

OVERLOOKED: DOMINANT IDEOLOGY, LIMESTONE COUNTY, ALABAMA  
NEWSPAPERS, AND TVA FAMILY RELOCATION, 1934-1936

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## VITA

Laura Beth Daws was born on February 20, 1981 to Carla and Bill Daws of Athens, Alabama. After graduating from West Limestone High School in 1999, she attended the University of North Alabama. In 2003, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree, *summa cum laude*, in Communication Arts: Public Communication with a minor in Spanish. She began work on her master's degree in Communication at Auburn University in August 2003. She received a graduate teaching assistantship and taught classes in Public Speaking.

THESIS ABSTRACT

OVERLOOKED: DOMINANT IDEOLOGY, LIMESTONE COUNTY, ALABAMA  
NEWSPAPERS, AND TVA FAMILY RELOCATION, 1934-1936

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The Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA's) construction of Wheeler Dam necessitated the flooding of 52,000 acres of land in Lauderdale, Limestone and Morgan counties in north Alabama. TVA purchased this land from the 835 families who owned it, but still had to ensure that the families who lived there relocated to other areas before the reservoir was created. TVA sent case workers to collect information about the families, made up of lower class individuals, and ensure that they moved away from flood zones. Despite the benefits TVA promised the region, some families were upset about moving and encountered hardships as a result of relocation. However, while relocation was taking place, the two Limestone County newspapers, the *Alabama Courier* and the *Limestone Democrat* reported overwhelmingly positive information about TVA and communicated little about relocated families. This thesis explores family relocation from a cultural history and communication perspective, concluding that the omission of information about relocated families was the result of the upper classes maintaining

ideological hegemony over the lower classes, political economy of the newspapers, and the lower classes believing the dominant ideology to the point that they participated in their own oppression.

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## I. OVERLOOKED: AN INTRODUCTION

Stories of the Great Depression are prominent in today's history books. Visual images of once well-to-do businessmen standing in unemployment lines, unsure of how to feed their families, still haunt the minds of many. But history often overlooks the story of those who were already poor to begin with at the time of the Depression, or those for whom Wall Street was nothing more than a distant, unreachable avenue only heard of through radio news accounts or rumor. People in the rural south lived hard-pressed, poverty-stricken lives for decades before that Black Tuesday in October, 1929. For the Tennessee River Valley region in particular, young couples with too many mouths to feed and not enough food to do so were common. Familiar, too, were entire families farming in bare feet under a hot sun, wearing worn-out clothing and living together in one-room shacks with no electricity or running water. These people were the epitome of desperation. The Great Depression for them simply meant bad times that got worse.

Hope appeared with the passage of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives. Governmental agencies were created to provide relief efforts from the Depression. One such organization, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), took on the monumental task of manipulating the Tennessee River for the purposes of flood control, improved navigation systems, and rural electrification. TVA planned to construct nine dams at crucial places along the Tennessee to achieve these goals. With this construction, however, came the necessity to flood a considerable amount of fertile

farmland along the riverbanks. Despite the benefits the TVA promised to provide the people of the region, not all families were enthusiastic about leaving the homes and lands on which they lived and worked for generations. Families living near the construction of Wheeler Dam in north Alabama are representative, as they were a subgroup of the 14,725 families living along the Tennessee River affected by the construction of TVA dams.

In rural north Alabama in 1934, the year construction began on Wheeler Dam, newspapers were a valuable, authoritative source of information. Editors and reporters were opinion leaders of newsworthy events of the day, though they still had the responsibility to be fair, accurate and thorough in their reports. Since the TVA was such a dominant, powerful force in the lives of Tennessee Valley residents, newspaper coverage of TVA was prominent. Newspapers' coverage of TVA impacted public perception and attitudes about TVA, communicating positive messages about the agency and the benefits it would bring to the region. Media theory and conventional wisdom tell us, though, that what is communicated in the media isn't always consistent with public perceptions or opinions about what's happening. Thus, this research project asked what were the attitudes toward TVA as held by the families affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam, as compared to newspaper coverage about TVA and relocation?

My research shows that the relocated families had mixed opinions about TVA, while newspaper coverage in Limestone County, Alabama was overwhelmingly positive. After setting a historical and theoretical context, I present information about TVA and family relocation as found in Limestone County newspapers and TVA case files, and then draw conclusions to answer the research question. The following chapters explain how I arrived at my conclusion.

## Preview of Chapters

This thesis answers the question, what were the attitudes toward TVA as held by the families affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam, as compared to newspaper coverage about TVA and relocation? The Tennessee Valley Authority formed in 1933 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives. TVA did many things for the poverty-stricken south by constructing dams along the Tennessee River, including improving the navigability of the river, providing for flood control which would help with the devastating land erosion problems, and harness the hydroelectric power generated by the dams to provide affordable electricity for residents of the region. This thesis explains the origins of TVA, social and historical contextual factors relevant to understanding why its presence was welcomed by many, and an explanation of what happened to those families who lived along the riverbanks and were forced to move out of the way of Wheeler Dam's construction.

Chapter two presents a historical context and specifically explains the Great Depression and social conditions of the south perpetuated by the Depression. First is a description of the social conditions in the south during the Depression. Detail about southern poverty during the Depression is necessary in order to understand the class structure of the relocated. Next is an overview of FDR's New Deal programs, a historical background of the TVA, and what TVA intended to do upon arrival in the south. The historical context tells us how important FDR's New Deal programs were to the revitalization and turnaround of the nation's economy, specifically the impact the New Deal had on the south. Thus, the historical context informs the research for allowing a

better understanding of the social and economic impact of TVA, and lending insight as to why TVA was a welcomed presence by some individuals.

Chapter three presents the theoretical and methodological context for analysis. This is a historical thesis from a communication perspective. Thus, it draws upon communication and media theory relating to newspapers. First, the chapter explains the relationship between communication, reality, and ideology. Here, I discuss how communication processes influence the realities and mindsets of cultures. This information is necessary to understanding how the reality and ideology of the relocated were affected by newspapers. The next section discusses media theory, including the relationship between media outlets and political economy. Finally, the connection between history, cultural history, and communication is presented, along with the methodology I chose for research and analysis. The methodology consists of a thematic analysis of two primary texts: Limestone County, Alabama newspapers from 1934-1936 and TVA case files of relocated families in Limestone County.

Chapter four presents information found in newspapers and in TVA case files. It analyzes what happened to the relocated families as compared and contrasted to information presented in newspapers at the time. The two Limestone County newspapers from 1934-1936, the *Alabama Courier* and the *Limestone Democrat*, were chosen for analysis, along with all TVA case files from Wheeler Dam's construction in Limestone County. This chapter explains to what extent TVA was covered in the weekly newspapers, and it cites frequent articles and advertisements explaining the overwhelmingly positive nature of the newspaper's coverage. This coverage is juxtaposed against the seemingly hopeless lives of the poverty-stricken families who

lived along the river and were forced to relocate. Citations and examples from case files attest to the hard-pressed nature of the lives of lower class individuals. Thus, a comparison is made between the newspaper coverage and the attitudes of the families as cited in case files.

Chapter five answers the research question on the basis of historical, theoretical and methodological contexts. This chapter explains and interprets the overwhelmingly positive information about TVA in the newspapers and its significance in maintaining the dominant ideology. It explains that the class status of the relocated families rendered their concerns inconsequential in the face of the needs of the middle and upper classes. TVA meant immediate benefits for the upper and middle classes, and this chapter explains how those groups maintained ideological hegemony through the perpetuation of the dominant ideology in overwhelmingly positive stories that were communicated in the weekly newspapers.

### Significance

This thesis begins to fill a gap in the literature about the Tennessee Valley Authority. While much has been written in the past seventy years about TVA, much of it centers on the organizational aspects of the agency, its place in the New Deal relief efforts, or the benefits it brought to the south. Little of the literature deals specifically with family relocation. The only published account of TVA relocation is a scholarly article in an agricultural journal that explored relocation from a race perspective.<sup>1</sup> Relocation is given brief mention in much of the TVA literature, but there is no extensive account of how relocation worked or what happened to the families that were relocated. Indeed, the lack of research on the relocated speaks to the perception that they were

unimportant. Though this thesis is by no means a comprehensive account of all relocated individuals for all TVA projects, it does jump-start the research needed in this area. It explains relocation from a communication perspective, and it draws original conclusions based on relevant literature and historical background. Thus, it contributes to the body of knowledge in the disciplines of communication and history.

This project is personally significant as well. I am a Limestone County native who grew up within a few miles of where most of the relocated families lived. TVA maintains a dominant presence in Athens and Limestone County, and I have always been personally interested in learning the story behind the legends of those who had to move out of the way of the dam. This project became even more personally significant to me as I noticed that in many instances, in order to find the families, the TVA case workers had to drive past the location that eventually became my home. I feel the story of the relocated is an important one to tell. Despite the dominant ideology of the 1930s or the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the lives and experiences of these rural southerners do matter.

However, this research is even more important because of its contributions to the field of communication. It does more than just relate the story about a relatively small group of people. It has broader implications to history and to the field of communication. Comparing how family relocation and TVA was covered in the newspapers to the TVA-constructed and maintained case files was the best way to tell what happened to rural Limestone Countians who lived along the Tennessee during Wheeler's construction. The newspapers revealed the reality that was created about TVA by an authoritative source. The case files provide information about many facets of life of rural southerners during the Depression – exact descriptions of their living conditions, information about their

diets, what type of personalities many of them had, and how they felt about TVA and relocation. From the newspapers' perspectives, TVA meant positive changes for the region. From the perspective of the relocated, TVA meant a further hardship in having to find a new place to live and farm. It is important to understand why the newspaper coverage was overwhelmingly positive as compared to the mixed opinions and attitudes of the relocated.

This thesis furthers our understanding about cultural communication. It demonstrates the power of communication processes on impacting the reality of individuals and groups of people. This research shows how symbolic processes created and maintained a reality for a group of people. In other words, this thesis shows how a dominant ideology was perpetuated by a powerful group over a less powerful group. The implications of this research extend beyond the field of communication. Even though it is an account of historical events, results of this research are applicable if studying community planning, power industries, the Depression, and class structures.

The following chapters tell a side of the story of relocation yet untold in any other account. This thesis examines the history of TVA's family relocation from a communication perspective. It will tell us how the attitudes of the relocated families compared to newspaper coverage of relocation. The next chapter discusses the relevant historical context, including conditions of life in the south during the Depression, and how TVA would impact the lives of southerners forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Melissa Walker, "African Americans and TVA Reservoir Property Removal: Race in a New Program," *Agricultural History* 72 (1998): 417-429.



## II. THE DEPRESSION, NEW DEAL AND THE RIVER: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Imagine a vast expanse of farm land with rolling hills along the shores of a 600-mile river. Visualize rows of cotton fruitfully growing, with farmers busily working to harvest the crop. Now imagine the same land, weeks later, devastated by the erosion caused by that massive river's flooding. The crops which once stood as a testament to capable farming methods and hard work and once promised to provide for farmers' families lay in ruin. The farmer looks heartbroken as he gazes across his land in dismay; the nearby river that giveth so much also taketh away. The farmer looks back to the wooden-frame shack that serves as his house. It provides just enough shelter for him, his wife, and his children. They are all hungry. There is no electricity and, thus, almost no means of storing any excess food the family may have. He turns to look at his neighbor's property and sees much the same scene. His crops were destroyed again too, and there is an air of desperation and worry on the face of his neighbor's wife while she attempts to carry on with the usual farm chores of washing what little clothing the family owns and cooking for her family with what few staples the family has. This may sound like an exaggerated description of life in a third-world, poverty-stricken country, but it is an accurate description of the lives of some Americans living in the rural south in the 1930s.

Specifically, this describes living conditions of people who lived near the Tennessee River in North Alabama. Though the people of this region were blessed with rich farmland and excellent weather, which translated to good growing and farming

conditions, the river was wild and created problems for those who lived near it. These natural resource problems, coupled with an economy that had yet to fully recover from the turmoil of the Civil War, suggested a need for a holistic relief agency. The Tennessee Valley Authority became that agency.

In order to understand the impact of the Tennessee Valley Authority on the people of Limestone County, Alabama who lived along the Tennessee River in 1935, one must first understand the times in which the people lived. The external environmental factors largely dictated the people's attitudes and behaviors. For Limestone County, in particular, the lower-class status of most individuals who lived there fulfilled a reality of poverty that did not allow them to see a way out of their dreadful state. The effects of the Great Depression on this group of people are undeniable. Though economic times were already harsh, the stock market fall simply meant such conditions did not improve for some time.

