron. Planters had to some degree solved the labor-supply problem they had faced at emancipation: provision of paternalism allowed them to tie black workers to the land in a world of free contracting, though not as firmly as the law had bound black workers under slavery, because coercion was no longer as viable, and exit was an option. They were able to reduce the cost of monitoring labor by providing workers with valuable services which they would forfeit if they were caught shirking. They offered both black and white workers a wide array of nonwage benefits, as well as assistance in commercial and legal transactions, and in addition provided their black workers with protection from the power of the state and the racial hostility of many whites.

The ability of planters to keep labor both cheap and dependable required not only that they continue to supply the full range of paternalistic benefits to their workers, but also that the external threat posed by a racist state continue. Furthermore, planters needed to ensure that no other party stepped forward to act as the workers' protector in commercial and legal dealings. In short, planters had an interest in maintaining a racist state and preventing federal interference in race and labor issues.

II. The Economics of Paternalism in Agriculture¹³

Woofter (1936 pp. 31–2) described some of the social and economic aspects of pater-

cotton demand. Blacks were excluded from the electoral process by the Black Belt elites because "The end of Negro voting would solidify their control over their tenants and free them from having to deal with elected or appointed black officials, a type of contact almost all Southern whites found distasteful" (p. 7). The elites excluded poor, up-country whites to prevent conflict over issues such as taxes and, more generally, to achieve political hegemony in state politics.

¹¹See examples from the 1870's in the Phillip H. Pitts papers. C. Vann Woodward (1951 p. 218) also notes the use of paternalism as a protective device for blacks. "Another considerable Negro element saw nothing better than to take refuge under the paternalism of the old masters, who offered some protection against the extreme race doctrines of the upland whites. . . . [The publication] *The Nation* . . . rejoiced that 'Thousands of them' had discovered 'that their interests are bound up with the interest of their old masters.'"

¹²Half of all Southern landlords surveyed in 1938 said they would routinely "stand good" for their tenants' debts, while only 3 percent of Northern landlords said they would do so. The study's author described this finding as "evidence of the paternalistic side of the landlord-tenant relationship in the South, an aspect which is insignificant in the North..." (Edgar A. Schuler, 1938 p. 172).

¹³For an elaboration of the issues in this section, see Alston and Ferrie (1989). Though we discuss paternalism in the U.S. South, it is not unique to America.

nalism in the American South in the 1930's:

[T]he landlord is also often called upon for services of a social nature, for the large plantation is a social as well as an economic organism and the matrix of a number of plantations often constitutes or dominates the larger unit of civil government in the locality.

Among efficient landlords, tenant health is one of the major considerations and doctors' bills are paid by the landlord and charged against the tenant crop. Those tenants who have a landlord who will "stand for" their bills are far more likely to get physicians' services than are the general run of tenants.

Landlords are also expected to "stand for" their tenants in minor difficulties such as may grow out of gambling games, altercations and traffic infractions. This function is, of course, not exercised indiscriminately. A good worker will, in all probability, be "got-ten off" and a drone left in the hands of the law. ...[T]he landlord assumes responsibility for such tenants who are arrested for minor offenses, especially during the busy season.

In the U.S. South, perhaps the most important aspect of paternalism was the protection planters offered from violence perpetrated by the larger community. Protection was important for all agricultural workers, but particularly for black workers, because they lacked civil rights, and society condoned violence. Paternalism was more than shelter from physical threats; it could also involve interceding in commercial transactions, obtaining medical care, providing influence or money to bail a son out of

jail, or settling familial disputes.¹⁴ White workers were not for the most part beneficiaries of paternalistic arrangements, both because they had a lower demand for protection from violence and because they were not as likely as blacks to be employed on plantations. Plantation owners were more likely than other employers to supply paternalism, both because of their political power and because of economies of scale in the provision of some aspects of paternalism, such as housing or medical care.

Paternalism is most prevalent in pre-mechanized and non-science-based agriculture. Before the advent of scientific advances that stabilized yields, workers possessed farm-specific knowledge, which gave landlords an incentive to curb the migration of tenants with such knowledge. Before mechanization, monitoring labor effort was costly because workers were spread over a considerable physical distance, and linkage of reward with effort was difficult because there could be considerable variation in output the cause of which was difficult to determine. Examples abound: Did the mule go lame naturally or did the workers mistreat the mule? Was the shortfall in output due to too little rain or too little work effort? Paternalism reduced these monitoring costs by reducing workers' tendency to shirk, by raising the costs of shirking and by increasing the length of the time horizon over which workers made decisions.¹⁵

Because paternalism is a long-term contract of sorts, it may induce in workers a sense that they, as well as the landlord, gain from long-run improvements to soil fertility. This is especially true for fixed-rent tenants who are residual claimants of any given year's output. Paternalism may also reduce the taste for shirking if it is viewed by workers not as a market transaction, but rather as benevolence from the patron. Under such conditions workers respond with

Similar arrangements have existed in nearly all countries at one time or another. Paternalism or patron-client relationships have existed in South America, England, and Asia in the 20th century (see T. W. Hutchinson, 1957; S. L. Barraclough and A. L. Domike, 1966; Allen W. Johnson, 1971; Howard Newby, 1977; Yujiro Hayami and Masao Kikuchi, 1982). Such relationships also existed in feudal Europe (see Marc Bloch, 1961, 1975).

¹⁴These examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

¹⁵The mechanisms through which paternalism could reduce monitoring costs in these ways are discussed in greater detail in Alston and Ferrie (1989).

goodwill gestures (more work intensity) of their own.¹⁶

More importantly, paternalism may act as an efficiency wage. Because some of the services acquired under paternalism are not available in markets, workers, who value such services, are not indifferent between the present paternalistic work relationship and the casual labor market.¹⁷ The lack of indifference encourages greater work intensity because workers are afraid of losing their paternalistic benefits if caught shirking. For example, in discussing the variety of services provided by a patron, Hayami and Kikuchi (1982 p. 218) remark that "...the discovery of shirking in one operation...would endanger the whole set of transactions."

Not all employers in pre-mechanized agriculture offered paternalistic employment contracts. The cost of providing paternalism varied inversely with political influence, which in turn was a function of farm size. This is why paternalism in the U.S. South was associated with plantations. For much of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, individual Southern plantation owners had the local political influence to ensure the delivery of protection and, by the turn of the century, the collective political influence at the state level to create a discriminatory socio-legal environment from which they then offered dispensation (see Kousser, 1974). Furthermore, from the end of Reconstruction through the 1960's, plantation owners collectively had the political power at the national level to prevent, or at least limit, federal interference in Southern race and labor relations (see V. O. Key, 1949; William C. Havard, 1972; V. O. Key, 1949; George E. Mowry, 1973; Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, 1993).

