

THIS IS SUNFLOWER COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

Sunflower County lies in the heart of the Mississippi Delta cotton country. The total population of the county in 1960 was 45,750-- 14,730 white, 30,855 black. The voting age population is 60.6% black.

In 1960, 35% of the white families and 90.8% of the black families had yearly incomes under \$3,000. Of the Negroes who were employed in 1960, 47.2% worked as farm laborers and 13.6% worked as domestic servants. Corresponding employment categories for whites were, respectively, 31.7% and 8.2%.

Thirteen percent of the Negroes and 8.5% of the whites 25 years or over had no schooling. Fifty-nine percent of the Negroes and 41% of the whites over 25 years had completed between one and six years of school.

The largest cotton producer in the county is the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. Other large producers in the county include Senator James O. Eastland with something over 2,000 acres, and the Billups Plantation, owned by the same family which operates cut-rate gasoline stations in several states.

There is very little industrial development in the county. The only industry of any size is the bagging plant of the Ludlow Corporation in Indianola. Ludlow's headquarters is in Needham Heights, Massachusetts.

Sunflower County is in the Second Mississippi Congressional District, represented by Congressman Jamie Whitten. Whitten is Chairman of the Agriculture Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

The county is represented in the Mississippi House by J. Fred Jones of Inverness and John H. Hough of Indianola. Hough identifies himself as a member of the White Citizens Council. The county comprises the 12th Mississippi Senatorial District and sends Robert L. Crook of Ruleville to the State Senate.

Sunflower is the home of Senator James O. Eastland. Clarence Albert Pierce is staff assistant to Senator Eastland, and also a state representative from Carroll County. In 1964 Pierce introduced into the Mississippi House a bill providing for mandatory sterilization of unwed mothers, which was designed to drive Negroes out of Mississippi.

The county has a long record of lawless violence against Negroes. In 1904 the current Senator Eastland's father led a lynch mob which burned Mr. and Mrs. Claude Holbert at the stake near the Eastland home in Doddsville. Mr. Holbert was accused of killing the elder Eastland's brother, the Senator's namesake, in a fight over a woman. Mrs. Holbert was not accused of anything. Both were Negroes.

There was another particularly brutal lynching at Parchman in 1929. A Negro prisoner had escaped from the penitentiary and in doing so had killed a guard. Here is a description of the lynching from the Memphis Press-Scimitar:

"The Negro was chained to a log and burned slowly. Now and then someone would step forward and throw a little gasoline on the blaze. The whole burning took a little more than an hour. The Negro was alive and screaming 40 minutes of that time. The fire ate its way slowly up the Negro's body. His right leg arched when the flames licked his calf and he begged members of the mob to straighten the leg, saying it hurt him. One fellow came forward with gasoline, threw it on the leg, saying, 'This will straighten it, you black -----.' The fire ate off his legs, and the Negro, a wonderful physical specimen, raised to a sitting position and spit in the faces of several of the mob, crying, 'You white -----s.' At this point a man with a knife came forward and cut off the Negro's ears, proudly displaying them later in the evening at a filling station at Drew, Mississippi.... The moment the Negro stopped screaming and died, the mob rushed forward for souvenirs. Links of the chains with which the Negro had been bound, pieces of his charred bones, one of his feet, parts of his fingers were grabbed."