This chapter provides the historical context for this thesis in an effort to explain some of these underlying societal conditions, the way of life of the Tennessee River Valley residents, and what kinds of relief were needed. Specifically, this chapter will explore the socioeconomic conditions of Tennessee River Valley residents in Limestone County, Alabama, how Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives sought to bring the country out of the Great Depression, and how the Tennessee Valley Authority intended to change the lives of those living in the rural south.

#### Lives of Poverty and Hard Work

The Great Depression affected the country like no other economic crisis ever had or has since. When the stock market crashed in 1929 on "Black Tuesday," many felt

their lives change in an instant. For the working middle class, the Depression meant a drastic change from stability to harsh times. Business professionals lost their livelihoods and stable sources of incomes on Wall Street. Families who had enough food and money to support a family suddenly dealt with problems of scarcity, as many went without food and worried about where their next paychecks and meals were coming from. In addition to the widespread scarcity of resources such as money and food, the Depression brought homelessness as well. In response to this social problem, across the nation shantytowns called “Hoovervilles” sprang up to address the needs of the recently homeless. Black and white photographs communicate the bleakness of this era and tell stories of Hooverville residents better than words ever could, as there is a look of desperation and sadness on the people’s faces. Their American dream turned into a nightmare. Economic times were desperately hard for the working class in the 1930s.

While historical accounts tend to focus on the Depression’s impact on our country’s business class, it is important to acknowledge the effects of the Depression on other classes. Skilled workers were affected, as the larger corporations for which they worked were forced to lay off even the most dedicated and loyal workers. Immigrants who came to the United States looking for a promised land of opportunities found harsh living conditions across the nation. The Depression affected workers everywhere from big cities to small towns. However, one class that is often overlooked in recounting the story of the Depression, but encompassed some of the most interesting effects of the Depression, included the citizens who lived in the rural south and were poor before the great economic collapse. Economic times were so hard in this region that when the Great

Depression was at its worst, some Tennessee Valley residents did not notice a difference in their economic status, as they were so poverty-stricken to begin with.<sup>1</sup>

Conditions were so bad in the south that President Roosevelt called the thirteen southern states “the Nation’s number one economic problem.”<sup>2</sup> This is a striking statement, as it implies that Roosevelt felt the plight of the southerners was more problematic than that of the more affluent businesspeople who were immediately affected by the stock market crash. Roosevelt’s statement stemmed from his recognition of the longstanding economic problems of the south. These were due in large part to the effects of the Civil War, as the south’s post-war economy was slow to improve. While the rest of the nation recovered fairly quickly and developed more industry and skilled labor jobs, the south failed in its attempts to rebuild a solid economic base, holding to its agrarian economic roots with little skilled laborers or industry.

Comparatively speaking, poor southerners were largely “primitive and illiterate” people.<sup>3</sup> This label was attached to this group because of their struggles with post-war economic and social conditions. The time from the end of the Civil War to the Depression was a time of hardship for many in the south. While the rest of the country progressed in the post-war era, the south struggled to gain ground. For those people, when the stock market finally fell, it meant their hard economic times and desperation would continue. For example, whereas housing conditions suddenly worsened for what was formerly the middle class, housing conditions in the south were already substandard. Many southerners were illiterate because of a lack of education – not necessarily because of a lack of schools, but because of the inability of children to stay in school as dictated by a need to help support their families. Some families understood the need for education

but could not ignore the greater need to provide food and money for their families, meaning children had to stay home and work instead of going to school. The Depression seemed to hold southerners hostage and leave no way out of their poverty-stricken state. One writer described this way of life, saying “eight out of ten schoolchildren stopped coming [to school] because the books and teachers cost money... the Depression ... held another generation prisoner to the old life of backbreaking work.”<sup>4</sup>

Poverty became institutionalized in the south in the years following the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> It began in the post-war decades because of the lack of economic initiatives, lack of skilled labor, lack of education, and failure to keep up with the rest of the growing nation. Poverty gradually became the reality of life. Despite feelings that the way of life could or should change, people did not understand how to change it or where to begin to change it. This ideology was ingrained to the point that the stereotype of the poor, backwards southerner stuck with this region in later decades. Images of poor southerners escalated during the Great Depression and remained in the minds of many both as cultural stereotypes as well as symbols for backwards living and social ineptitude.

Sadly, this stereotype partially stemmed from truth about life in the rural south. Some poor southerners recognized that their way of life was different from other parts of the country, understanding the rest of the nation’s perception that their class status was least in the country.<sup>6</sup> Along the Tennessee River, many people were simply isolated from other groups within their communities.<sup>7</sup> This contributed to the stereotype of the backwards southerner who was resistant to outside influences about how to improve his/her life. The rest of the country only recently experienced the hardships of poverty with which many southerners coped for years. People of the rural south did not have the

luxuries previously afforded to the middle class of the rest of the nation – there was no electricity or running water in many areas of the south, and for years there had been a scarcity of food, money and housing.

The state of Alabama is a good example of the degree of poverty in the south, as socioeconomic conditions there were typical of overall southern states, which were below average compared to the rest of the country.<sup>8</sup> Especially along the Tennessee River, where the predominant occupation was farming, most residents lived well below the poverty line. In particular, the socioeconomic status of those affected by the TVA, especially in Limestone County, Alabama, provides insight as to exactly how much, or how little, money and resources were available to sustain families in the Tennessee Valley area. In addition to serving as a snapshot of the economic conditions for the rest of the state of Alabama, Limestone County was chosen for this thesis because it was home to over 300 families that were directly affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam by TVA.

One way of understanding the effectiveness of an area's economy is by looking at totals of income.<sup>9</sup> As such, a study was compiled of income for all counties in Alabama in 1929 and 1935, years that are of interest to this thesis as they consider conditions immediately before the Depression and at the beginning of true relief efforts for the Tennessee Valley. During this time period, the average annual income for southerners in 1935-1936 was \$905.<sup>10</sup> Alabama's per capita income was the fourth-lowest in the nation, at \$330 per year.<sup>11</sup> In particular, the per capita income for Limestone Countians in 1929 averaged \$221 per year. Effects of the Depression were noticeable in later years; by 1935

per capita income for Limestone families plummeted to only \$101. Clearly, economic standards for people in Limestone County were low.

This economic situation is partially explained by the type of occupations residents held which, for the most part, yielded little income. In Limestone County, 81.5% of the population farmed for a living.<sup>12</sup> Farming accounted for 66.6% of all revenue in the county, contributing the fourth largest percentage of farm revenue to Alabama's total. Among the main crops for this area were cotton, corn, and soybeans, with some forestry and livestock production. Though most who lived in the Tennessee Valley area were poor farmers, it is interesting to note that a distinct class hierarchy existed within the fraternity of farmers.<sup>13</sup>

Though few farmers actually owned the land on which they farmed, those who did were the most affluent class of the farmers. Those fortunate enough to own their own farmlands generally owned many acres, meaning more income, and they served as hosts for tenant farmers or sharecroppers. Tenant farmers and sharecroppers rented lands. Most farmers fell into one of these two groups, which made for the middle ground of farmers in the south. Because of the largely agrarian economy, most people who worked chose to farm. However, there were other occupations besides farming that fit into the overall community hierarchy. Some were employed in skilled or trade occupations, constituting a working class, even though the incomes brought in from trades were not much, if any more, than those of farmers. Those who did not farm or did not have a trade usually fished for a living, and these workers constituted the lowest class in the rural south. Understanding this rigid class structure is an important link in understanding of the overall quality of life for people in rural north Alabama in the 1930s, as even among

the poorest in the nation, class differences added a degree of complexity to the otherwise simple lives of the farmers and workers in the region.

The way in which the responsibilities were divided among family members, especially farm families, indicates how hard people worked for so little money. Farm labor was “hard and unremitting, often carried on in extreme weather, exposure, and to a degree of excessive fatigue.”<sup>14</sup> Despite a gendered division of labor in which the women were expected to perform the domestic and reproductive functions of the family, in most farm families the responsibility of providing for the family did not rest solely on the men. Women, too, were expected to farm and perform work that was just as difficult as their husbands.<sup>15</sup> In keeping with the division of labor, however, it was unacceptable for the men to perform housework.<sup>16</sup> For most families, children were expected to work from an early age, helping around the house or farm performing chores that eventually led to manual labor like the rest of the family. Photographs from this time show children not happily playing together, but in fields working together with forlorn faces, being thrown into a life of hard work from an early age.

Though income and occupational information are important, they do not provide complete understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of this region. Other indicators of the overall way of life for Limestone County residents offer greater insight into their plight. A look at the diets of some residents sheds light on their poor health conditions. According to a study of one-hundred farm families in the Western section of Limestone County near the construction of Wheeler Dam, diets were inadequate. Barker cited an example of one family of four, including a baby of three days old, living off nothing but peas, cornbread and flour for three months.<sup>17</sup> Families generally did not have enough



milk, eggs or vegetables.<sup>18</sup> Similar stories were repeated throughout other areas of the county or state, such as a child stealing another's lunch and sadly finding less than what he had to begin with – only a rock and a stick.<sup>19</sup> In the most extreme cases, some children even resorted to the consumption of red clay as a supplement to the small amount of food they received.<sup>20</sup> Despite the rich resources of the river and fertile land, many people in the Tennessee Valley were hungry.

Housing conditions in this area were, for the most part, cramped and destitute. Houses were generally no more than wooden frame structures that provided minimal protection from freezing winters and stifling summers. Many families shared one- or two-room shacks with several children and extended family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles.<sup>21</sup> Some sharecroppers who moved frequently lived in tents that provided even less shelter. Homes generally had dirt floors, minimal furnishings, and sometimes were without window and door screens to keep out pests and insects.<sup>22</sup> Before the 1930s, this region had yet to experience the modern conveniences of electricity and running water, so those luxuries were not afforded to most of the community members.

The absence of electricity and running water were significant problems in the area. Census data from 1930 shows that 90% of the nation's urban areas had electricity, as compared to only 10% of those who lived in rural areas.<sup>23</sup> Lack of running water added to the area's already unsanitary conditions and contributed to the prevalence of outhouses. Water came mostly from wells, which added fetching water as one more chore on the already long list needed for the upkeep of even the smallest farms. It was quite a chore to physically gather water, so it also became a laborious task to wash

clothing and to bathe, factors that contributed to poor personal hygiene. There was no electricity on most farms, so there were no means for providing enough light at night to work, meaning that most of the day's work had to be completed in the daytime. Candles or lanterns provided dim indoor lighting amidst the vast darkness of the land. Absence of light at night made working outdoors impossible and doing any sort of indoor work difficult. Lack of electricity also contributed to the inability of farm families to properly store food. Without refrigerators or freezers, it was impossible to store meat products. This meant that whenever a family slaughtered precious livestock, they were often forced to consume the meat it provided immediately. A lack of refrigerated food storage contributed to the poor diets in the region. Family gardens may have been fruitful in summer months, but because there was no means of canning or storing vegetables, any surplus ruined before fall, meaning tough winters. Whereas much of the rest of the country was blessed with electricity and all its benefits, the absence of such in the rural south contributed much to the poverty and desolation of the area.

As if conditions with regards to food and housing were not deplorable enough, they were worsened by nearly uncontrollable diseases that plagued children and adults alike. Among the most common were pellagra, tuberculosis, rickets, hookworm and malaria. Unsanitary living conditions were certainly a culprit to the spread of disease, as many families wore only ragged, worn-out clothing and slept on filthy bedclothes. The situation was worsened because of the lack of physicians and treatments available or affordable.<sup>24</sup> Most people relied on some form of folk medicine or home remedies to help cure and control disease. Sometimes these illnesses were debilitating and deadly.

The lives of the farmers greatly depended on the ever-changing quality of the land. The crop season could make the difference between a bearable and unbearable winter. The farmers who took advantage of the extra-fertile soils along the banks of the Tennessee took risks every season, as the fertile land was hard to pass up for growing crops despite the threat each season of the wild river's flooding and destroying entire crops. Nevertheless, farmers seemed to love the land on which they lived and took great pride in their work. Despite the land's unstable temperament, the farmers along the Tennessee River fought year after year against the forces of mother nature to work the land.

Southerners certainly felt the effects of the Depression as much, if not more than, Americans in other regions. Sadly, the Depression did not mean the onset of the harsh way of life in the south; rather, it only meant it would be perpetuated. Bragg describes the effects of the Depression on the south as:

“redundant, like putting the bootheels to a man already down. It did not make the rows any longer for a farmer plowing a mule, or change the diet of a family already eating cornbread and beans seven days a week. It took a while to feel it. But in time, it even found the people at the ends of the dirt roads.”<sup>25</sup>

Relief was needed across the entire country, and rural southerners needed it in different ways such as better food, better housing, better education, better health, affordable electricity, more income, and an improvement in residents' overall ways of life. Most families who lived along the Tennessee River in Limestone County were, by today's standards, barely living off minimal food in deplorable conditions. Rarely are farm families smiling in the pictures that remain from that time period. There is a certain

look of desperation and helplessness; a look that most in a land of plenty would prefer to think is seen only on the faces of the disadvantaged in remote third-world countries. They reflect lives of poverty and hard work. Just when life seemed hopeless, the desperate found hope in a new president and new policy.