III. The Politics of Paternalism

Once the plantation elite had a firm grip on politics within the South, the Black Belt areas no longer had to stuff ballot boxes or engage in intimidation. The various means of disfranchisement ensured political hegemony at the state level for the upper socioeconomic class. Despite their power at the local and state levels, in order to maintain paternalism, the Southern rural elite had to prevent interference from both the federal government and the private sector. Government substitutes for paternalism would have raised the costs of monitoring labor, and out-migration of labor or in-migration of capital would have raised reservation wages. Landowners did not operate directly in politics but, rather, had congressmen as their political agents. After the Civil War and especially after the disfranchisement of blacks and poor whites, Southern Democratic congressmen viewed the rural elite as their constituents. At mid-century, Key (1949 p. 668) described the outcome of this arrangement: "the black belts manage to control almost the entire Southern Congressional delegation in opposition to proposals of external interference."

Given that the Southern delegation did not represent a majority in either house of Congress, how were they able to satisfy the desires of their rural elite constituents? Though never an absolute majority, Southern Democrats represented a substantial and influential percentage of the Democratic party. At present there is a lively debate over whether parties have had much influence over decision-making in Congress in the 20th century.¹⁸ Given that the party leadership is in charge of appointments to committees, it is difficult to deny that party leaders can ultimately influence decision-making. However, because short-run authority over legislation is ceded to committees, the composition of committees, when

¹⁶A similar model is described in George A. Akerlof (1982).

¹⁷Of course, instead of paternalistic goods and services, landlords could pay a higher wage than a worker's opportunity wage. Our argument is that paternalism is cheaper than using cash.

¹⁸For a synopsis of the issues in the debate, see Cox and McCubbins, 1993.

their members differ in preferences from the party median, can affect the outcome of legislation. This is particularly the case in the House when the Rules, Ways and Means, and Appropriations Committees, the so-called “control” committees, include members with preferences far removed from those of the median member. Nevertheless, whether one believes that power is in the hands of parties and exercised through committees or that committees themselves are the repository of power, the proximate source of power is the committees. For this reason we will focus our attention on committee composition.¹⁹

Decision-making in Congress is not democratic. Although every member has one vote, Congress has ceded considerable authority to committees.²⁰ Committees decide what legislation comes up for a vote, and when. In the House, when (and sometimes if) legislation reaches the floor is determined by the Rules Committee. Within their policy jurisdictions, committees have agenda control. Legislation originates in and is shaped by committees with jurisdiction over certain policy areas. For example, only the House and Senate Committees on Agriculture have the authority to submit agricultural legislation to the floor. Out of the infinite number of bills that could pass through Congress, committees can choose the bills that best suit the interests of committee members while still commanding a majority of votes in Congress. If the committee is not interested in an issue, even

though the majority of Congress is, it can simply fail to report a bill to the floor.²¹

Even after legislation passes in the House or Senate, committees still exercise disproportionate power. Differences in proposed legislation between the House and Senate are settled in conference between representatives of each chamber who are members of the relevant committees from which the proposed legislation emanated. In addition, after the legislation is law, the committees are the watchdogs over its implementation.

As in Congress as a whole, decision-making within committees is not democratic. Steven S. Smith (1989 p. 13) argues that

... widely recognized norms of apprenticeship and committee deference served to limit effective participation to a few senior committee members. Moreover, the distribution of resources and parliamentary prerogatives advantaged senior, majority-party, committee chairmen in both chambers.

Chairmen of committees set committee meeting times, made appointments to subcommittees, hired the professional staff, led the floor debate on the legislation reported out of their committees, and served on conference committees to reconcile differences between the two houses of Congress.

The importance of committees is not static, but needs to be viewed in a historical context. Seniority in committees was so important in the period from the end of World War II to the early 1970's because party

¹⁹The amount of authority allowed committees may depend on the cohesiveness of the majority party. When parties are factionalized, as the Democratic party was from the New Deal to approximately 1970, coalitions need to be formed and enforced in order for a party to be effective in policy-making. By allowing committees to exercise agenda control, the Democratic party held together the alliance based on Southern support for the party platform in return for noninterference in Southern labor and race relations.

²⁰Ceding control over legislation to committees enables legislators to increase the probability that legislation will not be reversed by future Congresses (see Kenneth A. Shepsle and Barry R. Weingast, 1984; Weingast and William Marshall, 1988).

²¹In the postwar period, the committee structure determined the course of legislation as long as it was a time of “business as usual.” If an issue received widespread national attention, the norms of reciprocity that gave committees some of their agenda control no longer functioned. For example, the attention given to the civil-rights movement in the media propelled civil rights to be examined by Congress as a whole—more as we naively think democracies should function—but civil-rights legislation, like the decision to go to war, is a marked exception to the general rule we have described. For most issues in the postwar period, an understanding of the makeup of committees is crucial for achieving an understanding of legislative outcomes.

cohesion was weak. During this period, committees and their senior members dominated the legislative process as a result of regional factionalism in the Democratic party (D. Roderick Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991; Cox and McCubbins, 1993). Leadership was split, giving more autonomy to senior committee members; but senior committee members still had to satisfy a faction within the Democratic party—Southern conservatives or Northern liberals. It was the growth of the Northern liberal faction of the Democratic party that led to the committee reforms in the early 1970's that diluted the power of committee chairmen. Clearly, the reforms were aimed at senior Southern conservative chairs.

Though the handwriting was on the wall in the early 1960's, except for the removal of the veto power of the Rules Committee for one congress (1963–1964), no important changes occurred in committee structure. However, this need not imply that the behavior of Southern congressmen was not influenced. Foreseeing that structural change was in the works and being guided by Northern liberals, Southerners may have tempered their conservative behavior in an effort to forestall change in the institutional structure of Congress. Naturally, Southerners would have given in on the issues that affected them the least, though it may have been in the interest of any individual congressman not to do so.²² We maintain that, given the ability of Southern agriculture to mechanize at relatively low cost, to shift into less labor-intensive crops prompted in part by government agricultural programs, and to stabilize yields through scientific advances such as weed control and fertilization, opposition to federal welfare was no longer as important to the Southern elite.

