

The River

By Pare Lorentz

A NATIONAL DRAMA IN PICTURES AND SOUND



A factual symphony

In dramatic pictures and in sonorous text, the tragedy of America's Mississippi unfolds in the pages of THE RIVER. Based upon his brilliant motion picture, Pare Lorentz's book is a 'Rich Land, Poor Land' brought to visual life. Here is an education in national geography and economic engineering, strikingly presented.

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CP

CB

~~C. Sullivan~~



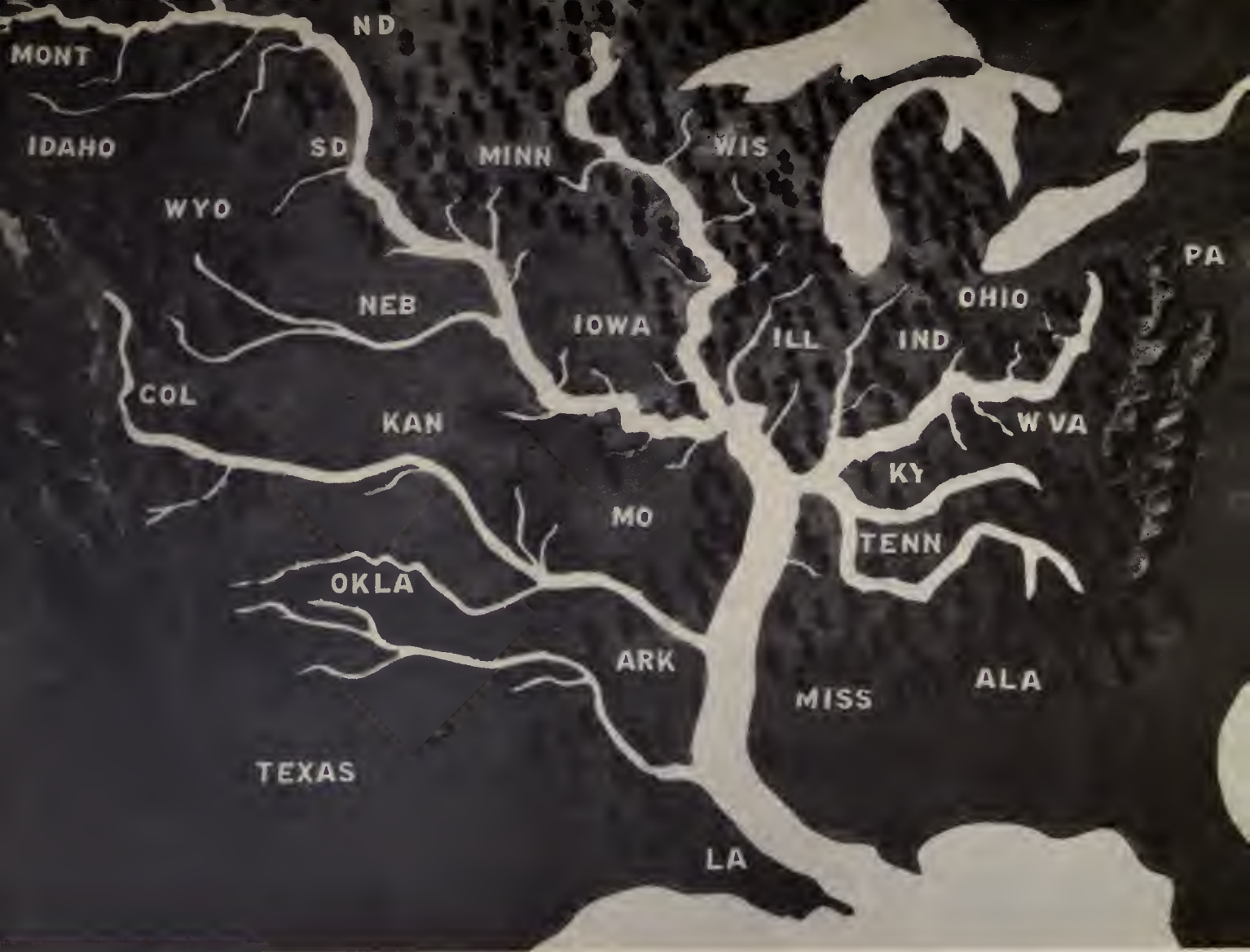
THE RIVER



W E R I V E R

BY PARE LORENTZ

STACKPOLESONS NEW YORK



THE BODY OF THE NATION

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*Credits for photographs: Charles Krutch, Tennessee Valley Authority;
Ficing Galloway, United Artists; American Red Cross*