### The New Deal and Relief Efforts

Desperate Americans needed hope; they needed a reason to believe things would get better. Hope came to the nation in 1932 in the form of a new president and new legislation. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives created governmental agencies to provide overall relief efforts from the Depression. The New Deal, a Democratic initiative, focused on "constant, steady change, the necessity for governmental action to accommodate those changes, and the continuing need for explaining to the people... what those changes were all about."<sup>26</sup> This new type of initiative attempted to harness the power of the United States government for the good of its citizens, and New Dealers intended their programs to be salvation from the oppressive times of the Depression.

Roosevelt utilized and expanded the executive powers of the Presidency while maintaining a high public profile. His "fireside chats" via radio made United States citizens feel as if he truly wanted to communicate a message of optimism. Another reason many Americans believed in the New Deal is because it "assumed the responsibility for guaranteeing every American a minimum standard of subsistence."<sup>27</sup> New Deal programs not only attempted to deal with the current problems of the Depression but took proactive measures in hopes of preventing more catastrophic economic times. These included "securities regulation, banking reforms, [and] unemployment compensation."<sup>28</sup>

In an historic first one hundred days in office, Roosevelt aggressively created new agencies in hopes of providing fast relief. Because of this rapid action, Americans became optimistic and excited for the first time in years. Roosevelt's first broad goal was rebuilding the economy, as among his first actions were taking the United States off the gold standard in an effort to pursue "domestic price-raising ventures"<sup>29</sup> and the creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). Agencies such as the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps gave Americans jobs in public works projects to strengthen the economy and workforce.<sup>30</sup> The National Industrial Recovery Act was passed to allow the government greater ability to plan for prosperity.<sup>31</sup> These programs addressed a variety of needs focusing on getting Americans back to work and overall economic improvement.

Additionally, there was a category of relief agencies created to help the plight of farmers. One such program was the Farm Security Administration to help make farmers more economically stable.<sup>32</sup> Some of the agricultural programs only offered temporary help, such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, which encouraged diversification of crops so that farmers did not rely completely on cotton. Also, the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA) attempted to provide relief to the residents of the rural south.<sup>33</sup> Though it substantially helped some by providing income and improving overall living standards, FERA's attempts to help were simply not enough. Eventually, it created a Rural Rehabilitation program that many criticized for focusing only on the short term aid to farmers, not the long term problems farmers faced. These agencies were aimed at helping the farmers, or aimed at solving what Roosevelt believed was the nation's top economic problem. Finally, the problems of this country's farmers

were noticed, and they responded well to the help the government offered. Most understood these programs not as charities, but as efforts to improve their situations and improve their overall working conditions.

Most salient of the New Deal programs to this thesis, however, was the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The TVA promised relief to the Valley's residents primarily by constructing a series of dams to tame the river, harness the water's power to provide energy for rural electrification, provide advice and assistance for the farmers of the region and improve the overall quality of life for southerners. What follows is a brief overview of the rich and turbulent history of this organization that still exists today.

#### *Tennessee Valley Authority*

The TVA Act was passed on May 18, 1933. It stated the Authority's purpose as to "improve the navigability and to provide for the flood control of the Tennessee River; to provide for reforestation and the proper use of marginal lands in the Tennessee Valley; to provide for the agricultural and industrial development of said valley."<sup>34</sup> TVA was to harness the great natural resources of the Tennessee River. Its founders were "dedicated to conservation and development of the resources of the Tennessee Valley as a means of improvement of economic well-being within the region."<sup>35</sup> The TVA's risky and innovative plans caused the agency to be classified as an experiment by many,<sup>36</sup> and others called the TVA simply an "idea."<sup>37</sup> The "idea" was monumental: to create nine dams at crucial points along the Tennessee River's winding course from its source in Knoxville, Tennessee to its end in Paducah, Kentucky.

Why was there a need for such an agency in the first place? The amount of relief needed in this region is evident in a case study done by the Tennessee Valley Authority in

the initial stages of its inception to gather information on the overall living and socioeconomic conditions of several areas affected by TVA projects.<sup>38</sup> To further validate the TVA's purpose, the results showed that despite the relief available to many, families in what would become the Wheeler Dam basin did not receive enough governmental assistance. Results showed that only 10-12% of the people in that specific area received relief money of about \$50 per family.<sup>39</sup> Though the assistance provided some monetary relief, more help was needed in more areas, largely because of the river itself. The Tennessee River, despite serving as a necessary source of water, actually hurt the Valley's landscape before the appearance of TVA, as yearly flooding and extreme soil erosion prevented the farmers of the region from having successful crops year after year. Aside from agricultural problems, trade and commerce were hindered through this region, especially in the area known as Muscle Shoals. In this area, the river dropped by such a degree that it was not navigable through this area of north Alabama. Coincidentally, Muscle Shoals was crucial to the holistic development of the river and the creation of the TVA.

Muscle Shoals was the site of controversy for nearly 20 years prior to TVA. In 1916, the federal government passed the National Defense Act, which allowed for mass production of synthetic nitrogen for purposes relating both to agriculture and national defense.<sup>40</sup> Efforts to follow through with the provisions of this act, however, resulted in a tangled web of legal problems for many years to come. The controversy centered around President Woodrow Wilson's authorization of a nitrate plant to be constructed near Muscle Shoals, an area chosen for its location and, specifically, its potential for hydroelectric power. Though a small dam was planned as part of the nitrate plant, the

project was never completed, leaving partially constructed facilities that never operated at their full potential,<sup>41</sup> as well as angered politicians over what appeared to be a waste of taxpayer money.

For progressive legislators, however, such as Nebraska Senator George Norris, the continued debate over what to do with the Muscle Shoals facilities proved to be just the outlet needed as an example of the potential service the government could provide the people.<sup>42</sup> Some lawmakers at this time were advocates of privately owned hydroelectric power plants, seeing monetary rewards in selling the facilities at Wilson to be privately developed and, consequently, the creation of electric companies that would be privately owned. However, Senator Norris felt that control of the great amounts of hydroelectric power that could be generated in Muscle Shoals would best be controlled by a governmental agency that kept the best interests of its constituents in mind, translating to affordable prices for electricity without privately owned, profit-driven competition. Senator Norris thus pushed TVA legislation not only because he felt doing so would be beneficial, but also because of his political ideology and a political motivation – the nitrate plant was Norris's starting point for debate as to why problems existed on the Tennessee as well as how the problems could be solved. Norris saw the Muscle Shoals facilities as being converted to one in a series of dams to be constructed along the Tennessee as part of multiple-purpose river development. When the TVA was finally created, Norris's vision was realized, and the problem at Muscle Shoals was resolved. The existing nitrate plant in Muscle Shoals was converted to Wilson Dam, and together with Wheeler Dam, which was planned to be built about 16 miles from Wilson, TVA had set plans in motion to control the raging river and provide hydroelectric power for many



residents in Lauderdale, Limestone, and neighboring counties.<sup>43</sup> The solutions offered by TVA seemed to solve the Muscle Shoals problem,<sup>44</sup> thus providing a positive first impression about TVA for many residents.

When the TVA Act passed, it officially created the agency that provided the multiple-purpose river development. Work on Wilson Dam, Wheeler Dam, and all other dams and projects progressed quickly. The dams themselves made the river navigable and provided a means of flood control while generating a large, affordable source of hydroelectric power. Each of these facets of the TVA idea had a direct impact on the lives and economies of residents TVA affected. First, if navigability was improved, overall trade and commerce would theoretically improve, which would stimulate the region's struggling economy. Secondly, flood control would help the farmers of the region have more successful harvests, as before TVA, floods could devastate a crop and, in turn, devastate a farmer's income. Some floods were so severe they destroyed houses, leaving piles of ruin scattered along the landscape. Thirdly, and most drastically, the river's power would be harnessed for electricity, solving the longstanding problem of rural electrification. TVA provided for a holistic development plan for controlling and utilizing the natural resources of the Tennessee River.

One of the most outstanding and unusual features of the TVA was the approach its creators took with regards to the sale of power that its dams generated. The TVA was to serve as a "public corporation with the powers of government but the flexibility of a private corporation."<sup>45</sup> This was an interesting position for the government to arrange for the TVA, as the federal government was, in a sense, voluntarily delegating authority over power distribution, an issue that could have been totally governmentally controlled since

the government created the agency. This decision was perhaps reflective of Roosevelt's purpose in creation of TVA: he was serious about making electricity affordable for rural residents.<sup>46</sup> After heated debate, it was decided that TVA would not be in direct competition with local power companies and would instead provide power at "yardstick" rates, setting the standard for what would be considered reasonable rates for other power companies to charge.<sup>47</sup> This was an important decision, as avoiding private ownership of power ensured low rates, making power both available and affordable to the Tennessee Valley residents.

Another important feature to note is that despite being a purely governmental project, TVA was to remain nonpartisan, at the mandate of President Roosevelt, and at the suggestion of Senator George Norris, who for ten years worked on improvements in the Muscle Shoals area.<sup>48</sup> This greatly affected Roosevelt's selection of the first board of directors, which consisted of Arthur E. Morgan, David Lilienthal, and Harcourt Morgan. All three men brought differing talents and perspectives to the board, which initially resulted in great productivity and later served as a source of deep conflict within the organization.

Initially, in the early phases of TVA's development and conception, directors took great care in charting the agency's path.<sup>49</sup> However, the major task was the construction of dams, and the construction commenced almost immediately, with 20 dams being built in only 20 years.<sup>50</sup> Credit for this is due largely to the first board of directors who approached the project with great enthusiasm, despite turbulent personality differences that created disputes over the broader purpose of the TVA.<sup>51</sup> The first directors were Arthur E. Morgan, a former president of Antioch College in Tennessee as well as a

former hydraulic engineer,<sup>52</sup> Harcourt Morgan, a conservative that was the former president of the University of Tennessee,<sup>53</sup> and young David Lilienthal, a Harvard law graduate.<sup>54</sup>

In his book revealing his personal TVA experiences, Arthur Morgan recounted how his initial hopes for TVA differed from the hopes of the other directors, saying that he wanted TVA to “create a new spirit and attitude in a public service... to the other two directors, the prospect was different.”<sup>55</sup> Specifically, he felt that Harcourt Morgan was concerned primarily with fertilizer improvement and development, while David Lilienthal saw the mechanical aspects of the operations, such as generation and distribution of electricity, as TVA’s primary focus.<sup>56</sup> Arthur Morgan wanted the TVA to become an agency that would bring new life to the old south; he saw TVA as innovative and unlike anything the country had seen before. Lilienthal was quoted as saying that “a moral purpose alone is not enough to insure that resource development will be a blessing and not a curse.”<sup>57</sup> Conflicts in decision making and the initial vision of the TVA occurred not because of any personal conflicts, but because of the three men’s differing backgrounds. Though TVA historians speak of the directors’ conflicts as detrimental, the early turmoil did not hinder the initial stages of the TVA’s development. Rather, the three differing backgrounds and visionary purposes of the directors may have contributed to the high degree to which other subprograms, such as land conservation and regional planning, were regarded.

Despite the conflict, TVA succeeded in achieving many of its goals. The Authority was revolutionary in both theory and practice, as its subprograms were renowned and attracted international attention.<sup>58</sup> TVA became a good example in

regional planning, serving as an international model for other agencies who sought to manipulate land in much the same way as TVA.<sup>59</sup> The dams allowed the river to become navigable, which assured an increase in trade and commerce for decades to come. Even through the turbulent Muscle Shoals area, the dams solved the problem of the river's steep drop in depth of 134 feet, finally making travel and trade safe through this region. The dam system worked as planned.

TVA sought to educate the people of the Tennessee Valley to further bring them out of their poverty-ridden state. Extension agents taught farmers about the importance and techniques of soil conservation. Home extension agents taught women about using food storage methods and refrigeration that was now available. They also conducted cooking and home demonstration workshops. Many community refrigerators appeared over the valley in an effort to convince residents that electricity was there for their own benefit and to encourage entire communities, all at once, to take advantage of the opportunities electricity provided.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps the most noticeable difference in the landscape, electricity soon became part of everyday life in the Tennessee Valley. Before TVA, the countryside was completely dark at night. After TVA's rural electrification, farms were scattered with outdoor and indoor lighting that granted farmers the option to continue working on some activities through the night and also provided a certain degree of safety in being able to see outdoors at night with more than just candlelight or lanterns. The picture of the small, lone farmhouse aglow underneath an outdoor light became a familiar sight across the countryside.