Understanding the importance of seniority in the institutional workings of Congress makes apparent why the South could succeed in blocking federal interference: Southern members had far greater seniority

than other members. Relative Southern seniority manifested itself in dominance of committees. For example, in 1933, Southerners chaired 12 of the 17 major House committees and nine of the 14 major Senate committees (Mowry, 1973 pp. 45–6).

Moreover, Southern power in Congress was not latent. Southern legislators in the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's took steps in Congress to prevent the provision of government substitutes for paternalism and to prevent the migration of labor out of the South, either of which would have reduced the value of planter-supplied paternalism. In earlier work we documented the success of Southern legislators in: 1) defeating or altering the coverage of farm workers under the initial Social Security Act; 2) limiting the appropriations of the Farm Security Administration once its agenda turned toward reforming the South; and 3) originating and maintaining a program for the importation of Mexican farm labor (Alston and Ferrie, 1985a,b, 1993). Nevertheless, paternalism disappeared in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Was this the result of diminished economic incentives occasioned by the rapid mechanization of Southern agriculture? Or did Southern politicians lose the political power to prevent outside interference in labor relations? Or both?

IV. Mechanization and the Disappearance of Paternalism²³

Mechanization and the accompanying science-based technology reduced the economic incentive to provide paternalism. The

²²We are grateful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this point.

²³In this section, and throughout the paper, we focus on the impact that mechanization and its accompanying technology had on paternalism because we maintain that mechanization was the most important causal factor. However, mechanization was not the only factor leading to a decline in paternalism. Government agricultural programs and the declining profitability of cotton relative to other crops led to a shift out of cotton and into other crops and livestock. See Frank Maier (1969) and Charles S. Aiken and Merle Prunty (1972) on the impact of government programs and Gilbert C. Fite (1984 Ch. 9) on the relative profitability of cotton.

advances in science that accompanied mechanization increased and stabilized yields, making the farm-specific knowledge of tenants less valuable. Because labor turnover was no longer as costly, the benefits of supplying paternalism were reduced. Mechanization also directly reduced the costs of labor and generating labor effect. With millions of farm workers displaced, the threat of unemployment was sufficient to generate work intensity. Furthermore, mechanization directly reduced the costs of monitoring labor by standardizing the production process and reducing the variation in the marginal productivity of labor. Paternalism became an outdated contractual device.²⁴

²⁴One might think that the mechanization of Southern agriculture that displaced labor prompted changes in the interests of politicians because of changed political constituencies. Then, one could ignore the economic interests of the rural South in explaining the lack of Southern resistance to Great Society welfare programs and look only at the interests of the new urban constituents. Such thinking is erroneous. The displaced workers in the South—many of them black—for the most part did not vote and as such did not form a new constituency, at least not until the Voting Rights Act took effect, and this did not occur until *after* the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act (which we discuss below)—the heart of the modern welfare state. The most influential constituents, the wealthy rural elite, did not disappear. Wright (1986 p. 268), discussing the South's receptivity to Civil Rights legislation in the 1960's, emphasized the importance of the changed attitudes of this elite: he suggests that, though the desire of business interests to market the region to outsiders was important in transforming attitudes toward race, "...it is even more important to recognize the basic contribution of the voices that were *not* heard on the other side, the planters and other protectors of the old isolated low-wage Southern labor market" (italics in original). In examining social-welfare legislation, we believe—as does Wright in the case of civil-rights legislation—that changes in the attitudes of the existing constituency, the white rural elite, were more decisive than the birth of new constituencies. Furthermore, relative seniority in Congress insulated Southern congressmen somewhat from the changes, if any, in constituent interests. Southern congressmen who stayed in office after mechanization were on committees that could serve the interests of the rural South (like the Agriculture Committee) and, as such, most likely continued to cater to the interests of the rural South. Switching committees to serve the interests of a

To test this hypothesis, we would ideally like a time series on paternalism that we could correlate with mechanization. None exists. Instead, we will take a different tack and rely on several pieces of circumstantial evidence.²⁵ The first pieces of evidence are the association between mechanization and tenancy and the association between tenancy and paternalism. If mechanization reduced tenancy because of a decline in monitoring and turnover costs, it is likely that mechanization indirectly prompted a decline in paternalism. The second sort of evidence is a proxy for the extent of social control: perceptions by blacks of race relations. One of the hallmarks of the South's system of social control was a certain form of race relations. Blacks were expected to show deference to whites in general under the system of social control, but in particular to employers who provided paternalistic benefits. If mechanization prompted changes in race relations, these changes would have signaled the erosion of the system of social control. Because paternalism

new constituency did not make political sense. Evidence in support of our view that political constituencies did not dramatically change immediately with the onset of mechanization comes from examining the Congressional elections of the 86th through 90th Congresses and the revealed preferences of Southerners for committee assignments. Southern congressmen were not turned out of office wholesale with the onset of mechanization. In the 86th through 90th Congresses, the South elected 32 new Democratic representatives, a rate of turnover lower than that outside the South during the same period. Nor did the new representatives seemingly cater to a new constituency. Of the newly elected Southern Democratic representatives, none whose predecessors were on committees most concerned with social welfare and agriculture requested a different committee assignment from his predecessor. At the very least, even if politicians no longer gave as much weight to the preferences of the rural South, it is nevertheless important to consider how mechanization affected the economic incentives of landlords to provide paternalism as a central part of the remaining agricultural contracts. We are grateful to Kenneth Shepsle for providing data on requests for committee assignments by incoming congressmen.

²⁵For a methodological discussion of the role of circumstantial evidence in economic history, see Fogel (1982).

was linked to the system of social control, changes in paternalism would have taken place as a result. The third sort of evidence is the use of Southern political power. If Southern Congressmen retained their stranglehold over committees and yet the welfare state expanded, this implies that Southerners retained their power to defeat welfare measures but resisted them less. Moreover, if paternalism was still important to the South, the welfare programs of the 1960's that Southerners did not block had a paradoxical bias: they encouraged rural out-migration.

A. *Plowing Up Paternalism*

The causal connection between mechanization and the decline in tenancy in the South has been established by a number of scholars. As the adoption of the cotton-picker climbed—42 percent of upland cotton was harvested mechanically in 1960, 82 percent in 1965, and nearly 100 percent in 1969—mechanization caused a continuous decline in tenancy (see James H. Street, 1957; Richard H. Day, 1967; Maier, 1969; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1974; Aiken, 1978; Fite, 1984; Pete Daniel, 1985; Wright, 1986; Jack Temple Kirby, 1987; Warren Whatley, 1987).²⁶ Tenancy began to fall before complete mechanization. Scholars such as Street (1957) and Day (1967) contend that partial mechanization (i.e., the

introduction of the tractor) caused both a decline in the number of tenants and a decline in the ratio of tenants to wage workers. Plowing with a tractor resulted in less labor demand throughout the season, as significant amounts of labor were now needed only for weeding and harvesting.