THE BODY OF THE NATION

But the basin of the Mississippi is the Body of The Nation. All the other parts are but members, important in themselves, yet more important in their relations to this. Exclusive of the Lake basin and of 300,000 square miles in Texas and New Mexico, which in many aspects form a part of it, this basin contains about 1,250,000 square miles. In extent it is the second great valley of the world, being exceeded only by that of the Amazon. The valley of the frozen Obi approaches it in extent; that of the La Plata comes next in space, and probably in habitable capacity, having about eight-ninths of its area; then comes that of the Yenisei, with about seven-ninths; then Lena, Amoor, Hoang-ho, Yang-tse-Kiang, and Nile, five-ninths; the Ganges, less than one-half; the Indus, less than one-third; the Euphrates, one-fifth; the Rhine, one-fifteenth. It exceeds in extent the whole of Europe, exclusive of Russia, Norway, and Sweden. It would contain Austria four times, Germany or Spain five times, France six times, the British Islands or Italy ten times. Conceptions formed from the river-basins of Western Europe are rudely shocked when we consider the extent of the valley of the Mississippi; nor are those formed from the sterile basins of the great rivers of Siberia, the lofty plateaus of Central Asia, or the mighty sweep of the swampy Amazon more adequate. Latitude, elevation, and rainfall all combine to render every part of the Mississippi Valley capable of supporting a dense population. As a dwelling-place for civilized man it is by far the first upon our globe.

Mark Twain's *Life on The Mississippi*.

P R E F A C E

The text in this book has been taken verbatim from a motion picture, "The River," which I produced for the Farm Security Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The photographs either are from the movie itself, or, with a few exceptions, were made by government cameramen working in the same areas in which we made the picture.

The narration for the movie was not written until we had hewed 80,000 feet of film down to 2900 feet. It was intended as a functional text to accompany Mr. Virgil Thomson's score, and to fit the tempo of the sequences in the picture.

I have not changed the words for two reasons: the text now provides a permanent record of the motion picture, and, originally utilitarian writing, I think it explains the pictorial story of the Mississippi River better than it might were it elaborated into a smoother and more conventional form.

I am greatly indebted to scores of hard-working civil servants who furnished me with information during the preparatory stages of "The River"; but the three books which I found essential to any understanding of the old river were Mark Twain's "Life On The Mississippi", still the most accurate book ever written on the subject; the Mississippi Valley Committee's Report, (1934, Department of Interior), the best-written government report I've ever read, and Lyle Saxon's "Father Mississippi."

I am also greatly indebted to Ed Locke; to Roy Stryker, of the Farm Security Administration; and to Charles Krutch, of the Tennessee Valley Authority, whose enthusiastic help in assembling the photographs made the book possible.

I list elsewhere credits for the pictures we used other than those from the motion picture.

PARE LORENTZ



From as far West as Idaho,
Down from the glacier peaks of the Rockies—

From as far East as New York,
Down from the turkey ridges of the Alleghenies
Down from Minnesota, twenty five hundred miles,
The Mississippi River runs to the Gulf.
Carrying every drop of water, that flows down
two-thirds the continent,
Carrying every brook and rill, rivulet and creek,
Carrying all the rivers that run down two thirds
the continent,
The Mississippi runs to the Gulf of Mexico.