TVA helped control the spread of disease, especially malaria, by spraying insecticides across the most vulnerable regions for several years after the agency's inception, which greatly improved the overall health of Valley residents. With better working conditions and health conditions, housing conditions soon improved. The holistic approach the TVA took in regional planning and improvement worked. The TVA radically changed the south and made the lives of countless southerners better.

However, the great social and economic benefits promised by TVA came at a cost to valley residents. Perhaps most noticeable and relevant to this study was the taking away of hundreds of thousands of acres of fertile farmland upon which many depended for farming, income and livelihood.<sup>61</sup> The construction of dams necessitated the creation of reservoir areas by flooding the land along much of the river's banks. Not only was farmland overtaken, but so were historic landmarks, ancient Indian mounds, graveyards, and the homes of many of the residents.<sup>62</sup> This flooding would also have a noticeable impact on the food supply of the area, affecting fish and livestock supplies.<sup>63</sup> Even though about half the land to be flooded was farm land,<sup>64</sup> because no major cities, places of industry or urban areas would be immediately affected, TVA justified the destruction of such rural places in the name of progress and in the name of the long term benefits it would bring to the Valley.

This decision could be viewed as a decision of the elite class that further oppressed the lower class. Residents who lived along the river were among the lowest class, from the perspective of finances and overall standards of living. Despite any altruistic motives early agency officials may have had for TVA's projects, it is important to understand that those who made the decision to flood hundreds of thousands of acres

of land in the rural south were among the elite class at the time, as they were professionals – governmental officials – who had the power to decide to manipulate both a river and the people who lived nearby and were likely the ones who would profit from the changes. TVA proceeded with their plans to flood the land necessary for the creation of reservoir areas. Thus, the interests of two groups of people converged with the formation of the TVA. On the one hand, the destitute farm families of Limestone County were told to leave their homes and land and the culture tied to both for the promise, and little else, of a better life. They were directed to do so by government representatives pledging to improve their health and financial security. Those same officials fully understood the enormous profitability of TVA projects, thus making it a project in which the temporary inconvenience to a few thousand families paled in comparison to the economic benefits to local business people, utility companies and the larger United States economy.

Despite the amount of literature available about this turbulent time period and the TVA, the family relocation process has generated little research. For the entire Tennessee River region covering an area that stretched from Knoxville, Tennessee to Paducah, Kentucky, over 200,000 acres of farmland were flooded, directly affecting 14,725 families who lived closest to the riverbanks by forcing them to move their homes and farms.<sup>65</sup> For the families who lived on the contour lines directly on the river, the construction of dams and creation of reservoir areas meant that their homes and land would soon be under water. These families were thus forced to relocate to other areas.

Newspapers were perhaps one way that people found out information about those who were relocated and the changes TVA made. During the Depression, there were two

weekly newspapers in Limestone County, the *Limestone Democrat* and the *Alabama Courier*. The history of the newspaper in Limestone County stretches back to 1819, the year that Alabama became a state.<sup>66</sup> Several small newspapers were printed in Athens, the county seat, as well as outlying communities. The *Alabama Courier* was founded in 1880 in Athens by Charles M. Hayes.<sup>67</sup> In the town of Elkmont, the *Elkmont Enterprise* was founded by Captain Sam Clay, who sold the paper to George L. Townes shortly after its creation. Townes renamed this paper the *Limestone Democrat*.<sup>68</sup> The two papers remained in circulation until the 1960s.<sup>69</sup> The political stance of the papers is of interest in consideration of the type of material they would print. The *Limestone Democrat*, for example, was an advocate of government ownership of utilities.<sup>70</sup> This implies that the *Democrat* may have been predisposed to focus on printing information that would support the TVA, as it was clearly an agency that would provide government ownership of utilities.

TVA was concerned with public image, as officials working with the agency knew that in order for their programs to be successful, the public needed to understand what was happening to their rapidly changing landscape and lives. This was especially important in the family relocation process. Newspapers played a role in communicating information about TVA and the changes it promised for the area. Chapter four discusses in-depth the quantity of articles about TVA as well as specific topics that were published about the agency. As the analysis section will show, newspapers were one way the TVA gained favor with the public it would soon serve.

TVA also used more direct methods to communicate their plans and introduce itself to the public. To help residents understand the family relocation process, and in an

effort to protect families who were in danger of being flooded, TVA hired and trained special case workers for the task. The team of case workers, as representatives of the federal government, personally visited every family that was required to relocate. In most cases, workers made multiple visits to ensure that the families moved away or offered assistance or information about other agencies that could assist in this process. Workers encouraged the families to utilize their extended families to assist them.

The case workers kept detailed files on every family they contacted. Information in the files included basic household demographics, such as the number of people in the home, the size of the home, number and ages of children, ages of adults at home, and specific geographic location. The files also contained in-depth notes on each visit the case worker made. These files were kept confidential and utilized by TVA staff to ensure that all families were successfully relocated to other areas not in danger of being flooded.

Reports from TVA say that the Authority paid homeowners fair market value for their properties, which theoretically should have allowed the families to relocate with little difficulty.<sup>71</sup> The process of finding a new location to live was delicate, however, as the new homestead needed to have the same provisional capabilities, such as fertile farmland or river access, as the former locations. Many families were reluctant to sell their land, and many even disbelieved that TVA was serious about flooding them out of their homes. Additionally, some residents of this area were reluctant to leave because of their lack of resources, inexperience with relocation, the costs associated with rebuilding homes, and the ambiguity associated with the situation.<sup>72</sup> The family relocation process was almost as daunting a task as the physical manipulation of the river itself.



Despite the number of people affected by the intentional flooding of such areas, no published account exists of what happened to the families affected by the family relocation process. Bits of information about this process are scattered throughout publications on TVA. TVA itself rarely mentioned the process, as brief information shows up in TVA Annual Reports from 1935 and 1936 that include information on all aspects of the agency from those years. TVA publications that were intended to be distributed to the general public as informational documents about their benefits never mentioned the relocation process.

TVA stands today as an institution that “symbolizes man in control of his environment and directing his destiny.”<sup>73</sup> It served as an example of what big government can accomplish by extending its powers to smaller branches.<sup>74</sup> TVA fulfilled many of its promises for a better way of life to people in the Tennessee Valley. Despite this, some sources say that the TVA failed to assist in the economic growth of the region as much as they claim to have helped.<sup>75</sup> As Russell said, “under a controlled economy, it is persons – not things – who are told by government what they must or must not do.”<sup>76</sup> Understanding what happened to the families that were affected is important to understand the holistic affects of the TVA on the families of Limestone County.

#### “Electricity for All”

This chapter set the historical context for the remainder of this thesis. At the time of the creation of the TVA, the nation was in the middle of the greatest economic crisis it ever knew – the Great Depression. As such, families across the nation were suffering, especially in the deep south where poverty was a way of life. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal initiatives incorporated a plan to bring electricity and a better way of life to

this region. The Tennessee Valley Authority promised great benefits to Valley residents, but it meant that 14,725 families had to sacrifice their homes and land. Thus, this chapter explained the way of life of the people that were affected by the family relocation process, underlying conditions that dictated the need for the TVA, how TVA fit into the larger picture of New Deal initiatives, and what plans the TVA had for people of the rural south. This information helps answer the question of what the attitudes were toward TVA as held by the families affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam, as it told how the affected families lived before TVA's presence and why the TVA was a necessary agency.

The TVA communicated their plans for rural development in several ways, including promotional printed materials and specially trained social workers. Knowledge of the family relocation process, one of the most intrusive elements of building the dams, certainly traveled by word of mouth within communities, but the local newspapers should have also covered this event as it affected a number of people in circulation range. The local newspapers did cover TVA events in depth, but did they cover all TVA projects equally? Though newspaper stories attested to the benefits TVA promised for the region, as later chapters will show, coverage of TVA largely fit into the dominant ideology in the community with regards to employment, the economy, and overall relief efforts. Similarly, newspapers in any community and from any time period in our nation's history are bound to serve not only editorial and reporting functions of the world around them but also an important business function as well. Thus, the Limestone County newspapers may have dealt with competing interests in the publication of stories in their papers.

TVA's early logo featured a man's fist clutching a bolt of lightning, subtitled with the line "Electricity for All." But, as following chapters demonstrate, not "all" were immediate recipients of the benefits of electricity, despite what may have been communicated in the newspapers. Thus, the following chapter will explain the theoretical and methodological context for this thesis, explaining how to understand what information was communicated by newspapers and the impact the coverage, or lack of coverage, had on the affected people.

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96.

<sup>3</sup> J. Wayne Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), 1. (hereafter cited as Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People*)

<sup>4</sup> Rick Bragg, *Ava's Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 90-91.

<sup>5</sup> Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Flynt, *Poor But Proud*

<sup>7</sup> W. M. Adamson, "Income in Counties of Alabama: 1929 and 1935," (University, Alabama: Bureau of Business Research, School of Commerce and Business Administration, University of Alabama, 1939, multilithed). (hereafter cited as Adamson, "Income in Counties of Alabama")

<sup>8</sup> U. S. Census of Population, 1930. Washington, Government Printing Office: 1930, James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Birmingham, AL: Southern Living Gallery, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Adamson, "Income in Counties of Alabama," 1.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Sierra Ransmeier, *The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Case Study in the Economics of Multiple Purpose Stream Planning* (Nashville: The Vanderbilt University Press, 1942), 86. (hereafter cited as Ransmeier, *The Tennessee Valley Authority*)

<sup>11</sup> Adamson, "Income in Counties of Alabama," 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People*.

<sup>14</sup> Bessie Barker, "A Study of the Living Conditions of One Hundred Families in Limestone County, Alabama on Various Economic Levels" (Masters Thesis, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 1934), 5. (hereafter cited as Barker, "A Study of the Living Conditions")

<sup>15</sup> Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). (hereafter cited as Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm*)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Barker, "A Study of the Living Conditions," 6.

<sup>18</sup> Flynt, *Poor But Proud*.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case Files, RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region. (hereafter cited as TVA Case Files)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> U. S. Census of Population, 1930. Washington, Government Printing Office: 1930.

<sup>24</sup> Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People*, 41.

<sup>25</sup> Rick Bragg, *Ava's Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 87-88.

- <sup>26</sup> George Wolfskill, New Deal Critics: Did They Miss the Point? In Droze, Wilmon H., Wolfskill, George and Leuchtenburg, William E. *Essays on the New Deal* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1969), 59. (hereafter cited as Wolfskill, New Deal Critics)
- <sup>27</sup> William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 332. (hereafter cited as Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt)
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 335.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 51.
- <sup>30</sup> Wolfskill, New Deal Critics.
- <sup>31</sup> Wolfskill, New Deal Critics, 62.
- <sup>32</sup> Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People*, 83.
- <sup>33</sup> Flynt, *Poor But Proud*.
- <sup>34</sup> "Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933," 73<sup>rd</sup> U. S. Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, May 18, 1933, H. R. 5081.
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- <sup>39</sup> Alexander and Ludlow, "Social and Economic Characteristics," 17.
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- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>45</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 55.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid*.
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- <sup>48</sup> Thomas K. McCraw, *Morgan vs. Lilienthal: The Feud Within the TVA* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970).
- <sup>49</sup> Wilmon Henry Droze, *High Dams and Slack Waters: TVA Rebuilds a River* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965).
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- <sup>52</sup> Thomas K. McCraw, *Morgan vs. Lilienthal: The Feud Within the TVA* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970).
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- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>55</sup> Arthur E. Morgan., *The Making of the TVA* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1974), 55.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>57</sup> David E. Lilienthal, *TVA: Democracy on the March* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 5.
- <sup>58</sup> Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 337.

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- <sup>59</sup> Preston J. Hubbard, *Origins of the TVA: The Muscle Shoals Controversy, 1920-1932* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961)
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- <sup>62</sup> Donald Davidson, *The Tennessee: The Old River Frontier to Secession* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1948): 237
- <sup>63</sup> C. Herman Pritchett, *The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Study in Public Administration* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1943).
- <sup>64</sup> Alexander and Ludlow, "Social and Economic Characteristics"
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- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> Lawrence L. Durisch, Research Section, Social and Economic Division, Tennessee Valley Authority "Preliminary and Confidential Report: Families of the Wheeler Reservoir Area," 9 August 1935, RG 142 Box 72, National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region.
- <sup>72</sup> Arthur E. Morgan., *The Making of the TVA* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1974).
- <sup>73</sup> C. Herman Pritchett, *The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Study in Public Administration* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 314.
- <sup>74</sup> Harry L. Case, *Personnel Policy in a Public Agency: The TVA Experience* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1955), 119.
- <sup>75</sup> William U. Chandler, *The Myth of TVA: Conservation and Development in the Tennessee Valley, 1933-1983* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1984).
- <sup>76</sup> Dean Russell, *The TVA Idea* (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1949), 77.

