

The Native Americans, knowing nothing of money transactions, were cheated, pushed constantly to the west, their treaties dishonored, whole tribes massacred and their once proud culture nearly extinguished.

None of the disinherited, however, submitted without fierce and continuing struggles.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to do more than outline those struggles and the robberies and injustices that brought them on. That story has been told often and thoroughly before.

What *is* relevant to our subject is how those robberies finally resulted in the ruin of much of the soil itself — so that today 100,000,000 acres are eroded, unfit for agriculture.

What *is* relevant is the hard fact that those robberies prevented the tillers of the land from using it for long periods of time, that landowners held vast areas out of use until the press of population and the growth of industry increased its value, ten, one hundred, one thousand times.

To blame are the distorted social relationships which have ruled America from the beginning. In the colonial era the relationship of masters and bondsmen, masters and slaves, ruled the economy. Independent farmers existed precariously in isolated pockets of the social structure.

The British Formulated a Policy

By the time the British took over from other European contenders they had formulated a policy: this magnificent continent must not be used only for quick plunder, but to enrich England in the coming centuries. They knew well that land without labor to exploit it was valueless. To that end the laboring classes must be taken to the land, either by enticing promises or by force. Instead of felons being sent to rot in England's jails, they were shipped to America as forced laborers, bonded in servitude for however many number of years the judging magistrate decided; shiploads of young and healthy women were enticed by the promise of capable and strong husbands to make the sea journey to the promised land; men were knocked down on the streets of Dover, Plymouth and London and dragged aboard cutters to join the labor force in America.

But in spite of these drastic measures too many acres still lay

idle. The more conscientious representatives of the Crown, fully aware of the gap between the British policy and colonial practice, grew alarmed.

Writing from Savannah to the Lords of Trade, at London, April 20, 1763, Governor James Wright (of Georgia) referred heatedly to the 'very extraordinary procedure of the Governor of South Carolina,' in allowing the monopolization by a few of the most valuable areas of land. 'I have called this, my lords, the death or destruction of the province; for an extension of limits to the southward, if the lands were properly parcelled out to the people who would really cultivate and improve them, would draw some thousand inhabitants here; whereas great part of the lands, my lords, are ordered in large tracts to some wealthy settlers in Carolina, who probably will never see it themselves . . . and it is well understood here that many of those persons, especially those who have the largest tracts, have no intention to remove here or settle them; but probably some years hence, when it begins to get valuable, will sell it, and in the meantime those vast tracts are to lie waste and unimproved.'¹

The Lords of Trade, pondering over a solution to this knotty problem, came up with an apt answer. They would deny grants to any but slave-holding gentlemen, or those who could command the labor, for some years, of indentured servants. Here was a way to improve and develop the land that had been lying idle without allowing the "riff-raff" of Europe to get a foothold on it. Here was the way to clear the wilderness and plant crops and still keep title to the lands in the hands of "responsible" men. Slaves and indentured servants had only one function—to labor—and their labors would eventually bring greater riches to England itself.

But it was too late, even then. The landlords of the New World had already gathered up greater power than the monarchs who had originally given it to them. With the aid of the farmers and artisans they had dispossessed, they overthrew English rule, confiscated the estates of absentee British Tories, and kept for themselves the thousands of square miles they had been granted by three successive kings of England. They drew up a constitution in accordance with their own needs.

However, less than twenty years after the American War for Independence, the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, John Jay, arranged a treaty with the English Crown, restoring most of those lands to their former owners. This act of