Down the Yellowstone, the Milk, the White and
Cheyenne;
The Cannonball, the Musselshell, the James and
the Sioux;
Down the Judith, the Grand, the Osage, and the
Platte,
The Skunk, the Salt, the Black, and Minnesota ;
Down the Rock, the Illinois, and the Kankakee
The Allegheny, the Monongahela, Kanawha, and
Muskingum;
Down the Miami, the Wabash, the Licking and
the Green
The Cumberland, the Kentucky, and the Ten-
nessee;
Down the Ouchita, the Wichita, the Red, and
Yazoo—



Down the Missouri three thousand miles from the
Rockies;
Down the Ohio a thousand miles from the Alle-
ghenies;
Down the Arkansas fifteen hundred miles from
the Great Divide;
Down the Red, a thousand miles from Texas;
Down the great Valley, twenty-five hundred miles
from Minnesota,
Carrying every rivulet and brook, creek and rill,
Carrying all the rivers that run down two-thirds
the continent—
The Mississippi runs to the Gulf.







New Orleans to Baton Rouge,
Baton Rouge to Natchez,
Natchez to Vicksburg,
Vicksburg to Memphis,
Memphis to Cairo—
We built a dyke a thousand miles long.
Men and mules, mules and mud;
Mules and mud a thousand miles up the Missis-
sippi.
A century before we bought the great Western
River, the Spanish and the French built
dykes to keep the Mississippi out of New
Orleans at flood stage.



In forty years we continued the levee the entire
length of the great alluvial Delta,
That mud plain that extends from the Gulf of
Mexico clear to the mouth of the Ohio.
The ancient valley built up for centuries by the
old river spilling her floods across the bottom
of the continent—
A mud delta of forty thousand square miles.
Men and mules, mules and mud—
New Orleans to Baton Rouge,
Natchez to Vicksburg,
Memphis to Cairo—
A thousand miles up the river.

And we made cotton king!







We rolled a million bales down the river for
Liverpool and Leeds . . .



1860: we rolled four million bales down the river;





Rolled them off Alabama,
Rolled them off Mississippi,
Rolled them off Louisiana,
Rolled them down the river!

We fought a war.

We fought a war and kept the west bank
of the river free of slavery forever.

But we left the old South impoverished
and stricken.

Doubly stricken, because, beyond the tra-
gedy of war, already the frenzied
cotton cultivation of a quarter of a
century had taken toll of the land.

We mined the soil for cotton until it would
yield no more, and then moved west.

We fought a war, but there was a double
tragedy—the tragedy of land twice
impoverished.





HEADQUARTERS, ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

April 10, 1865

After four years of arduous service marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources.

I need not tell the survivors of so many hard-fought battles, who have remained steadfast to the last that I have consented to this result from no distrust of them. . .

But feeling that valor and devotion could accomplish nothing that could compensate for the loss that would have attended the continuation of the contest,

I have determined to avoid useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their country-men. . .

With an increasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country,

and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration of myself, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

R. E. LEE, General.





Black spruce and Norway pine,
Douglas fir and Red cedar,
Scarlet oak and Shagbark hickory,
Hemlock and aspen—
There was lumber in the North.





The war impoverished the old South, the railroads
killed the steamboats,
But there was lumber in the North.
Heads up!
Lumber on the upper river.



Heads up!
Lumber enough to cover all Europe.
Down from Minnesota and Wisconsin,
Down to St. Paul ;
Down to St. Louis and St. Joe—
Lumber for the new continent of the West.
Lumber for the new mills.





There was lumber in the North
and coal in the hills.
Iron and coal down the Monon-
gahela.
Iron and coal down the Alle-
gheny.
Iron and coal down the Ohio.
Down to Pittsburgh,
Down to Wheeling,
Iron and coal for the steel mills,
for the railroads driving
West and South, for the new
cities of the Great Valley—