### III. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The young man's crisp, pressed suit stands out in stark contrast to the ragged overalls, work shirt, and tattered dress worn by the man and woman he's visiting. The family listens carefully as this educated man explains the need of the family to relocate from the rich, fertile riverbanks on which they live because they will soon be literally under water. They seem to understand, but are still hesitant to leave despite knowing the benefits the new dams and TVA projects will bring, and despite knowing that refusal to leave could mean death. Later on that evening, as the husband and wife sit at the makeshift table in their two-room frame house and discuss where to go and how to rebuild their lives, the reality of their fate sinks in. They accept it unquestioningly. Signs all around them convince the family of what they know to be true – times are hard, and TVA will help. Their neighbors across the field have accepted relocating, and they seem happy to leave the run-down shacks that have been home for too long. Besides that, TVA seems to genuinely care about their fate, since it went to the trouble of sending individuals to personally visit all the families that surround them, even though sometimes it meant traveling by boat to remote, tiny islands in the river. And the newspapers, a source of authority in this small town, support TVA. Why should the family question these authorities?

Such was the story for many Limestone County residents who were affected by the construction of TVA's Wheeler Dam in 1935. The family relocation process that impacted hundreds of families in Limestone meant more than physically relocating to

another area. The process was also an example of the pervasiveness of a dominant ideology. Communication processes surrounded TVA, the agency responsible for relocation, the most visible of which perhaps was the publication of stories in the local newspapers about TVA and its benefits to the region.

News was communicated by several different media in the rural south in the 1930s, including radio, film and newspapers. Radio certainly played a role in the social and political changes that followed in our society after the Depression.<sup>1</sup> However, only 12% of total United States rural families and 1.6% of rural farm families in Alabama had radios in 1930,<sup>2</sup> a statistic consistent with the rest of the country's farm families according to 1930 national census data, and only 4.5% of all homes on farms had a radio.<sup>3</sup> Some people could afford the luxury of attending motion pictures, which showcased newsreels that were sometimes weeks old. Newspapers, then, served an important function in the communication of current events. Census statistics show that in 1930, 4.3% of the population of the United States were illiterate, while 10.5% of Alabama citizens were illiterate.<sup>4</sup> Limestone County's illiteracy rate was 8.6%.<sup>5</sup> Thus, of the mass media commonly consumed by Americans in the 1930s, newspapers were the most used among Alabama citizens.

In the 1930s, Limestone County, Alabama was served by two weekly newspapers, the *Alabama Courier* and the *Limestone Democrat*. In this thesis, these two newspapers from 1934-1936 were examined as a record of what was communicated about the TVA in general and the family relocation process in particular. Communication theory will be used to understand the relationship between the newspaper messages about the TVA relocation process and the attitudes of the relocated themselves. Analysis will answer the

question, what were the attitudes toward TVA as held by the families affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam, as compared to newspaper coverage of TVA and relocation?

This chapter will discuss the theoretical context for this thesis. First, the relationship between communication, reality and ideology will be explained. Next, a review of relevant media theory will be presented, followed by an explanation of traditional and cultural histories. Finally, the methodology for this thesis will be presented.

### Communication, Reality and Ideology

This thesis examines the reality communicated in Limestone County newspapers about family relocation related to Wheeler Dam's construction. Understanding how that, or any, reality is created requires understanding of the concepts of communication, reality and ideology. Each one will be explained individually. However, after the explanation, it becomes evident that these concepts actually interact with each other in complex ways and in a constant manner.

#### *Communication*

What is communication? This is a fundamental question, an answer for which communication scholars have yet to agree on a precise definition. One definition treats communication as a transactional process, or one that can be represented as a linear model that explains communication as an exchange of messages.<sup>6</sup> In other words, a sender encodes a message for transmittal to a receiver, who then decodes the message and interprets meaning. This process can be inhibited by noise, the term for any factor that can affect the receiver's perception of the message. Noise includes external



environmental factors, such as other sounds, as well as internal factors, such as thoughts or distractions for the listener. This model accounts for feedback, or the process by which the receiver lets the sender know that a message was received and interpreted. A cyclical pattern can result, according to this model, that allows for communication processes to continue in this linear fashion. Thus, communication is explained as a relatively straightforward transmission of information.

While the transmission model tends to dominate a fundamental understanding of the communication process, theorists have developed an alternative definition that focuses on the cultural significance of communication. From this perspective, communication is central to the ritualistic maintenance of culture and is understood as an ongoing, continual process.<sup>7</sup> According to Carey, communication is a “symbolic process whereby realities are produced, maintained, repaired and transformed.”<sup>8</sup> The ritualistic view focuses on the communication processes through which people come together in cultural fellowship, something that differs from the transactional model which focuses on a more direct process of creating messages for transmission to others.<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand the significance of this theory, a breakdown and analysis of its parts is necessary. Crucial to understanding Carey’s definition is an explanation of the concept of symbolic processes. Humans are unique in that we are symbol-using creatures; we use symbols to communicate.<sup>10</sup> A symbol is defined as something that stands for something else.<sup>11</sup> Symbolic processes occur on a daily basis and are the basic components of communication. A basic example of a symbolic process is the use of a linguistic system to communicate thoughts, as ideas are formulated and then encoded for communication by cognitive processes. Words, the building blocks of language, are thus

nothing more than symbols that were created by humans to stand for or represent thoughts, concepts and processes.

Another example of a symbolic process is nonverbal communication behaviors. For example, in the United States, direct eye contact means more than one person gazing at another. Direct eye contact can be used to position oneself in an authoritative role or to initiate a verbal communicative behavior. Taken further, the facial expressions associated with eye contact constitute another set of symbolic processes. If a person frowns at another while making direct eye contact, the person on the receiving end of that nonverbal gesture may interpret that the person staring is not happy. Symbolic processes exist in the context of interpersonal relationships as well. Kind gestures to another person, such as giving flowers, spending time with another person, or purchasing someone gifts, symbolically can communicate one's positive feelings for the other.

A symbolic process more relevant to this thesis, however, is information published in newspapers. What is published in daily newspapers symbolically communicates several different things. First of all, a newspaper is a medium through which information dissemination is possible. So, the papers have a responsibility to their readers to print news stories that are relevant to individuals. Secondly, the public understands that what is printed in newspapers is symbolic of the "truth" in current affairs. Information that is printed in papers is read by a public and expected to be true. Lastly, newspapers, by reputations, are authoritative sources, as the editors and journalists who publish papers are supposedly skilled, trained, and educated in journalism. Thus, newspapers symbolically communicate more than just the news of the day. They also communicate their authoritativeness as one of the oldest media outlets.

## *Reality*

Continuing with Carey's ritualistic definition of communication, another critical concept within the definition is the concept of reality. According to Berger and Luckmann, realities are subjective constructions of social groups.<sup>12</sup> They state that realities are socially constructed for individuals through a lifetime of socialization processes. Aside from any shared meaning symbols or ideas may have, realities are individual in nature yet socially constructed. The influence of others shapes one's belief system and outlook on the world.<sup>13</sup> In other words, Berger and Luckmann assert that objective reality; truth, knowledge and all that is seemingly objective to one person is actually the result of socially constructed influences on thought processes, belief systems, attitudes, and behaviors.<sup>14</sup> Thus, objective realities are only known to use through language and symbolic interaction, both subjective processes. The rules of social interaction with which we are so familiar and we understand as "the way things are" is actually an agreed-upon acceptance of reality. The codes of behavior we follow, the concepts we value, and the attitudes we display are symbols through which we communicate our perspectives or shared meanings. Thus, reality is constantly and ritualistically communicated.

Examples of the differences in objective Truth and subjective truth, or objective Reality and subjective reality, are visible in everyday belief systems with regards to race, class and gender. Whereas the objective Reality is that humans vary widely in skin tones and other physical features, our society has created a subjective reality in which skin color translates to unequal status for persons of different races. An objective Reality in which women and men are biologically different has been culturally transformed into a

subjective gendered reality in which masculinity is more highly valued than femininity. Finally, despite the objective Reality that individual income levels vary widely, our culture has created an ideological hierarchy in which monetary and material wealth, occupation and status, and a multitude of other details combine to ascribe power and prestige according to upper class, middle class and lower class.

Carey asserts that cultures use communication processes to create and recreate specific worldviews. Symbolic processes construct and reconstruct ideologies and realities for societies' individuals. Thus, a conversation between two people is not just an exchange of information. It is the ritualistic perpetuation of cultural ideology through linguistic codes, nonverbal rules of communication, and the interpersonal codes of behavior. Similarly, newspaper stories do not simply report the news. They perpetuate cultural values by framing information in ways that re-create shared or dominant worldviews. News that is selected for publication is deemed "important" according to a particular worldview, while those that aren't published are "unimportant."

Symbolic processes, then, have the power to produce, maintain, repair and transform realities. A reality is initially produced for a person through communication behaviors. For example, parents or parental figures produce realities for their children by defining what is right and wrong, or what is culturally acceptable or unacceptable. Linguistic systems are learned by small children from their parents and others who surround them daily and bombard them with the culture's language. On a broader scale, media have the ability to produce reality for those who consume their content. Nightly news broadcasts are capable of re-producing realities for their viewers, as they communicate what is defined as important. Music played on radio stations produce

realities about whose music is “popular” and, thus, acceptable and worthy of support. Likewise, whatever information newspapers communicate becomes a production of reality for its readers.

Symbolic processes maintain realities by perpetuating the status quo. Once a reality, belief, or perception is produced, if it is consistent with what others in the culture believe, then it is reinforced through a number of avenues, from personal reassurance from close friends and family to overall societal approval as a “normal” functioning member of society. Society rewards those individuals who maintain traditional belief systems without attempting to challenge them. .

Realities are repaired through symbolic processes as well. Repair of realities becomes necessary to mend the public image of popular individuals who act in contradiction to the way the public expects. For example, when former President Bill Clinton was impeached because of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, he sought to repair the reality that he was an immoral, unfit leader through a series of public relations tactics and the later publication of his memoirs and subsequent appearance on television talk shows to promote his side of the story. Other instances calling for a repair of realities can occur in groups of people. When the tragic events of September 11, 2001 occurred, our nation sought to repair the reality that our country was not immune or safe from terrorists. To repair that reality, individuals became more patriotic, displaying flags on front doorsteps and clothing and changing attitudes to reflect positively about the United States.

Finally, Carey states that symbolic processes transform realities. This means that socially constructed realities can change. Transforming reality generally requires a conscious effort on the part of the group in society who holds the most power. The

women's suffrage movement provides an example of how reality was transformed for our country. Early feminists sought to transform public opinion about women, specifically to convince the public that women deserved the right to vote in all elections. Because of strong leadership and the mobilization of feminists across the country, what began as a legal change permitting women to vote soon became a cultural transformation, as society's image of women gradually became that they were competent enough to research candidates and issues and vote.

In summary, Carey offers an alternative explanation of the process of communication. Specifically, Carey explains how symbolic processes contribute to the construction of social and individual realities. Though realities are socially constructed, there are some commonly held points of view, or belief systems, central to any culture, especially in the United States. These commonly-held viewpoints are powerful, pervasive, and perpetuated by society. Crucial to the understanding of the effects and importance of newspapers, or any other media outlet, on society is an understanding of dominant ideologies, how they function, and what they mean.

### *Ideologies*

An ideology is a belief system. Ideologies provide individuals a way of making sense of their worlds or realities. They also dictate one's worldview or outlook on life. Ideologies are the lenses through which one views the world. They influence attitudes, beliefs and values. They provide an outlet for how to rationalize and justify events, and they provide justification for why one structures life in a certain way.

A dominant ideology is the most prevalent point of view in a society. The concept of dominant ideologies can be applied to nearly all aspects of society. For

example, the dominant ideology in our culture with regards to race is that Whites are superior. With regards to class differences, the dominant ideology is that those with the most material wealth superior. The dominant ideology with regards to gender is that males or masculine individuals are more worthy than females or feminine individuals, so the concept of masculinity devalues the concept of femininity. Dominant ideologies exist so that one group maintains power over another, but it is a power granted through social and cultural acquiescence.

Dominant ideologies establish power for one group of people in our society that is filled with dialectic oppositions. Those who are powerful in society are those who are at the very top of the hierarchy, a hierarchy that is necessary because of another dominant ideology that dictates its existence. In other words, we view our lives through the lenses of power. In any social establishment, one must be aware of the power structure that is present in order to follow the rules and be a “normal” societal member. For example, in the public school system, a definite hierarchy exists ranging from the least powerful group, the students, to the educators, to eventually the most powerful principal. Interestingly enough, the least powerful group of students is the group that has the most people. More power is held, then, by a very few number of people. This scenario exists in other places in society, too. Businesses operate under a strict hierarchy and maze of assistants, subordinates, middle managers, boards of directors, vice presidents, chief officers and presidents. Here again, the most populous group, the employees, hold the least amount of power, while the few members on the board of directors, vice presidents, and president are the ones who generally make decisions, have money, and thus have power. Power is so central to the daily operations of our society that hierarchies are even

seen within the home. Nearly every family has a dominant member, be it the parental figure who makes the most money, the oldest living member, or in rarer cases, the one who is responsible for daily household operations. Power is central to our daily lives, and power is crucial to our ideological viewpoints.

