

Sunnyside. They brought in Italian and Sicilian workers; paid their passage over on the boat. The three men nearly got into serious trouble with the federal government because a Catholic priest who was ministering to those people saw what was being done to them. It amounted to peonage; they had to work off their passage and it never worked out so that they got clear. The three men were very nearly prosecuted for peonage, but they managed to get from under it by the fact that Theodore Roosevelt had met Senator Percy as a young man when he came down to my part of the country on a bear hunt with my other grandfather. This was my mother's father who was in on the plantation; his name was Rosenstock. My other grandfather Foote had had Roosevelt down here on a bear hunt, and they got to talking, "What are we going to do when we're not hunting with President Roosevelt? How are we going to talk with him? We'll bore him to death." So my grandfather said, "We'll ask Percy along; he can talk with him." So, as a result of that relationship they were able to get the indictment quashed, or anyhow not prosecuted on condition that they let the people go. And the people did go. They moved up to northwest Arkansas to a place called Tonti Town. They're still up there, a great many of them. They grow grapes to make wine. A lot of them stayed, not on Sunnyside, but stayed around Greenville: the Muffalettos, the Signas, the Siaias, all those people were among those South Italian and especially Sicilian. They were from a little town in Sicily called Cefalu; many of them came from around there. When I was a boy there were many who had come over with that group. Now they are second or third generation from that. But that's another thing about the Delta being a melting pot. When I was a boy in Greenville it was a town of about 18,000, and it

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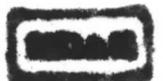
had fifty Chinese grocery stores in it. The Chinese were a sizable part of the population of Greenville. There were Syrians, a lot of them, and, of course, Italians, and the Irish had come down to work on the levees. It was a great melting pot. Not in the hills, you see. Out there there were very few foreigners, or "dutchmen" as they called them, they called all foreigners "dutchmen." But in the Delta it really was. When I was a boy the Chinese were a considerable factor in Greenville, and many of them had kept their pigtails. They wore stiff straw kadys with their pigtails coiled on top of their heads under the kady, and whenever a "Chinaman" cut off his pigtail, that meant he'd given up the idea of going back home. Most of them had had the notion of coming and getting three or four thousand dollars ahead and going back to China and being a rich man. But when one of them cut his pigtail off, that meant he was not going back.

JONES: Who brought the Chinese over?

FOOTE: I think they came over working for the railroads or some kind of labor gangs. I've never been really straight on it. There's another thing that the Department of Archives ought to go into, and I don't know whether this is true or not, but I have heard that there was a great Chinese massacre in Leland around 1906 or some year back in there. It may not be true. As I heard it, there was a case of a Chinese being accused of rape, and that the massacre occurred. Now what "massacre" means I'm not too sure, but there was supposed to have been a whole-sale killing of Chinese in Leland back around the turn of the century or shortly thereafter.

JONES: Have you ever heard of that, Clinton?

FOOTE: I only remember hearing about it as a boy. I never have really looked



into it. There may be no truth to it, or it might have been a slight thing blown up into big proportions. Leland at one time was a mean little town.

JONES: How far is it from Greenville?

FOOTE: Nine miles, depending on if you went by Fish Lake bridge or Highway 82.

JONES: Your fictional town Ithaca, is that Leland?

FOOTE: No, that's Glen Allen. Leland is called Bannard, and Greenville's Bristol.

BAGLEY: Did you spend much time down on Lake Washington?

FOOTE: Not a great deal. I worked for a gravel company down there one summer. Sort of a funny thing happened down there, talking about outlanders. This was in August, and it was a very hot summer. I almost can't believe the heat we had, without any relief from it. It would be a hundred and six, you know. Here we are this summer, it hasn't reached a hundred here in Memphis all summer. But this was a very hot summer, and I worked for a gravel company, you work out in the open under the sun. There was a Northern boy that had come down to work that summer, I've forgotten his name, but he had a theory about dress; that the Arabs knew how to dress, that you ought to wear a burnoose or something. So he rigged him up some kind of burnoose and he was down there checking the gravel at a landing down there, and we went down there about half an hour later and he was lying on the ground, stretched out cold-stone with heat prostration. It was dangerous too, but he had this theory about how you should dress for hot weather.