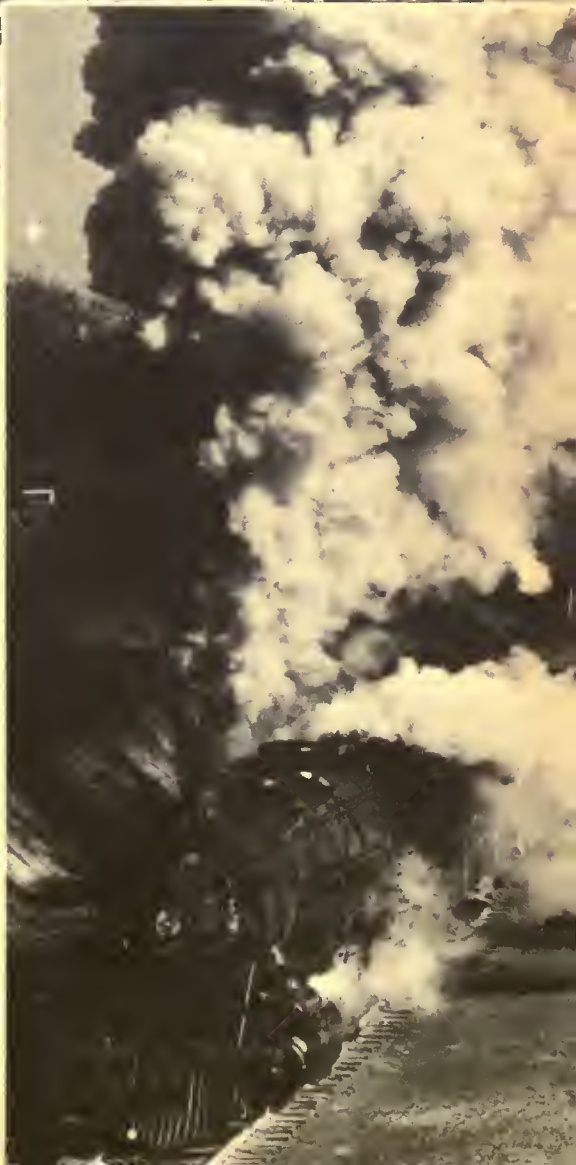
We built new machinery and
cleared new land in the
West.

Ten million bales down to the
Gulf—

Cotton for the spools of England
and France.

Fifteen million bales down to the
Gulf—

Cotton for the spools of Italy and
Germany.





We built a hundred cities and a thousand towns:
St. Paul and Minneapolis,
Davenport and Keokuk,
Moline and Quincy,
Cincinnati and St. Louis,
Omaha and Kansas City . . .
Across to the Rockies and down from Minnesota,
Twenty-five hundred miles to New Orleans,
We built a new continent.





Black spruce and Norway pine,
Douglas fir and Red cedar,
Scarlet oak and Shagbark hickory.
We built a hundred cities and a thousand towns—
But at what a cost!
We cut the top off the Alleghenies and sent it
down the river.
We cut the top off Minnesota and sent it down
the river.
We cut the top off Wisconsin and sent it down the
river.
We left the mountains and the hills slashed and
burned,
And moved on.



The water comes downhill, spring and fall;
Down from the cut-over mountains,
Down from the plowed-off slopes,
Down every brook and rill, rivulet and creek,
Carrying every drop of water that flows down
 two-thirds the continent
1903 and 1907,
1913 and 1922,
1927,
1936,
1937!





Down from Pennsylvania and Ohio,
Kentucky and West Virginia,
Missouri and Illinois,

