

SLAVERY IN AMERICA

LEGAL SLAVERY was abolished in 1865 by an act of congress which said: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." As far as general public opinion is concerned, the Civil War and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment marked the end of bondage in this country. The truth of the matter, however, is that, with the "deep south" as the worst offender, actual slavery still exists in the United States. In mines, sawmills, turpentine camps and on plantations, white men and Negroes alike work from one year's end to the next without drawing a dollar in cash. They are kept in debt by the viciously abused "company commissary" system and are forcibly restrained from leaving their jobs because of their carefully arranged debts. In many cases, when laborers do manage to leave one place of employment, it is only because they have been "sold" with their debts to some other operator and their condition is in no way improved. Sympathy of law enforcement agents for the owners makes escape practically impossible. Those who try are arrested and returned for whatever punishment their "owners" decree for them.

THE DECKER-WIGGINS CASE

PEONAGE, as construed by the Federal Courts means: "To be held in bondage. That a debt must exist and that the work of the person or persons held must be in discharge of that debt." While such cases are frequently reported, they seldom reach the courts. An exception was the Joseph Shelly Decker case of Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. Decker, a planter, held J. W. Wiggins, colored, and Ethel Davis, his common-law wife, for a debt of \$175. In July, 1937, the two Negroes escaped. Decker followed, chained them in a truck and drove to a neighbor, Joe Hyde, to whom he offered to sell them for the \$175. When Hyde refused, he took them home, chained them to a tree and beat Wiggins. Later, Wiggins agreed to work but ran away again. Decker kept the woman chained to a bed at night and worked her in the fields by day. Wiggins brought Sheriff Hogan of Tallahatchie County to the Decker place. The Davis woman was still chained to the bed and Decker was arrested. The case came to trial in Federal Court, February, 1938. Decker was found guilty by a jury, sentenced to three years in Federal prison and fined \$1,000. In trial, he admitted the offenses but pleaded that they have not worked in discharge of the debt.



JOSEPH SHELLY DECKER, Mississippi planter, who got a three-year prison sentence and a \$1,000 fine passed upon him after being convicted of using chains to obtain and force involuntary labor.



DURING HIS TRIAL, Decker admitted that he kept Ethel Davis in chains like the posed model above. He held her in the hope that her common-law husband would return and be captured.



SHARE-CROPPERS



CHILDREN are born in the poverty of one shack and move to others from year to year as their parents fight the endless, desperate battle against privation.

LIVING CONDITIONS of southern share-croppers are among the worst in the nation. The majority do not own even the tools with which they work, and, as a consequence, have little or no civic standing. Lack of proper food and medical care makes millions of them victims of malnutrition, of pellagra, malaria, hookworm, tuberculosis, syphilis, and other preventable and curable diseases.



THE LANDLORD usually does the tenant's accounting. When his crop is "made" in December the bill at the commissary will leave little in cash.



DOWN THE ROAD to another shack on another tenant farm for another year. All they own in the world is their bundles and there is no cash at all. When they start the new crop they must have credit advances which will more than equal their yield in the end.



SHIFTING THEIR HOMES and the need to work to eat leaves no schooling time for share-cropper children.



ARKANSAS COTTON CHOPPERS struck and picketed for a living wage in 1936. At that time, plantation owners signed an agreement to pay \$1.25 a day, but when the strike was over, a reign of terror began. Strike leaders were arrested and beaten; wages dropped.

CHILD LABOR IN CANNERIES AND MINES

THE OLD EVIL of child labor still exists in many parts of the United States. It exists because working conditions for adults are so desperate that parents cannot make an existing wage without the aid of their children.

In the "tiff" mining counties of Missouri, child labor laws are evaded by legislation which permits children to work with their families. "Tiff" is the common term applied to the chemically inert mineral, barite, which is used in the manufacture of paints, enamels, rubber goods, floor coverings, and paper. "Tiff" is bought on a tonnage basis, the price to the miners averaging \$4.50. In the "tiff" country, the average boy or girl starts digging before the age of ten and school is given up forever. Working ten hours a day with pick and shovel, the children make less than \$3.00 a week.

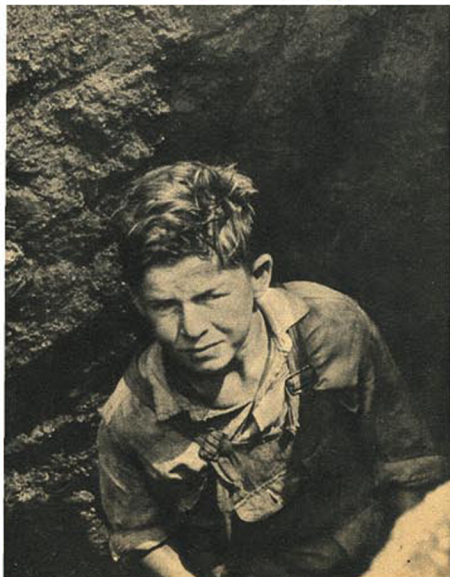
In the Gulf States of Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, children as young as six years old, many so small that they have to stand on boxes to reach the tables, go to work in the shrimp picking sheds. Children are used in two jobs. One is pulling off heads and hulls from the shrimp meat in preparation for canning. The other is "heading," or removing the heads only, before icing the shrimp for raw shipment. The hours of labor begin when the shrimps come in, sometimes as early as one o'clock in the morning. It lasts until the "catch" is finished and then begins again in the evening and continues until the second "catch" is dressed. The average wage for children is thirteen cents an hour. In most instances their meager earnings are collected by their parents.



THIS THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD "tiff" worker in Washington County, Missouri, has made his own living and contributed to the support of others since he was eight.

AN ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD shrimp picker working the pre-dawn shift at Arkansas Pass, Texas.

THIS LITTLE GIRL of six stands on a box so that she can reach the shrimp. Work begins at four a.m.



A TWELVE-YEAR-OLD "tiff" miner who had no chance to go beyond the second grade in school.

THE CHECK-OFF SYSTEM

COAL MINES have long been the battleground in labor's fight for unionization. With the substitution of electric power in countless industries, the economic conditions surrounding coal operations have become steadily worse. Frequently mines have shut down altogether and, taking advantage of the labor surplus, mine operators used this additional weapon to fight union organization. Company unions have been formed, armed guards have kept other organizers out of, and the workers in, the company-owned towns. In many areas miners work on the check-off system, whereby rents for living in company houses, goods bought in company stores, fees for company doctors, as well as union fines, dues, and assessments are deducted from the miner's small pay envelope.



A CORDON of guards was thrown around a company town in Jefferson County, Alabama, to keep organizers and newspapermen from entering.



COAL OPERATORS own the houses in which the workers live. In many areas these are the only homes and the rents are unjustifiably high.

TWICE A MONTH payday rolls around for this Pennsylvania coal miner. The company-kept check-off slip tells him, usually, where all his earnings went.



TWO WEEKS' work have earned \$33.66. But twelve deductions from the company's bookkeeping department have left only \$3.10 for the miner.