As a result, Day (1967 p. 439) argues, the “maintenance of sharecroppers the year round became uneconomic. Instead, a combination of resident wage labor and labor hired from nearby villages was favored.” The logical difficulty with this view is that it sees sharecropping as an inflexible arrangement rather than a contractual form in which several margins can be adjusted. For example, just as the share could be adjusted, so too could in-kind benefits such as housing or medical care. Nevertheless, the observation that tenancy fell with partial mechanization is correct. We contend that the rationale for the decline in tenancy with partial mechanization is the same as the rationale in the case of complete mechanization: monitoring costs fall with standardized techniques and with the increased unemployment or underemployment wrought by a decline in the demand for labor.²⁷

Street (1957 pp. 218–27) argues that partial mechanization prompted a variety of changes in contractual arrangements. 1) During the war, when male labor was particularly scarce, females would receive a small sharecrop plot for hoeing and picking, and males, when home from jobs in war industries, would be hired on a part-time wage-labor basis. 2) Some landlords continued to use sharecroppers but charged croppers for tractor operations. 3) The landlord's share increased in recognition of his increased inputs. 4) Finally, the labor force was divided into two parts: enough share-

²⁶Tenancy also fell for reasons other than mechanization. The most notable cause was the decline in cotton acreage prompted by government agricultural policy ostensibly aimed at soil conservation but actually proposed to raise farm income (see Aiken and Prunty, 1972; Alston, 1981; Fite, 1984). A notable omission from most historical accounts of mechanization is the role played by the importation of Mexican agricultural workers, popularly known as the Bracero Program. The Bracero Program relieved some of the peak labor demand at harvest, encouraging the adoption of the tractor and eroding paternalism through the same mechanism discussed below. The Bracero Program also appears to have delayed the adoption of the cotton-picker in Texas and Arkansas (see Wayne A. Grove, 1993).

²⁷Claude O. Brannen (1924) observed the same effect in reverse in the 1920's: planters increased the use of tenant contracts in the face of labor scarcity.

croppers for weed control and the remainder wage workers.²⁸

For the South as a whole, tenancy peaked in 1930 and fell thereafter. Tenants numbered close to 1.8 million in 1930, fell to under one million by 1950, and then plummeted to 360,000 by 1959. In the next decade, the number fell in half again. The most precipitous drop in tenancy came during the 1950's, the period when scholars contend that out-migration from the agricultural South became dominated by push rather than pull factors (see U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975 p. 465; Wright, 1986 p. 245).²⁹ Wage labor also declined over the entire period, but not by as much (N. L. LeRay et al., 1960; Aiken and Prunty, 1972; Alston, 1985). Hence there was a relative shift out of tenant contracts and into wage labor.

The decline in tenancy suggests that paternalism fell as well and fell most notably in the 1950's during the period of rapid

mechanization.³⁰ The decline in the number of tenants and in the ratio of tenants to wage workers prompted a reduction in the provision of a variety of in-kind goods and services to workers, most notably food and housing, because of economies of scale (Alston and Ferrie, 1986). Previously, if plantation owners provided their workers with food and shelter, they had more contact with them, became more familiar with them, and could thereby provide paternalism at a lower cost. This is because contact and knowledge allowed them to identify "good" workers more easily and provide them with greater paternalism, reinforcing in the minds of workers the causal link between performance and the receipt of paternalism. When fewer in-kind goods were provided, the reduced contact between employers and workers raised the cost of providing paternalism.³¹

²⁸Street argues, as have others, that sharecrop contracts secure labor better than wage contracts. The argument is that sharecroppers stay through the harvest for their share, while wage workers are paid by the day, week, or month. This ignores the fact that some wage workers are contracted for the year. Furthermore, there seems to be no logical reason precluding the withholding of some wages until after harvest—say as a bonus like that some workers receive in ski resorts if they stay for the season. After all, as Woodman (1979) has noted, sharecroppers are legally wage workers paid with a share of the crop. The reason a sharecrop contract holds workers better is because sharecroppers earn more on average than wage workers. Therefore, given that landlords advance subsistence to both wage workers and croppers and withhold the rest until the end of the season, sharecroppers would forfeit more by leaving before the end of the season (Alston, 1981).

²⁹The fact that pull factors dominated migration in the 1940's is not evidence that paternalism was a failure in securing labor. We need to know the counterfactual: how much migration would have occurred in the absence of paternalism. We do know that planters responded to the tight labor market of the 1940's by individually offering more paternalistic benefits and by collectively fostering state and local government improvements in schools and other social services. The plantation elite were instrumental in encouraging state governments to provide better schools as a means of discouraging out-migration (see Robert A. Margo, 1991 Ch. 3).

³⁰Though both the absolute number of tenants and their number relative to the size of the agricultural labor force peaked in the 1930 Census, there is considerable anecdotal evidence that paternalism was still used in the 1930's and the war years. Paternalism did not begin to decline immediately with the decline in tenancy for several reasons: 1) the unemployment that led to the substitution of wage workers for tenants was not expected to be permanent, and paternalism represented a longer-term contract than tenancy; 2) the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) which led to a reduction in labor demand and thereby a reduction in tenancy was initially an emergency measure whose future life was uncertain, as demonstrated by the Supreme Court's ruling it unconstitutional—we doubt that planters in the face of such uncertainty would have immediately abandoned paternalism as part of labor relations; and 3) the cost of using paternalism was in part subsidized through the funds of the Resettlement Administration, which the local elites controlled.

³¹We are advancing a supply-side story for the decline in paternalism, but there was no doubt a decline in the demand for paternalism caused by rising income and education levels, which would have diminished the value of planter intercession in many commercial transactions and in legal and social difficulties. However, unless one advocates a threshold model for the impact of education and income on paternalism, the steady climb in these factors would have had only a modest impact on the decline in paternalism because education and income had been rising over the course of the 20th century with little discernible impact on paternalism. An alternative demand explanation for the decline in paternalism is World War II. After seeing how the

At the same time, the onset of mechanization prompting the rapid decline in tenancy in the 1950's ushered in a period of relative labor surplus and with it an increased likelihood of unemployment (Day, 1967 pp. 427–49). As long as workers were not indifferent between unemployment and working, then higher unemployment rates enhanced the monitoring effectiveness of any given wage (see Samuel Bowles, 1985; H. Lorne Carmichael, 1989, 1990). Higher unemployment, by reducing monitoring costs, substituted for tenancy and paternalism, prompting employers to negotiate wage contracts with their remaining laborers. Alston (1985) found a negative relationship between unemployment rates and the ratio of the number of tenants to the dollar value of wage expenditures in a pooled time-series cross-section regression for data from ten Southern cotton-growing states for the years 1930–1960. If the expenditures on wage contracts went up relative to the number of tenants, this suggests that paternalism fell, because wage workers were seldom the beneficiaries of paternalism—paternalism was not necessary, as wage workers were closely monitored by human supervisors, were already monitored by the nature of the technology, or were reluctant to shirk because of the threat of unemployment.