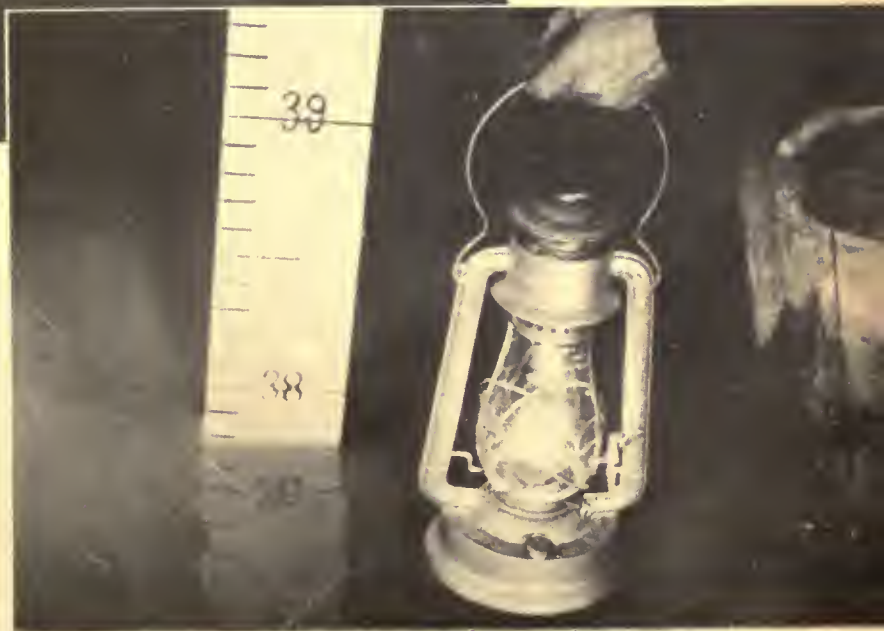
Down from North Carolina and Tennessee—
Down the Judith, the Grand, the Osage, and the
Platte,

The Rock, the Salt, the Black and Minnesota,
Down the Monongahela, the Allegheny, Kana
wha and Muskingum,

The Miami, the Wabash, the Licking and the
Green,

Down the White, the Wolfe, and the Cache,
Down the Kaw and Kaskaskia, the Red and
Yazoo,

Down the Cumberland, Kentucky and the Ten
nessee—



Down to the Mississippi.
New Orleans to Baton Rouge—
Baton Rouge to Natchez—
Natchez to Vicksburg—
Vicksburg to Memphis—
Memphis to Cairo—
A thousand miles down the levee the long vigil
starts.

Thirty-eight feet at
Baton Rouge
River rising.
Helena: river rising.
Memphis: river rising.
Cairo: river rising.
A thousand miles to
go,
A thousand miles of
levee to hold—





Coastguard patrol needed at
Paducah!

Coastguard patrol needed at
Paducah!

200 boats—wanted at Hickman!

200 boats wanted at Hickman!

Levee patrol: men to Blytheville!

Levee patrol: men to Blytheville!

2000 men wanted at Cairo!

2000 men wanted at Cairo!

A hundred thousand men to fight
the old river.





We sent armies down the river to help the engineers fight a battle on a two thousand mile front:

The Army and the Navy,
The Coast Guard and the Marine Corps,
The CCC and the WPA,
The Red Cross and the Health Service.

They fought night and day to hold the old river off the valley.

Food and water needed at Louisville: 500 dead,
5000 ill;

Food and water needed at Cincinnati;

Food and water and shelter and clothing needed
for 750,000 flood victims;



Food and medicine needed at Lawrenceburg;
35,000 homeless in Evansville;
Food and medicine needed in Aurora;
Food and medicine and shelter and clothing for
750,000 down in the valley.





Last time we held the levees,
But the old river claimed her valley.
She backed into Tennessee and Ar-
kansas
And Missouri and Illinois.
She left stock drowned, houses torn
loose,
Farms ruined.

1903 and 1907.
1913 and 1922.
1927.
1936.
1937!



We built a hundred cities and a
thousand towns—
But at what a cost!



Spring and fall the water comes down, and for
years the old river has taken a toll from the
Valley more terrible than ever she does in
flood times.

Year in, year out, the water comes down
From a thousand hillsides, washing the top off
the Valley.

For fifty years we dug for cotton and moved West
when the land gave out.

For fifty years we plowed for corn, and moved on
when the land gave out.