Power can be gained in different ways. More importantly, there are different types and levels of power. With regards to political power, one may seek election to a high office such as governor or United States Senate. One's social standing, such as national or even local celebrity status, impacts the amount of power one possesses. The best indicator of one's power, however, comes from one's economic status. Those with monetary wealth and material possessions are those who hold power in contemporary society.

Closely related to the concept of dominant ideologies is the concept of hegemony. Hegemony means authority, and it is related to the authority inherent in dominant ideologies. Part of maintaining a dominant ideology is the implementation of hegemonic processes, or the way in which our society perpetuates those ideologies. Hegemonic processes take several forms. Our legal system serves as a hegemonic function in the creation, passage and enforcement of laws that are supposedly fair to all citizens but actually contribute to the power of one group.

An example of hegemonic processes in the media is found in millions of American homes every night. All three major networks' nightly newscasts are currently anchored by White men. They tell us each night, in 22 minutes, what world and national events were the most relevant that day. Nightly newscasts are an authority source, then, for information. Because that "important" and powerful information is delivered by



White men, the nightly news contributes to the dominant ideology that White men in our country are powerful. It appears to the viewer that White men wearing suits are the ones in our culture entitled with knowledge and the perpetuation of ideas, and as such, power.

The power of a dominant ideology is its pervasiveness. Ideologies offer justification for the way things work in the world. They make everyday processes seem natural and inherent, when actually what is taken for granted as everyday natural behavior is the result of lifetimes of socialization processes and individual influences. According to Strinati, ideology is a “material force which embodies people’s imaginary relationship to their real world.”<sup>15</sup> When one rationalizes a behavior by writing it off as “just the way it is,” an ideology is at work. For example, a group of people who were told by a governmental authority to leave their homes because of the danger of flooding may have offered little resistance because those individuals accepted their plight as natural, or out of their control. Of issue, too, was the power of the government over the public. This government was largely comprised of White, educated, wealthy men who had thus been defined as “better” than the public they served – an understanding that all parties had developed over their entire lives. Ideologies in that sense, then, can rationalize behavior, especially with regards to race, class or gender issues.

Though ideologies, like realities and cultures, are socially constructed, they seem natural, objective, and unquestionable. Ideologies are so widely accepted that they encourage individuals in a less powerful group to participate in their own oppression. Thus, the ruling group or class’s power is maintained through hegemonic processes that reinforce dominant ideologies, and the role of every individual within a society, not just the powerful, participate in the perpetuation and reinforcement of dominant ideologies.

Dominant ideologies are just that – dominant. They are belief systems, viewpoints, and worldviews that become dominant because the majority of the population believe them and perpetuate them in everyday life. Dominant ideology functions in the minds of a public, causing all actions and thoughts to be mediated by socially constructed paradigms, ideas and symbols that ensure the perpetuation of long-standing power structures or hierarchies. In this way, dominant ideologies work to serve the purposes of granting power to one group through the voluntary participation of the oppressed group – a group that does not see the power structure and their larger place in the system as anything other than “natural.”<sup>16</sup>

Though in this country they tend to favor this segment of the population, dominant ideologies are not the arbitrary creation of a handful of White, educated, wealthy men who meet weekly in a New York City skyscraper to discuss ways and plans for maintaining their dominance. Rather, dominant ideologies are maintained and perpetuated in even the smallest habitual actions committed by individuals who are not part of either of the aforementioned groups. Before Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a White person, Blacks accepted their defined roles by sitting in the backs of buses for years. In our country, the importance of correct gender socialization is evident from the first hour of birth, as baby girls are quickly bundled in a pink blanket while baby boys are wrapped in blue. A father that scolds his son for playing with his sister’s dolls because they are “girl’s toys” perpetuates the dominant ideology that boys seek toys that are “appropriately” masculine, like trucks and toy soldiers.

Carey’s definition of communication provides a solid starting point for understanding theory behind how the media operate and, specifically, what role media

play in the creation of culture and dominant ideologies. This thesis looks at newspapers' representations of the TVA's family relocation process. As such, a section on key aspects of media theory will provide background on how newspaper reports are interpreted as compared to what actually happened to the people who were relocated.

### Media Theory

Media outlets exist for purposes other than serving as outlets for the dissemination of ideas to a public. News media serve an important function in a democratic society, in that they are responsible for the dissemination of information and the maintenance of a free marketplace of ideas. In other words, news media are responsible for presenting relevant current events and issues, as well as being honest and fair in that information presentation. On the other hand, media outlets also exist to make a profit. They are, above all else, businesses or commercial presses in the case of newspapers, which means their primary purpose is to make money.<sup>17</sup> Some theorists and critics go so far as to say that the profit-driven nature of the industry dictates content. Newspapers serve two main functions, editorial and business.

Public opinion about media outlets is mixed. With regard to newspapers, the public feels that papers should show concern for the good of the community they serve, and they should remain impartial in their reporting of news stories.<sup>18</sup> However, a political slant is potentially revealed in editorial sections of papers and the way news stories are framed. The public perception about newspapers is that they should function to promote democracy and respect First Amendment rights to free speech and publication of free ideas. Even if a political slant is revealed, democracy is still perpetuated in the public debate sparked by what is written. A problem can arise when the information

presented is one-sided or incomplete, especially when readers take notice. Nevertheless, newspapers are perceived by the public to print the truth; they are perceived to publish newsworthy stories and information to help them in everyday lives and keep them informed about local, national and world events.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of public opinion, though, the two main functions of newspapers remain to serve editorial and business functions within the community. The editorial function of newspapers is to publish truthful information about relevant current affairs and events. Newspaper editors and journalists have the freedom to express their personal opinions in print, which can spark debate among a paper's readers, promote special interests, or simply make commentary on current events. Though this editorial function grants newspaper writers some power in potentially shaping public opinion, doing so might conflict with the paper's need for fair reporting.<sup>20</sup>

The main purpose of a newspaper, then, "is to tell people what is happening in the world, be it good, bad or neither."<sup>21</sup> Local newspapers play a special role in community building and serve an important function in small communities that may not be the target of larger media outlets' attention.<sup>22</sup> Newspapers bring relevant stories to individuals' doorsteps. They serve a special function in a democracy, as they are responsible for the perpetuation of a marketplace of free ideas. In other words, newspapers play a political role in the perpetuation of democracy and ensuring that all voices are fairly represented.<sup>23</sup> Many people assume newspapers to be honest and fair in their reporting practices, to hire competent, educated journalists who take their jobs seriously, and to serve the public by selecting content for print that is the most accurate, timely and relevant as possible.

Another political role of newspapers is that of serving as a government watchdog.<sup>24</sup> Newspapers hold a special and powerful place in our society, as they have the resources to gather and disseminate information about people, places, events, and government. Newspapers are especially important in local markets because research show that local media outlets usually support local institutions.<sup>25</sup> Because the First Amendment provides for the freedom of the press, newspapers take full advantage of their freedom to publish truthful information, even if it exposes powerful governmental scandals, without fear of retribution.<sup>26</sup> These constitute the watchdog function of the press.<sup>27</sup> Former President Nixon and the Watergate scandal is a classic example of newspapers protecting the public interest by exposing criminal acts in our nation's highest offices. Similarly, some feel that newspapers possess a social responsibility to perform checks and balances on the federal government.<sup>28</sup> These functions categorize journalists and the newspapers they work for as public servants.<sup>29</sup> Theories of watchdog journalism posit that the media are responsible with communicating if the government is doing harm to a person or group of people. Thus, media should keep the public informed about governmental decisions and policy-making. The public has the right to know the truth, and journalists should tell the truth.<sup>30</sup>

Another watchdog element is that newspapers serve the collective good or public interest.<sup>31</sup> If this is the case, then the newspaper is held accountable to standards set by the general public. Newspapers should be socially responsible.<sup>32</sup> Another similar view is the guard dog function of the media. While media generally protect powerful institutions within a community, the guard dog media are wary of the powerful in harming citizens.<sup>33</sup>

The watchdog and guard dog functions together mean that newspapers should work for the common good of the communities they serve.<sup>34</sup>

Besides the responsibilities associated with the editorial and reporting functions of newspapers, however, it is important to remember the second and perhaps more important function to those who work on newspapers – the business function. Like most media outlets, regardless of the responsibility of fair and balanced reporting, newspapers exist to make a profit. Newspapers could not exist if it were not for subscriptions, sales, and especially the large amount of advertising dollars companies pay yearly. Thus, the editorial and business functions threaten a delicate balance that is necessary between responsible journalism and profit margins.<sup>35</sup>

Newspapers are popular and successful if they attract readers.<sup>36</sup> The stories that make headlines need to be interesting to readers to maintain subscription rates and increase the likelihood that the paper will be purchased. The immense pressure on newspapers to please readers is a potential danger to the maintenance of a marketplace of free ideas. That is to say that the stories that are the most important to readers are not always necessarily the ones that are published, as human interest stories, sensational stories, the daily lives of celebrities and scandals often take precedence over the “hard news” that is perceived to be tedious and irrelevant to some readers.

If this is the case, then what constitutes what is newsworthy? Who decides what is published in daily papers? Who decides what becomes news? There is great significance in what is considered news. Space and time restraints restrict the chances of a newsworthy event being brought to the public’s attention. An editor’s function is to

ensure that the best quality and most relevant content is printed. Thus, the editor is in a powerful gatekeeping position.

The gatekeeping process necessarily results in agenda setting.<sup>37</sup> The agenda setting function of the mass media states that media do not necessarily tell a public what to think, rather they tell the public what to think about.<sup>38</sup> In other words, editors have the power to set agendas and influence attitudes and public perceptions about political and current events. In their initial study, McCombs and Shaw argued that media can influence attitudes toward political events.<sup>39</sup> Whereas newspapers are expected to provide an accurate representation of world events and culture, the agenda setting theory says that this representation is limited or even impossible, because what gets published is a representation of what the editor thinks is important. Thus, the editor is in a powerful position, as he or she has the means to perpetuate dominant ideologies about local, national or worldwide events. In a sense, the newspaper editor serves as an opinion leader.

An even more powerful influence on newspapers is the pressure to attract advertisers and, in turn, profits. Newspapers exist as profit-oriented institutions that focus on bottom-line profits. Advertising is the dominant source of revenue for newspapers. The business function thus has the potential to exert a negative influence on the quality of media content. In other words, because newspapers exist to make money, logic follows that their content is influenced by this profit-driven process. For example, if a reporter for a local newspaper approaches his or her editor with a story idea about exposing the shady business practices of a local car dealership that is one of the newspaper's biggest advertisers, the editor may reject that story on the basis that

publishing negative information about that dealership would result in a loss of advertising dollars. Though newspapers serve a function to promote public welfare, which would have been served through warning readers about faulty business practices, in this case, profits have dictated content and thus left the public uninformed.

Because the public perceives media outlets, especially newspapers, as authoritative, trusting sources for providing information, many unquestioningly accept the information presented as “truth.” But, considering the agenda setting theory together with the pressures editors face to make a profit, this means that what one reads is not unbiased truth. A newspaper must sell to as many people as possible while maintaining good relationships with advertisers and attracting more advertisers. At what cost will editors choose the business responsibilities of the paper over the public interest in a paper’s content? Is it even possible to keep such a combination in check?

On the one hand, newspapers serve the public interest in functioning as a watchdog for governmental agencies and activities. On the other hand, newspapers must exist as a business institution, or by making profits from advertisers and readers. Newspapers, like other media outlets, seek to maximize audiences to maximize profits.<sup>40</sup> The pressures of existing to make a profit can affect content, as newspapers are criticized sometimes for publishing content their readers want to see, not necessarily what their readers need to see in a free-market democracy.