Monitoring costs also fell because mechanization reduced variation in the marginal productivity of labor. Machines by their very nature standardize work output and limit the scope for shirking. For example, plowing or cultivating with a tractor provides less scope for shirking than plowing with a mule

or cultivating with a hoe. With the tractor technology, employers could evaluate labor effort after a given task better than they could with the mule technology. The ability to monitor labor effort *ex post* reduced supervision costs and thereby part of the rationale for share contracts and paternalism. This created an additional incentive to negotiate wage contracts with the remaining laborers. Using the ratio of tractors to horses plus mules as a proxy for mechanization and supervision costs, Alston (1985) found that mechanization was negatively correlated over time and across space with the relative use of tenancy contracts in the ten major cotton-producing states in the South.³² The fact that paternalism and tenancy went hand in hand and that both were driven by supervision costs implies that if mechanization prompted a shift into wage contracts, then it also reduced the use of paternalism.

So far we have discussed the impact of mechanization on the supply of paternalism by white landowners. Mechanization also affected the demand for paternalism by primarily black farm workers in two ways. Paternalism was an implicit contract between workers and employers: in return for “good and faithful” labor, employers offered protection and other services. The timing of the exchange was important. “Good and faithful” labor came first, and then the landlord delivered. This relationship was maintained as long as workers expected planters to uphold their side of the bargain. If, during the 1950's, workers foresaw the incentive of planters to renege as mechanization proceeded, the incentive for them to toil in the present diminished as the demand for labor declined. To stimulate work effort, payment had to be made more coincident with labor effort. Paternalism became less effective.

rest of the world worked, former tenants were reluctant to come back to a system of paternalism which they found demeaning. We suspect that World War II did change tastes for some in a way that made paternalistic arrangements less appealing, but this could not be the whole story because many tenants never had any war experience. The majority of Southern tenants did not leave the farm for work in war-related industries or military service in part due to the efforts of Southerners in limiting out-migration through emigration laws and draft deferments. In addition, returning veterans from World War I had not ushered in a period of diminished paternalistic relations in Southern agriculture.

³²Monitoring costs may have fallen for another reason as well. Unlike mules, tractors or cotton-pickers were seldom owned by workers. When landlords owned the capital equipment, they had an incentive to monitor its use. If they were present for this reason, the marginal costs of monitoring labor fell and so too did the incentive for tenancy and paternalism (see Alston and Higgs, 1982).

Mechanization also affected paternalism less directly. To be effective, paternalism required a lack of either well-defined and enforced civil rights or government-supplied social services. In such a world, it made sense for blacks (and for that matter poor whites) to obtain a white protector. With the advent of Great Society programs, poor Southerners would have had a substitute for planter paternalism. Mechanization increased the likelihood of Great Society programs in two ways: one via the supply of legislation (which we discuss in greater detail below) and the other via the demand for legislation. By causing out-migration to Northern urban areas, mechanization increased the size of the Northern black constituency.³³ Northern Democrats seized the opportunity to win the augmented urban black and poor white vote by satisfying their demand for Great Society programs (see Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, 1971). With a new federal safety net in place, black and white workers in the South could do without paternalistic relationships, which may have hastened the demise of paternalism.

B. *Tenancy, Deference, and the Provision of Paternalism*

For the 1930's, Charles Johnson (1941) found that the best indicator of social conditions in the South—education and race relations among others—was cotton cultivation. Our analysis suggests the reason. Under paternalism, in addition to providing “good and faithful” labor, agricultural tenants showed deference to their landlords, while the system of social control required that black tenants show deference to whites at large.³⁴ Employers may have insisted on

deference because of its impact on production, even though many tenants detested it: deference may have reinforced the hierarchical relationship between landlords and tenants and increased the effectiveness of authority and supervision.³⁵ Tenancy facilitated the maintenance of deference and of racial etiquette in general.

Tenants received most of their income in-kind. Most notable was the purchasing power advanced at plantation stores or designated stores in the county or town. Black tenants and croppers frequently did not have discretion over where they shopped. To merchants, they were a guaranteed clientele. This enabled merchants to treat blacks differentially from whites without cost. For example, merchants did not permit blacks to try on clothing and would even stop waiting on a black customer to wait on white customers who subsequently entered the store (Powdermaker, 1978 p. 50).

For black agricultural workers, the decline in tenancy brought with it a rise in cash income relative to kind, both because of a reduction in economies of scale in supplying in-kind goods and because wage workers were generally paid in cash and not given advances. Displaced tenants, if they found employment, got jobs that paid cash wages. In addition, income levels were rising in general, further increasing discre-

p. 90) described the deferential behavior of Sam, a black tenant:

By inclining his head, Sam shows the white man that he acknowledges him as superior. He tips his hat to white men and women. He does not look a white woman straight in the eye. Sam treats all whites, from the “sorriest” poor white to the wealthiest “high type” white from the plantation, with the same deference. He waits until a white person is disengaged before approaching for conversation. . . . He says “sir” or “ma’am” at all times, punctuating his conversation frequently with these titles of courtesy.

³⁵Stefano Fenoltea (1975) describes a similar functioning of authority in medieval England. For documentation of tenants’ dislike of displaying deference, see Allison Davis et al. (1969), Arthur Raper (1974), Theodore Rosengarten (1974), Hortense Powdermaker (1978), and Neil McMillen (1989).

³³See Richard P. Young et al. (1992) for a discussion of the impact of Northern black constituents on the voting behavior of senators on civil-rights bills in the 20th century.

³⁴Deference appears to have been (or still is) part of paternalism in a variety of countries around the globe (see Alston and Ferrie, 1989). Morton Rubin (1951

tionary cash income. Now, if treated disrespectfully by a merchant, blacks could take their business elsewhere. Merchants responded by yielding concessions to blacks not only because of economic pressure from blacks who stayed within the South, but also because the out-migration accompanying mechanization was causing a scramble for economic survival.