Corn and wheat; wheat and cotton—we planted
and plowed with no thought for the future—

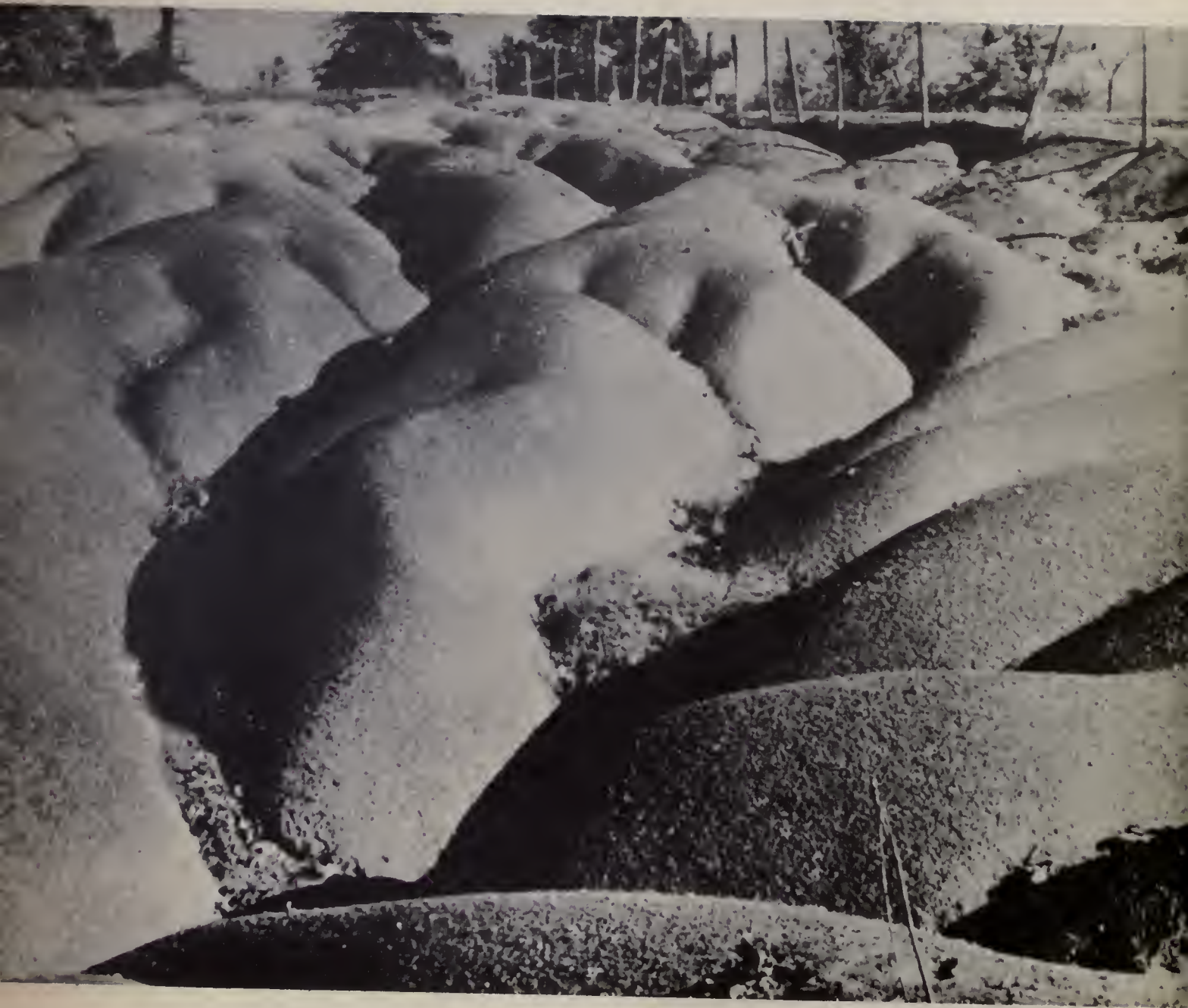
And four hundred million tons of top soil,

Four hundred million tons of our most valuable
natural resource have been washed into the
Gulf of Mexico every year.













And poor land makes poor people.
Poor people make poor land.
For a quarter of a century we have been forcing
more and more farmers into tenancy.
Today forty percent of all the farmers in the great
Valley are tenants.