Such are the concepts associated with political economy. Strinati defines political economy as a way to explain the relationship between media ownership and the content communicated by media outlets.<sup>41</sup> If viewing a culture through the lens of political economy, one looks to media infrastructure, namely the profit-driven nature of media



outlets, to explain what content gets published, what ideas or opinions are communicated, and how politics, economy and power influence the culture in which we live.<sup>42</sup>

Political economy says that cultures are constructed through hegemonic processes, which means that cultures are created by individuals acting under constraints of dominant ideology. Political economy offers explanation for the relationship between the structural characteristics of media and the creation of cultures.<sup>43</sup> Political economy posits that what is popular within a culture is brought to the forefront of public attention by a ruling class seeking to perpetuate the dominant ideology in society while garnering the most profit.<sup>44</sup> In other words, “the political economy perspective sees the mass media conveying dominant values and assumptions which derive from and serve the interests of the ruling class and which reproduce the prevailing structure of class power.”<sup>45</sup>

For example, newspapers play a role in the political economy of a society in their dependence upon advertisers. Not only will newspapers print paid advertisements for companies and products, but they also might, in an interest to protect public opinion about that advertiser, refrain from printing stories that may have negative implications for the company. On television, if a pharmaceutical company is a big advertiser during a nightly newscast, the news outlet puts itself at risk by running a story that exposes potentially harmful side effects of their drugs. In these ways, profit-driven institutions that are supposed to serve the public good have compromised values, thus bringing forth the concept of political economy.

Processes of political economy are examples of hegemonic processes put in place to maintain authority and help perpetuate the dominant ideology. Even common sense is mediated by hegemonic processes. Gramsci says that members of any culture participate

in their oppression in the everyday choices they make.<sup>46</sup> Hegemonic processes legitimize the already established authority. Because of the structural characteristics and elite class ownership, mass media outlets play a role in hegemony, in that they help secure the class inequalities already present in society.<sup>47</sup> In the case of newspapers, then, they serve symbolic functions in the reinforcement of the legitimacy of established authority. Hegemonic processes are the vehicles that secure control for a ruling class without the use of force. Thus, the culture in a society is the result of a series hegemonic processes that perpetuate dominant ideologies.<sup>48</sup>

Academicians that study ideologies and hegemonic processes are part of the rising number of cultural studies experts. A culture is a whole way of life of a group of people.<sup>49</sup> Cultural studies, then, examines “the entire range of a society’s arts, beliefs, institutions, and communicative practices.”<sup>50</sup> Cultural studies as a movement draws from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, communication and history.<sup>51</sup> Those who classify themselves as cultural studies experts deal with cultural practices and trends, but cultural histories allow for the study of past cultures. Though good historical accounts place events and writings in context, traditional histories generally do not focus on the culture more than the event or people of which they study. Differences in the study and writing of traditional and cultural histories will be explained in the following section.

#### Traditional and Cultural History

The study of history has relevance and importance in academics and other places as well. Knowing history helps us to know ourselves, provides insight as to the decisions we make today, and helps us understand connections between the past and present, and future.<sup>52</sup> History provides us with insight and provides material that enhances our

understanding of things past and present.<sup>53</sup> Through their works, historians help explain and describe past events, or help us to know the past.<sup>54</sup> As one author writes, “what historians do best is to make connections with the past in order to illuminate the problems of the present.”<sup>55</sup>

Historians seek to present the facts of things past in an unbiased manner.<sup>56</sup> History is concerned not only with facts, dates, names, and places. Good histories are concerned, too, with the larger picture of any historical account, including contextual factors such as social, economic and political conditions.<sup>57</sup> According to one historian, history “becomes an attempt to reimagine the past while recovering it.”<sup>58</sup> Though these are the basics of a traditional history, cultural histories look more specifically to the culture to help explain historical events. Though this thesis has elements of an organizational history in that it examines the TVA as an institution, the thesis is most closely related to a cultural history. This section will explain the similarities and differences in traditional and cultural histories.

To create a history, one must rely on both primary and secondary sources.<sup>59</sup> Primary sources are artifacts and writings that come directly from the person or event of study.<sup>60</sup> They include diaries, written letters, personal testimonies, newspapers, magazines, and, for this thesis, case files written by social workers for TVA. Secondary sources are anything derivative of primary sources.<sup>61</sup> They include all other historical artifacts, including books, articles, and other historical accounts written after the event. If the finished historical account is likened to a house, primary sources are the foundation that solidifies the argument, where secondary sources are the framework that makes connections and fills in gaps. Personal bias and human error present limitations to any

historical account.<sup>62</sup> Secondary sources are subject to researcher bias, in that once a new historical account is written, it is removed from the primary sources or actual event.

Traditional histories consider three elements: the location of the events, the context and social order in which the events occurred, and by what criteria were ideas accepted as truth or rejected as false.<sup>63</sup> History is concerned, too, with relationships among people.<sup>64</sup> Since this is a historical study of discourse, or an ongoing communication process with a group of people, these three aspects are important to understanding of what messages were communicated by TVA.

This thesis has elements of a local history as well. Local histories deal with a specific area, such as a city or community, instead of a larger country or the entire world.<sup>65</sup> Local histories have importance in this country because of the fragmented nature of culture in our country. As Kammen writes, “more often than not, the most critical decisions affecting the lives of ordinary people were made by local citizens and implemented through local institutions.”<sup>66</sup> Though critical decisions were made at the federal or national level by TVA and its directors, decisions about land clearing and what was printed in newspapers were local decisions. Family relocation was a very local process requiring many decisions to be made by case workers on a situational basis. It serves us well to look at this specific group affected by TVA’s relocation, because most literature about TVA speaks of how it impacted an entire region of people, not just the individual.

There exists a definite connection between history and culture,<sup>67</sup> as well as a connection between history and the social sciences.<sup>68</sup> There also exists, for some individuals, a desire to know more than just past historical events and how they affected

the culture for the future; these individuals also seek to understand how the underlying, contextual cultural practices may have influenced or impacted those events. These questions arose in the historical academic community in the early 1900s, thus bringing forth the origins of cultural history in the United States. Farrand, a historian concerned with the overall knowledge of United States history and the divisions that were present in the study of history, sought to research in-depth the “inner life of the people of the United States.”<sup>69</sup> The problem then, and now, with cultural history is the complex nature of the study. It is difficult to define culture and, in turn, difficult to succinctly define cultural history.<sup>70</sup> Cultural histories and traditional histories differ. While both categories seek to represent the truth of the past, cultural histories take into consideration the contextual, cultural factors that surround events. Cultural histories look to the lifestyle of the people being studied as essential, contributing factors to events and decisions. Where traditional histories focus on events in the political and economic worlds, cultural histories recognize the value of understanding a way of life of people of times past as explanation for why events occurred.

This thesis draws a connection between history, communication and culture. It incorporates elements of local history, in that it deals with a small community of individuals, but on a broader scale it connects elements of local and national history, as TVA was a program created by the federal government. It examines how culture led the people affected by family relocation to participate in their own oppression and poverty, and explains how the dominant ideology was reflected in the newspapers. This is a cultural history because it examines the ideologies in a community and how the culture

reflected those ideologies. It is a cultural history because it is concerned with the relationship between “everyday structures and change.”<sup>71</sup>

Also, this thesis examines how culture can serve as a catalyst for change and how cultural systems serve to reinforce a sense of community.<sup>72</sup> This thesis differs from traditional history in that it focuses more on the common people in society and less on the ones who exercised power. This is a common characteristic of less traditional histories.<sup>73</sup> It examines historical texts, namely the TVA case files and Limestone County newspapers, as evidence for interpretation about a culture and community. It considers how cultures are socially constructed, another element setting it apart from traditional histories.<sup>74</sup>

Cultural studies and cultural history provide a way of understanding human behavior.<sup>75</sup> Culture and history are interlinked largely because of their dependence on each other. In our economy, it is important to understand culture, as “it is through explicit social values that people are given the personal ambition and essential knowledge to keep the system going.”<sup>76</sup> This cultural history seeks to understand whether the newspaper accounts of the family relocations accurately represented the attitudes of the families themselves. The role of the dominant ideology informs the analysis of detailed records kept on each family relocated and newspaper accounts for information about TVA and family relocation.

There is no carefully choreographed methodological approach to use when writing a historical account.<sup>77</sup> Historical writing today draws from other disciplines for theoretical and methodological purposes.<sup>78</sup> Historians sometimes utilize methodological techniques from those found in the social sciences.<sup>79</sup> Cultural studies as a discipline is

concerned with the reading of texts in ascribing meanings to events.<sup>80</sup> Thus, debate exists over the best methodology to utilize in creating a cultural history. The next section will explain the methodological process this thesis utilizes in researching and analyzing the data found in both newspaper records and TVA case files.

### Methodology

A qualitative approach is appropriate for the study of both culture and history, and the information in the primary sources lends itself well to a qualitative analysis. Also, because the newspapers and case files contain information in narrative form, a thematic analysis allows for the most comprehensive type of information gathering in this case. This research is qualitative, too, because the case files and newspaper accounts can be considered rhetorical texts for thematic analysis. According to one source, history should be considered in the genre of narratives or story-telling.<sup>81</sup> The study of narratives lends itself well to qualitative research methods, especially if narratives are studied using a thematic analysis. Thematic analyses involve a process of reading through textual materials. Upon this reading, the researcher scans for consistent themes within the content and later codes the text, or categorizes it into those consistent themes.

Another important aspect of qualitative research lies in the development of grounded theory. Grounded theory can be defined as the “discovery of theory from data.”<sup>82</sup> Theory develops from the researcher, and the theory that is generated is presented at the conclusion of the presentation and analysis of research. Theory and categorical divisions are created by a process known as open coding, which consists of breaking down the text to allow comparisons and a search for similarities and differences within.<sup>83</sup> Just as there is no one best definition for cultural studies, there is no one best

methodology for conducting a cultural history.<sup>84</sup> Textual analysis tends to lend itself to such studies, though it is not the only methodological choice of researchers. As the primary sources contain data that are largely in story or narrative form, thematic analyses are the preferred methodology.

A cultural history methodology that relies upon thematic analyses is the best methodological approach for this thesis. The primary sources for this work are primarily the individual case studies done by TVA for each family in Limestone County that was affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam as well as the two Limestone County newspapers of the time, the *Limestone Democrat* and the *Alabama Courier*. These newspapers, like others of the time, had the ability to shape and influence public opinion.<sup>85</sup> As Lears asserts, “the rhetoric of a dominant culture may contain more clues to its hegemony.”<sup>86</sup> This makes them valid artifacts from which to study the effects of TVA on the people of Limestone County.

For this study, both the TVA case files and Limestone County newspapers will be treated as artifacts. The stories that they tell about the lives of those who were relocated and the information the public received about TVA will be analyzed thematically. The case files will be read, looking for consistent or recurrent themes that allow for a snapshot description about the lifestyles, living conditions, income, expressed attitudes and feelings towards TVA, and the amount of time it took to successfully relocate the homes. Each issue of the two Limestone County newspapers from 1934-1936 will be read, allowing for a summary of the types of articles published about TVA, in general, as well as the family relocation process.



Preliminary TVA research revealed that little information was available in the literature about the family relocation process for any of the dams constructed. Starting with a basic knowledge that families were relocated because of the necessity of flooding lands along the riverbanks, a search on the Tennessee Valley Authority website provided the phone number for the TVA archive in its national headquarters in Knoxville, Tennessee. After a few questions about how I could find more information about family relocation, the archivist informed me of the publicly available TVA annual reports that gave detailed reports of progress on each dam, including budgetary information, schedule of progress, accounts of how much land was flooded and how many families were affected. In addition to such information TVA made public, the archivist informed me about the case files that TVA kept for each family relocated.

TVA hired and trained social workers to personally visit each of the 14,725 families that were to be relocated in North Alabama and Southern Tennessee. For Wheeler Dam, a group of individuals were responsible for visiting all 835 families affected. The case workers, as they were referred to in literature, kept records of each family's relocation progress. Though they may have been scribed from handwritten notes, they were officially filed as typewritten documents, in a file folder for each individual family. They were filed in boxes by dam, alphabetically by family name, with each head of household handwritten in pencil at the top of each folder. TVA used the information in the files to calculate exactly how many families were relocated and to keep track of demographic information on each family. However, the case files paint a much more detailed picture of the residents than standard information about race, gender, children, ages, and addresses. Information in narrative form is also available, as detailed

notes on each conversation the case worker had with the family are included in the files. More importantly, all of the case files are currently housed in their original form in East Point, Georgia at the National Archives and Records Administration Southeast Repository. As such, frequent visits were made to the archives for initial research and, eventually, to photocopy every record available for Limestone County families. A finding aid was utilized to search for the Limestone families, as all records for Wheeler Dam were filed together, alphabetically, without regard for county of residence. Limestone County was chosen to serve as a representation of Wheeler families, as it had the largest number of families directly affected by family removal of all counties involved in Wheeler's construction.

After securing information in the case files, it was necessary to select which newspapers would be used for analysis. There were several papers available in North Alabama in the 1930s, especially in neighboring counties of Madison, Morgan and Lauderdale, *The Huntsville Times*, *The Decatur Daily* and *The Florence Times*, respectively. National newspapers, like *The New York Times*, were considered as well. However, the two smaller, local, weekly newspapers in Limestone County were chosen because of their proximity to the people affected by family relocation in that particular region. As such, the two Limestone County papers were probably the most readily and easily accessible, and most widely read, by residents.