Receiving better treatment in commercial transactions gave blacks increased self-respect that was continually reinforced. As Raper (1974 p. 177) noted, as early as the 1930's:

[T]he dependent family began to acquire training in personal and family responsibility and in discriminating buying. The family seemed to take on a sense of self-direction: when furnished through a commissary, the head of the house and other members went several times a week to get this or that, each time acknowledging their dependence and usually stressing it in order to get what was wanted. When a cash allowance was given a tenant, he reported to the landlord at the first of the month to get what was his by agreement. With this money he went forth to buy where he thought he was getting the best values for his money, and where he was treated with the most consideration.

As a result, race etiquette and deference to whites at large, which had been enforced in part through tenancy and the absence of cash, were being threatened as tenancy declined.

Better treatment of blacks in commercial transactions prompted demands by blacks for better treatment in society. Payment of cash and fewer personal dealings with employers divorced work and social life. Blacks were not independent economically of whites, but the frequency with which they were required to demonstrate dependence through deferential behavior declined as tenancy declined. If this was true, blacks would have perceived race relations as better where tenancy was lower. And they did.

As part of a study of Southern politics in 1961, Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro (1966) collected data on the perception of race relations by blacks in communities across the South. Alston (1986) used these data to test for the influence of tenancy on race relations. In an analysis controlling for other influences (median black income, degree of ruralness, the ratio of black population to total population, education, and exposure to television), Alston found results consistent with the hypothesis that tenancy was correlated with traditional Southern race etiquette: a high level of tenancy was the only variable that was consistently and strongly associated with perceptions of poor race relations. This suggests that, as tenancy rates fell, the institution of social control was weakened. Because paternalism was linked to the system of social control, the use of paternalism would have declined as well. Even before the movement for civil rights at the federal level, then, technological forces were working to undermine the South's traditional system of race relations—what we have called its system of "social control"—and the paternalistic relations that it fostered.

C. Political Ability to Resist the "Great Society"

Inspector Gregory: "Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

Holmes: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

Inspector Gregory: "The dog did nothing in the night-time."

Holmes: "That was the curious incident."

[Arthur Conan Doyle, 1930 p. 320]

The point to which we wish to draw attention is the curious behavior of Southern congressmen in the 1960's. They no longer blocked welfare legislation as they had formerly. Two explanations are possible. Either Southerners lost political power or they no longer had as much incentive to thwart the expansion of the welfare state. We argue that Southern politicians did not lose

TABLE 1—SENIORITY OF SOUTHERN DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSMEN, 1947–1970

Committee	Years chaired by Southern Democrat			Average number of first five Democratic seats occupied by Southern Democrat		
	1947–1960	1961–1964	1965–1970	1947–1960	1961–1964	1965–1970
A. House Committees:						
Rules	6	4	6	3.0	3.0	1.7
Appropriations	0	0	6	2.3	2.0	3.3
Ways and Means	10	4	6	3.4	2.0	2.7
Agriculture	10	4	6	4.7	5.0	5.0
Education/Labor	8	0	4	2.0	2.0	1.0
Judiciary	0	0	0	1.3	1.5	1.0
B. Senate Committees:						
Rules	0	2	6	1.0	1.0	1.3
Appropriations	4	0	2	2.7	3.5	4.0
Finance	10	4	6	3.5	3.5	3.3
Agriculture	10	4	6	4.0	5.0	5.0
Labor	6	4	6	1.4	2.0	1.7
Judiciary	4	4	6	2.5	4.7	3.2

Notes: The Democrats were in a majority in the House and Senate over the periods 1949–1952 and 1955–1970. We employed the *Congressional Quarterly* definition of the South: the former Confederate states, plus Kentucky and Oklahoma.

Source: *Congressional Directory*.

committee power in the 1960's, which suggests that paternalism did not die from an inability to sustain it, but rather from a declining economic incentive to employ it.

Political power in Congress from the 1920's through the 1960's was exercised through committees. Christopher J. Deering and Smith (1984) argue that the period from 1947 to the mid-1960's marked the zenith in power of committee chairmen. Before the reforms of committees in the early 1970's, chairmen could withhold legislation from the floor singlehandedly (Smith, 1989 pp. 8–9). Knowing the power of the committee chairmen, other committee members shaped legislation to meet the approval of chairmen. Similarly, in the House, committee chairmen catered to the chairman of the Rules Committee in order to get legislation to the floor (Bruce J. Dierenfield, 1987 p. 231).

Because of the dominance of the Democratic party in the South, Southern congressmen were more senior on average than congressmen in other regions. Consequently, they disproportionately chaired and

occupied the senior seats on committees in the postwar period, the era of strong committee chairs. In Table 1, we present evidence on the dominance of Southern Democratic congressmen on committees in the House and Senate from 1947 to 1970. The committees examined were chosen because of either their importance in overseeing legislation in general or their jurisdiction over agriculture, welfare, labor, or civil rights. We consider three eras, all in the period of strong committee chairmanship: from 1947 through the election of President John Kennedy in 1960; the New Frontier years and the first spate of welfare legislation from 1961 to 1964; and the years 1965–1970, which saw the arrival of more Great Society programs under President Lyndon Johnson and their continuation under President Richard Nixon, by which time cotton cultivation in the South was almost fully mechanized.

In the House, in the first period, a Southerner chaired the Ways and Means and Agriculture Committees every year Democrats enjoyed a majority. In addition, South-

erners disproportionately occupied the other senior ranks. Southerners averaged 3.4 of the top five Democratic seats on the Ways and Means Committee and 4.7 of the corresponding seats on the Agriculture Committee. Their dominance did not significantly change on these committees in the second and third periods: most importantly they chaired the committees from 1961 to 1970, while their senior representation increased slightly on the Agriculture Committee and fell on the Ways and Means Committee.³⁶ On the Education and Labor Committee and the Rules Committee, Southern Democrats controlled the chairmanship from 1955 through the remainder of the first period. They also occupied more than their share of the senior ranks on the Rules Committee and two of the five most senior positions on the Education and Labor Committee. From 1961 to 1964, Southerners continued to dominate the Rules Committee as they had since Congressman Smith (VA) assumed the chairmanship in 1955. After 1953, Congressman Colmer (MS) was the second-ranking Democrat on the Rules Committee, followed Smith to the chairmanship in 1967, and held it through our third period. In the Education and Labor Committee, though their senior representation stayed constant in the early 1960's Southerners lost the chairmanship in 1961 but regained it again in 1967 when Congressman Perkins (KY) took over as chair.