Ten percent are share croppers,
Down on their knees in the valley,
A share of the crop their only security.
No home, no land of their own,
Aimless, footloose, and impoverished,
Unable to eat even from the land because their
cash crop is their only livelihood.





Credit at the store is their only
reserve.

And a generation growing up
with no new land in the
West—

No new continent to build.

A generation whose people
knew King's Mountain, and
Shiloh;

A generation whose people
knew Fremont and Custer;



But a generation facing a life
of dirt and poverty,
Disease and drudgery;
Growing up without proper
food, medical care, or
schooling,
“Ill-clad, ill-housed, and ill-
fed”—
And in the greatest river valley
in the world.





There is no such thing as an ideal river in Nature, but the Mississippi is out of joint.

*Dust blowing in the West—floods raging in the East—
We have seen these problems growing to horrible extremes.*

*When first we found the great valley it was forty percent forested.
Today, for every hundred acres of forests we found, we have ten left.
Today five percent of the entire valley is ruined forever for agricultural use!
Twenty-five percent of the topsoil has been shoved by the old river into the
Gulf of Mexico.*

*Today two out of five farmers in the valley are tenant farmers—ten percent
of them share croppers, living in a state of squalor unknown to the poorest
peasant in Europe*

*And we are forcing thirty thousand more into tenancy and cropping every
year.*

*Flood control of the Mississippi means control in the great Delta that must
carry all the water brought down from two-thirds the continent*

*And control of the Delta means control of the little rivers, the great arms
running down from the uplands. And the old river can be controlled.*

*We had the power to take the valley apart— we have the power to put it to-
gether again.*



In 1933 we started, down on the Tennessee River, when our Congress created the Tennessee Valley Authority, commissioned to develop navigation, flood control, agriculture, and industry in the valley: a valley that carries more rainfall than any other in the country; the valley through which the Tennessee used to roar down to Paducah in flood times with more water than any other tributary of the Ohio.



First came the dams.

Up on the Clinch, at the head of the river, we built Norris Dam, a great barrier to hold water in flood times and to release water down the river for navigation in low water season.



Next came Wheeler, first in a series of great barriers that will transform the old Tennessee into a link of fresh water pools locked and dammed, regulated and controlled, down six hundred fifty miles to Paducah.



But you cannot plan for water unless you plan for land: for the cut-over mountains—the eroded hills—the gullied fields that pour their waters unchecked down to the river.

The CCC, working with the forest service and agricultural experts, have started to put the worn fields and hillsides back together; black walnut and pine for the worn out fields, and the gullied hillsides; black walnut and pine for new forest preserves, roots for the cut-over and burned-over hillsides; roots to hold the water in the ground.



Soil conservation men have worked out crop systems with the farmers of the Valley—crops to conserve and enrich the topsoil.

Today a million acres of land in the Tennessee Valley are being tilled scientifically.