JONES: What other odd jobs did you have around Greenville when you were coming up?

FOOTE: I worked as a checker in a gin. I worked--this is always in the summertime home from college or summertime from high school. I worked for

U.S. Gypsum Company one time, pulling wallboard out of a humidifier and running it through a micrometer. I made thirty-two and a half cents an hour. When the U.S. Gypsum Company came to Greenville, they were going to pay a minimum wage not of thirty-two and a half cents an hour, but of something like forty cents. Chicago Mill and Lumber was already there, and they asked the Gypsum Company not to do that because it would make their own workers dissatisfied. So U.S. Gypsum, who was willing to pay more, paid less, so that Chicago Mill wouldn't be unhappy and have to raise its wages. A lot of that went on, an awful lot of it. And if anything good had come of it, it would be something else, but nothing good came of it. It didn't turn out a fine product, they didn't raise fine people who grew up to do good things. It was nothing but robbing the worker. It's enough to make a communist out of anybody, until you got to know a few communists. That was a big advantage I had. I felt strong pulls toward the communist party in the early and middle thirties. Nobody else had any answers, and the communists said, "We've got the answer; here's what you can do; help the downtrodden." It sounded good to me, and if there'd been any way to join the party I would have joined it gladly, but there wasn't. Then I went off to Chapel Hill and there were communists all over the campus, two or three card-carrying communists on the faculty and a lots of them on the campus. I got to know them, and then was when I saw that there must be something wrong with communism because of the individual communists I got to know. So I've always thought it was a serious mistake to drive them underground. You should have them out in the open where everybody could see them and get to know them.

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BAGLEY: Well, do you think these workers at the Gypsum Company were aware that they were being cheated?

FOOTE: No, I don't think they knew that story. Besides, they were glad to have a job. Thirty-two and a half cents an hour sounded good to me. And it was new jobs, you see, when there weren't any jobs. Nobody who wasn't alive during the depression can believe what it was like; seeing men come to the door asking for something to eat, intelligent men who had left home because they couldn't bear to be a burden on their families. They were just out roaming around looking for anything they could do, from everywhere.

BAGLEY: How did this affect Greenville?

FOOTE: Greenville weathered the depression rather well, as a matter of fact. Being agricultural, there was always something to eat. I know for a fact that we never turned a single hungry person away from the house at any time. There was always something for anybody who asked for it.

JONES: Do you know of other places that didn't make it through the depression so well?

FOOTE: No, to see really hard times you'd have to go to industrial towns; like the mill towns in North Carolina, where unemployment really hit. What's hard for people to realize now is how little money it took to live on. A man with a business who was making \$200 a month, at this time back in 1933, say; he belonged to the country club, drove a Buick, had everything he ever wanted, kids in college. \$200 a month was a lot of money during the depression. I'm always being shocked by what things cost, a shirt or anything else. It's a terrible shock to me because I learned values in the depression. But of all the items that have gone up most, the two that have gone up most are haircuts--a haircut in the depression was 35¢, it's \$6 now--and the movies were 30¢, and

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now they're \$2.50, \$3, \$3.50. Those things are great shocks. And grocery bills are just unbelievable now, especially to someone who, as I say, learned his values back in the depression. A loaf of bread cost 8¢; now it cost 60 or 70¢, any kind of price. I never mind being robbed financially if I'm warned ahead of time. I enjoy going to New York with my wife and paying \$100 for a great meal. I knew it was going to cost me that before I went there, and I certainly didn't have to go there, so I have no objection to that. What makes me mad is when they catch me unaware, or I feel that a bunch of Arabs are getting my money for gasoline. I don't like it.

JONES: Have you got anything else, Clinton?

BAGLEY: No.

JONES: Before I cut this off I want to say how much I appreciate you talking with me. It's been an honor to meet you.

FOOTE: Thank you, I was glad to do it. I'm glad that you came.

JONES: Thank you for having me in your house.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by John Jones)

(Final copy typed by Nan Vodde)



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