Appropriations and Judiciary were the only committees in the first period on which Southerners were not well represented. Southerners lacked influence on the Appropriations Committee until 1965, when Congressman Mahon (TX) ascended to the chairmanship, Southern Democrats occupied more than three of the top five seats,

and Congressman Jones (NC) was the second-ranking Republican from 1965 through the remainder of the decade. On the Judiciary Committee, Southern Democratic representation was weak throughout all three periods and roughly constant. However, from 1959 through 1966, Southern Republican Congressmen Poff (VA) and Cramer (FL) held two of the top five minority seats.

In the Senate, as in the House, Southerners had disproportionate power in committees. In the first period, Southerners held sway over the Agriculture and Finance Committees, chairing them every year that the Democrats held a majority. A Southerner chaired the Labor Committee after 1954 and the Judiciary Committee beginning in 1957. In the first period, Southerners were weakly represented as chairmen only on Rules and Appropriations. However, despite not having the chairmanship of the Appropriations Committee, Southerners were well represented in the senior ranks, averaging almost three of the first five senior Democratic positions. In the 1960's Southern senators reigned virtually supreme over the committee hierarchy: they chaired the Agriculture, Labor, Finance, and Judiciary Committees in every year; they chaired the Rules Committee from 1963 to 1970; and although Senator Russell (GA) chaired the Appropriations Committee only in 1969 and 1970, he was the second-ranking Democratic member of the committee after 1953, and because he had been on the committee since 1933, he had considerable influence.

Overall, there is no evidence that Southerners lost their control over committees in Congress in the 1960's. Indeed, as judged by the number of chairmanships, by 1965 Southern agenda control had never been greater. Given the essentially static power position of Southerners in the House and their increased power in the Senate in the 1960's it is extremely unlikely that the welfare programs of the 1960's could have emerged from Congress without the countenance of Southern congressmen. Not only did Southerners have the agenda control which committee power and their importance within the Democratic Party pro-

³⁶Though the number of Southern congressmen in the top five Democratic seats on the Ways and Means Committee fell in the early 1960's, representation by the South was still considerable. In the period from 1961 to 1964 Southern Democrats held an average of 5.2 of the top ten seats. Furthermore, in the same period, Representative Baker (R-TN) was either the second- or third-ranking Republican on the committee.

duced, but as we will see below, both Kennedy and Johnson needed the Southern vote in order to pass welfare legislation (John C. Donovan, 1967 p. 20).³⁷

D. *The South's Role in Shaping the War on Poverty*

The Great Society "War on Poverty" was in practice a war aimed at urban ghettos. Piven and Cloward (1971), as well as other scholars, argue that the reason for the urban bias was an effort by the administration to capture the Northern black urban vote, which if successful, would have enabled the Democrats to avoid a close call like the 1960 election. We do not disagree with this assessment of the demand for legislation, but considering that Southerners held agenda control and the necessary marginal votes needed for passage of Great Society welfare programs, a look is warranted at why Southerners supplied programs aimed at alleviating poverty in urban ghettos.

If paternalism was still valuable to the South, Southern legislators would not have allowed welfare programs aimed at alleviating poverty in Northern urban areas, be-

³⁷Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. described the dependence of Kennedy on the South:

He (Kennedy) could never escape the political arithmetic. The Democrats lost twenty seats (in the 1960 election)... All from the North, nearly all liberal Democrats... Many times in the next two years Kennedy desperately needed these twenty votes. Without them he was more than ever dependent on the South...."

[quoted in Donovan, 1967 p. 20]

Donovan notes that Johnson faced the same situation as Kennedy. Some scholars have suggested that the Great Society would never have come into being without the application of the particular political skills of Johnson. We do not dispute this view, but rather suggest that perhaps the presence of Johnson was a necessary though not sufficient condition for such legislation to have passed. In the presence of Southern opposition, even Franklin Roosevelt, a president as politically astute and as successful in pushing other aspects of his legislative agenda as any, was unable to pass a Social Security Act which encroached on the South's paternalistic labor relations.

cause this would have encouraged out-migration, which in turn would have raised labor costs. Instead of remaining valuable, however, paternalism became burdensome with the advance of mechanization, because plantation owners may have felt a moral obligation to uphold their side of an implicit contract. Even if plantation owners felt no guilt over not caring for displaced workers, as long as the local community felt an obligation to provide some, albeit low, level of welfare assistance to displaced workers, the burden would have been felt most by the local elite in increased taxes. A way to avoid the obligations of paternalism or taxes was to encourage out-migration.³⁸

Perhaps more importantly, civil rights were coming to the South whether white Southerners wanted them or not—and many white Southerners vehemently opposed them. By the 1960's, however, the threat of civil rights to the white South was no longer its impact on labor relations. Civil rights were actually beneficial to the business community and were seen by many businessmen as such (Wright, 1986 p. 268; Bruce J. Schulman, 1991 pp. 209–10). Rather, civil rights were a direct assault on white supremacy, a cornerstone of the institution of social control in the South. Given that federal welfare was no longer seen as a threat to labor relations and that civil rights were on the horizon, the white Southern rural elite chose to encourage black out-migration to limit the impact of civil rights.

Evidence from the birth and life of the Economic Opportunity Act is consistent with our view that mechanization destroyed the economic motive for supplying paternalism

³⁸As Jill Quadagno (1988 p. 146), another student of the South's role in the evolution of the Social Security system, has noted,

Step by step, Southern congressmen released welfare for the aged poor from local government, passing control to the federal government as the burden of maintaining aged blacks surpassed their economic value and as the threat that direct cash payments to an older relative would subsidize an entire family became less critical to a changing plantation economy.

and that Southerners worked to limit the anticipated impact of civil rights in the South by promoting out-migration and assuring that control of new federal programs remained in their hands. The Economic Opportunity Bill was conceived in the White House as the centerpiece of the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty. The bill consisted of six parts, only the first three of which were controversial. Title I dealt with youth unemployment and was essentially a redraft of a bill that had previously stalled in the House Rules Committee, which was chaired by Representative Howard Smith (D-VA). The most radical part of the bill was Title II, which established urban and rural community-action programs. What made the programs radical was that they gave no role to state and local governments. The goal was to involve the poor directly and make an end-run around urban bureaucracies. Because poverty had previously been mostly a local issue, the biggest threat was to mayors of large cities. Title III, rural economic opportunity programs, included grants aimed at land reform, principally Southern land reform, the goal of which was to purchase tracts of land for resale to tenants and sharecroppers.