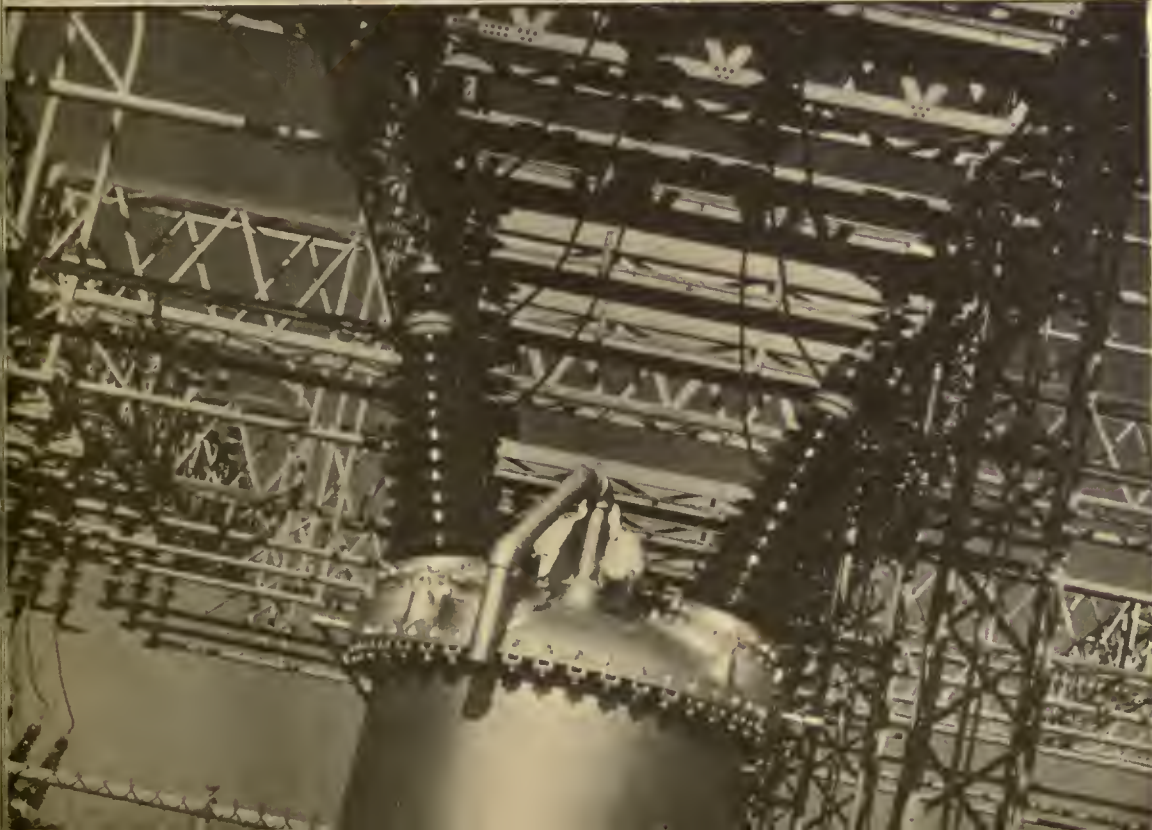


But you cannot plan for water and land unless you plan for people. Down in the Valley, the Farm Security Administration has built a model agricultural community. Living in homes they themselves built, paying for them on long term rates the homesteaders will have a chance to share in the wealth of the Valley.

More important, the Farm Security Administration has lent thousands of dollars to farmers in the Valley, farmers who were caught by years of depression and in need of only a stake to be self-sufficient.



But where there is water there is power.
Where there's water for flood control and water
for navigation, there's water for power—



Power for the farmers of the Valley.

Power for the villages and cities and factories of the Valley

West Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama.

Power to give a new Tennessee Valley to a new generation.

Power enough to make the river work!





EPILOGUE

We got the blacks to plant the cotton and they gouged the top off the valley.
We got the Swedes to cut the forests, and they sent them down the river.
Then we moved our saws and our plows and started all over again ;
And we left a hollow-eyed generation to peck at the worn-out valley ;
And left the Swedes to shiver in their naked North country.
1903, 1907, 1913, 1922, 1927, 1936, 1937—
For you can't wall out and dam two-thirds the water in the country.
We built dams but the dams filled in.
We built a thousand mile dyke but it didn't hold ;
So we built it higher.
We played with a continent for fifty years.

Flood control? Of the Mississippi?

Control from Denver to Helena ;
From Itasca to Paducah ;
From Pittsburgh to Cairo—
Control of the wheat, the corn and the cotton land ;
Control enough to put back a thousand forests ;
Control enough to put the river together again before it is too late . . . before
it has picked up the heart of a continent and shoved it into the Gulf of
Mexico.

Pare Lorentz



A most original writer, a critic of distinction, Pare Lorentz has attained a happy climax of his career in his motion picture productions of "The River" and "The Plow that Broke the Plains." This book, a permanent record of his film, is evidence of his poetic versatility.

STACKPOLE PICTURE BOOKS

C O U N T Y F A I R

The text is by Phil Stong

The pictures by Josephine von Miklos

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S A M

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