The important distinction made in Title I was that a new "emphasis [was] placed on large 'urban' training and remedial-education centers rather than on conservation camps" (James Sundquist, 1969 p. 26). In Title II, Southerners ensured that governors were given the right to veto the placement of Job Corps Centers and Community Action Programs in their states.³⁹ Southerners were also concerned that community-action grants would be disruptive to the Southern way of life. Their concern was that the grants might go to groups not under the control of the local power structure. To limit this threat, Southerners "modified the legislation to require grantee organizations either to be public agencies or, if private

³⁹ Donovan (1967 pp. 36–7) argues that the veto was part of the price paid by the administration for Southern support.

nonprofit agencies, to have an established record of concern with the problems of the poor, or else a link to such an established record by being created by an established agency" (Adam Yarmolinsky, 1969 p. 46). It was not that congressmen outside the South favored the administration's attempt at bypassing local control, but rather that Southern congressmen were in a better position to do something about it.⁴⁰ Grants for land reform in Title III were struck from the final bill as well.

The House passed the Economic Opportunity Bill by a roll-call vote of 226–185. Sixty Southern Democrats voted for the legislation. In the Senate, the Southern vote was not quite as crucial, with half of the Southern delegation voting in favor of the bill. It is important to remember that the votes were taken after the bills were altered in committee. The Economic Opportunity Bill that emerged was aimed at fighting poverty in Northern ghettos by allowing local communities to bypass local urban bureaucracies. From the South's viewpoint, the bill as amended and passed posed little threat to the Southern way of life. In fact, it seems to have been part of an unsuccessful last-ditch effort to maintain the Southern way of life by encouraging out-migration of blacks. Before mechanization and a shift toward less labor-intensive crops, out-migration would have threatened the Southern way of life because it would have increased labor costs. After mechanization and the demise of paternalism, encouraging out-migration was seen as a way of limiting the anticipated impact of civil rights.⁴¹ The

⁴⁰ Southerners continued to have disproportionate influence over the actions of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). At the behest of Senator John Stennis (D-MS), the Senate Appropriations Committee began an investigation in the autumn of 1965 into a Head Start program grant in Mississippi. As a result of the investigation, the Senate tightened its control over the OEO in November 1965. In 1966, the House Education and Labor Committee placed additional constraints on the OEO.

⁴¹ In fact, black workers displaced by mechanization "were frequently given a bus ticket, a token amount of

final shape of the Economic Opportunity Act was one more piece of evidence demonstrating the death of paternalism in the South.⁴²

Additional evidence on the extent to which Southern votes changed as the economic interests of the rural Southern elite changed comes from an examination of the Bracero and Food Stamp programs. The Bracero Program (Public Law 78) provided for the importation of Mexican farm laborers. In 1953, Southerners supported the program by a margin of 104–3 in the House; by 1963, the margin had fallen to 82–23 (Alston and Ferrie, 1993). The program's effect was to enhance the supply of labor, particularly in the newer cotton-producing states of the Southwest, reducing the incentive of cotton workers from the Deep South to migrate west. The result for Southern planters was lower wages and lower labor costs. Though the Bracero program was not a welfare program, the voting behavior of Southerners on the program is consistent with the hypothesis that mechanization made labor issues less important.⁴³

cash, and the address of the welfare office in New York." Former New York mayor and congressman John Lindsay recalled that "... his Southern colleagues would clap him on the back and say, 'John, we're sending 'em right up to you'" (Adam Smith [pseud.], 1985 p. 64).

⁴²Schulman (1991 pp. 180–1) argues that Southerners were opposed to welfare programs in general. Southerners, however, were not unanimous in their opposition, while they had been almost unanimous in the past: as we noted earlier, 60 Southern Democrats voted for this legislation in the House, while in the Senate, half the Southern delegation voted in favor of the bill. Schulman's evidence on the opposition to welfare is consistent with our hypothesis that Southerners retained sufficient political power to shape welfare programs to encourage rural out-migration and thereby limit the impact of welfare in the rural South.

⁴³The Bracero program was the only federal legislation bearing upon agricultural labor relations in the South that was voted upon repeatedly over the 1950's and 1960's and for which roll-call votes were recorded. The overall level of Southern cohesiveness in voting on all legislation over this period, though, is also consistent with a clear change in Southern interests. Havard (1972 pp. 644–5) reports that Southerners in the House attained a 90-percent or higher degree of unity on

The birth of the Food Stamp program is also consistent with our hypothesis that, with access to mechanization and with civil rights on the horizon, Southern congressmen encouraged rural out-migration. John A. Ferejohn (1986) documents the legislative history of the program. He shows that, though the bill was clearly a piece of urban welfare legislation, it was actually sent to the floor by the House Agriculture Committee, a stronghold of the rural Southern congressional delegation. In 1963, when the Agriculture Committee reported the Food Stamp Bill, the committee was chaired by Representative Cooley (D-NC) and the seven senior Democrats on the committee were from the South. Though many Southern congressmen voted against the bill on the floor of the House, the votes of those Southerners who favored it were decisive; they provided the bill's margin of passage and continued to do so throughout the program's early life (Ferejohn, 1986 pp. 230–3).

V. Conclusion

The 1960's represent a watershed in the history of American social-welfare legislation. Sweeping changes in the scope and scale of the U.S. welfare state were legislated over the decade, and an important part of the story of this period was what went on behind the legislation—how changes in economic relationships led to the evaporation of opposition to much of that legislation. We have focused on what we believe was an important such change: the end of paternalistic relations in Southern agriculture.

For the first half of the 20th century, the South represented a formidable obstacle to the expansion of the welfare state. Following the Civil War, in response to the constraints of technology, planters fostered the institution of social control and adopted a paternalistic system of labor relations that

41 percent of all roll calls in the 1933–1945 period; by the 1950's, they did so on only 19 percent of all roll calls, while in the 1960's, they achieved such high cohesion on only 6 percent of all roll-call votes.

reduced labor costs by reducing the cost of monitoring labor effort and discouraging labor turnover. The importance of Southerners within the Democratic party and the committee structure of Congress ensured that senior Southern congressmen could block legislation that threatened that system.

Before mechanization, social control in the South and the rules of the game in Congress shaped not only the paternalistic relationship between Southern plantation landlords and their workers, but also the developmental pattern of the Federal welfare state. The complete mechanization of Southern agriculture reduced the economic incentive of Southern politicians to oppose uniformly federal welfare programs and made possible the expansion of the welfare state in the 1960's.

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