Next, it was necessary to select which issues would be read. Family relocation for Wheeler families took place in the fall of 1935. Originally, TVA planned to relocate each family by October 31, 1935. However, after case workers began talking to families in the field, it became apparent that a deadline extension was necessary. Case files

indicate that a verbal extension of December 31, 1935 was given to many families who had not relocated by the October 31 deadline. Case files indicate also, however, that many families were not relocated until March of 1936, a move that placed those families in grave danger of being flooded. Certainly, then, newspapers from 1935 and 1936 were read for information specific to family relocation. However, considering that Athens, the county seat of Limestone, was the first Alabama city to receive TVA power in May 1934 because of nearby Wilson Dam, it seemed necessary to read newspapers from 1934 to obtain a complete picture of how the newspapers communicated information about TVA. So, each issue of the two Limestone County newspapers, the *Alabama Courier* and the *Limestone Democrat*, were read for the years of 1934-1936.

After preliminary research of case files, newspapers, and general literature about TVA's history and projects, a research question was formulated. Though several questions were forming, one overarching question needed to be answered: what were the attitudes toward TVA as held by the families affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam, as compared to newspaper coverage of the TVA and relocation? This question was selected because it served as an umbrella question for individual inquiries that arose later. Above all, this thesis seeks to understand how the relocated families felt about being forced to move and what information was published in newspapers about their plight. This question leads to answers as to whether or not the relocated families were happy, or if they appreciated the TVA or the benefits it brought to the region. This question also answers how the newspapers felt about TVA, and if the newspapers communicated positive or negative messages concerning TVA. This research question

allowed for detailed explanation of the historical beginnings of the TVA and of newspapers, and provided for a clear theoretical foundation for analysis.

This study is a qualitative study, as both primary sources, the case files and newspapers, are viewed as rhetorical artifacts rich with information in largely narrative form. How, then, should the research question be answered using qualitative data? First, the primary sources will provide information that paints a picture of the culture of Limestone County residents of the mid 1930s. Contextual factors, such as the Depression, long-standing poverty of the region, popular occupations, and dominant worldviews, will be considered against the evidence in the primary sources. Communication theory with regards to the process of communication, the production of reality, and the meaning and power of dominant ideology was selected.

### Conclusion

Cultures and realities are socially constructed through socialization processes, symbolic processes, and communication. While reality and ideology are abstract concepts, they are things that we perpetuate. They are not directly imposed on us, but we agree with them and in doing so we participate in our own oppression. We agree with the hierarchy because the reality constructed the ideology as normal.

This thesis seeks to understand the reality of those who were relocated as compared to the reality of TVA's presence in Limestone County as portrayed in local newspapers. It seeks to demonstrate a link between history, communication and culture. It is an examination of what reality was produced, maintained, repaired or transformed by newspapers for the hundreds who were affected by Wheeler Dam's construction and, subsequently, forced to move from their homes and land. Comparisons and contrasts will

be made of the two realities, and conclusions will be drawn. Using theory as outlined in this chapter, information as presented in newspapers and in case files from the family relocation process will be analyzed, and the information in the analysis will explain what role the newspapers had in communicating the changes to the community.

Historical accounts have a way of becoming etched into the collective mindset.<sup>87</sup> History sometimes, though, is in contradiction to previously held beliefs about what was true in times past.<sup>88</sup> Historians should try to change dominant perspectives about the past.<sup>89</sup> This thesis seeks to understand the history behind the TVA's family relocation process and to discover if the few pieces of information that exist about the process are accurate, regardless of the long-standing myths about TVA and family relocation. The next chapter is a presentation of the information in the TVA family relocation case files and summary of articles written about TVA from Limestone County newspapers. The case files will provide a detailed glimpse into the quality of life of the residents, how they felt about the case workers, how they felt about the relocation process, and how readily or stubbornly they complied with case workers demands. The *Alabama Courier* and *Limestone Democrat* gleanings will tell us the quantity and content of information that was communicated about the family relocation process to residents of Limestone County.

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#### IV. TVA IS ON ITS WAY: A COMPARISON OF CASE FILES AND NEWSPAPERS

The recent cotton harvest brought even less income than the farmer expected, and he hadn't expected much because of the Depression. The farmer thought the TVA man knew a lot about farming, but did not fully understand the concept of a farm family's life hinging on a combination of luck, weather and soil conditions to yield a good crop. The TVA man seemed to care less with each passing visit (he'd been to their farms three times in two months) that his family did not have a place to relocate, much less the money needed to rebuild. Though life for him as a tenant farmer was simple, it provided all his family thought they needed. Until now. The farmer was increasingly suspicious of this educated man who asked a lot of personal questions and wrote down all of his answers. Though he hadn't read a newspaper in some time, the talk of his neighbors let him know that towards town, people were excited about TVA. Even though it was an inconvenience, the farmer finally agreed to move, partly to get the case worker off his back, partly to save his family, and partly because he was left with no other option.

The Tennessee Valley Authority promised to rid many southerners of the ills of poverty by harnessing the power of the Tennessee River, a body of water that was a source of pride, productivity and problems. TVA's task was not just to construct a series of dams to control the river and provide affordable electricity. Though that was a difficult undertaking in itself, it was only a stepping stone towards a larger goal of

complete regional planning and development, including outreach programs, disease control, and overall quality of life improvements. Physically manipulating tons of land and water was a daunting endeavor. But perhaps the most challenging aspect of all TVA projects was the family relocation process. In addition to clearing hundreds of thousands of acres of trees, shrubbery and woods, all houses and other physical structures that were in the way of the reservoir areas had to be cleared as well. Though TVA claimed to pay fair-market value for the homes and lands they purchased, the process of relocating the people who were affected was not a simple transaction. Moving families out of their homes was a delicate task that could not be ignored by TVA officials. The reality for residents whose homes were destroyed by the creation of dams was that they had to find new places to live.

Despite overwhelmingly positive press and chatter that surrounded TVA, in reality some people felt inconvenienced and frustrated with the mandate to relocate. Some people were wary of TVA and the changes it promised. If people had concerns about TVA or family relocation, did anyone hear them or offer them an outlet to express frustration? As explained in the previous chapter, newspapers are expected to serve a social responsibility to report accurate and balanced information about events that impact their readers. As such, what information was communicated in the newspapers about the family relocation process? More importantly, what were the attitudes toward TVA as held by the families affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam, as compared to newspaper coverage of the event at the time?

This chapter tells the story of the oppressed and poverty-stricken people who lived along the Tennessee River during the time of Wheeler Dam's construction. It is

told in their words as translated by specially trained TVA case workers. It is the story of anticipation for change as seen from the perspective of newspapers. It is the story of the hopes and expectations that this region would be saved from poverty thanks to electricity and the TVA. It is also the story of the merchants who saw, for the first time in years, booming business. This section presents the information in the family relocation case files for Wheeler Dam and Limestone County, telling the story of the lives, opinions, and attitudes of the families who were affected by relocation. Following is historical background on the *Limestone Democrat* and *Alabama Courier*, the papers that served Limestone County when relocation took place, how TVA locally handled family relocation, and a comparison of what was written in both case files and newspapers about family relocation and TVA. Taken together, this information establishes the foundation for interpreting what the families experienced and what local papers reported.

#### Newspapers in Limestone County

During the time of Wheeler's construction, Limestone County was served by two newspapers, the *Alabama Courier* and the *Limestone Democrat*. Both were weekly papers available each Thursday. Over the years, Limestone County was served by several newspapers, but these two stood the test of time and continued to serve the county until the mid 1960s, when they merged to become the *Athens-Limestone News Courier*. In 1935 the *Democrat* had a circulation of 1,575,<sup>1</sup> while the *Courier* reached around 2,000 readers. Subscription rates for both papers were similar. A one-year subscription to the *Democrat* was \$1.50. The same rate applied to the *Courier* if the subscriber lived outside the county, and the paper was offered at a reduced subscription rate of \$1.00 if the individual lived within Limestone County.

The two papers were similar in structure and content. Lifestyle and social sections in both papers were prominent, with detailed columns about happenings in individual communities within Limestone County, such as Shanghai, Elkmont, Cairo, and Pleasant Grove. Feature stories and advertisements promoted upcoming shows at the local Ritz Theater near the downtown courthouse square. National news events, including information about President Roosevelt and his continuing New Deal relief efforts, made headlines, as did major world events. Since these were papers with local community circulation, stories of local interest were prevalent as well, including content about how the crops were shaping up for the farmers and overall economic trends. There was also a considerable amount of space devoted to fictional writing.

Despite their similarities, overall content differences in the *Courier* and *Democrat* were obvious. The *Courier* targeted a more rural audience, while the *Democrat's* content featured less about farms and agriculture and more about politics, the economy, and national issues. The difference in the target audiences was noticeable in the types and frequencies of advertisements in each. The *Courier's* advertisements were generally small in relation to the *Democrat's* larger and more frequent quarter- and half-page sized advertisements. The *Courier's* main advertisements were those for medicines and health-related products. Though these types of ads appeared in the *Democrat*, it featured more advertisements for motor vehicles, the latest film at the Ritz Theater downtown, dry cleaners, and suits. Ads in the *Courier* became more professional in appearance from 1934-1936. Thus, the *Courier* targeted more rural readers while the *Democrat* targeted the more affluent members of the community.

Of all the farm laborers in the Wheeler reservoir area, only 25% subscribed to either newspapers or magazines.<sup>2</sup> Percentages of individuals who read no current literature ranged from 90.9% of farm laborers to 50% of landowners, with sharecroppers and tenants falling within that range.<sup>3</sup> Despite the percentage of people who may or may not have regularly read a newspaper, two newspapers existed in the 1930s that were published especially for Limestone County residents. They had circulations of approximately 2,000 each. The *Democrat* and *Courier* probably understood their niche market and target audience, which did not necessarily include the rural families affected by relocation. Still, TVA directly affected the lives of every Limestone County resident, and TVA was a popular topic in newspapers in the 1930s. Newspapers were one way that the public learned about TVA and what it would mean for their city and county.

Between the years of 1934-1936, when TVA was conducting most of its construction projects in North Alabama, the agency was a regular topic of stories and advertisements. Both the *Limestone Democrat* and *Alabama Courier* frequently mentioned TVA, the benefits of new, affordable electricity, and the fact that electrical appliances were finally for sale. Most articles about TVA were front page stories; it was unusual to find a TVA update hidden amidst the middle section of the paper. Though Limestone County was suffering from the greatest economic depression it had ever known, the newspapers promoted a renewed sense of optimism and hopefulness, largely attributed to TVA and President Roosevelt's New Deal relief initiatives.

#### TVA at Wheeler

TVA was created to bring relief to the "nation's number one economic problem,"<sup>4</sup> the rural south. The south's problems weren't just economic in nature. Adequate

housing, good health, and education were luxuries for the poorest people in this area. These social problems and, ironically, the livelihood of Limestone County residents largely were derived from one source – the Tennessee River. TVA hoped that a series of dams from the river's source in Knoxville to its end in Paducah, Kentucky would be the catalyst needed to spring the area into economic and social recovery.

Wheeler Dam was an especially crucial element of the TVA plan. Only about 15 miles away from Wilson Dam, the two were necessarily a short distance from each other because of the unique and problematic river conditions at Muscle Shoals. There, the river dropped 93 feet creating a nearly impassable corridor for trade and commerce ships, and making the lives of residents even more unstable because of the constant flooding and erosion the wild river caused. Thus, agriculture, the most dependable form of income in this area, was hindered.

Building a dam requires more than tons of concrete, incredible forces of physical labor, and precise, well-developed plans. In this case, dam construction also necessitated the flooding of thousands of acres of land. As the land along the riverbanks was the most fertile and usually the best suited for farming, it was where a lot of rural families lived. Those families, from the TVA perspective, were all that stood in the way of a better life, electricity, education, improved health, and an economic jump start for an entire region. Simply put, they had to go.

The TVA Act was signed into law by Franklin D. Roosevelt in May 1933. It intended to create a series of dams along the Tennessee River in southern Tennessee and north Alabama. The dams would provide a method of flood control, make the river more navigable, and produce an enormous amount of hydroelectric energy to be sold to nearby

residents at affordable prices. Construction began on Wheeler Dam on November 31, 1933 and was finally completed on October 3, 1936. Family relocation began in October 1935, nearly two years after the construction of Wheeler Dam began. Although the land behind the dam would not flood until after Wheeler was completed, the TVA wanted to relocate all families in the newly created floodzone well before any water inundated the area. It would be, for the most part, a gradual process. Athens began receiving TVA power in May, 1934. It was the first city in Alabama to reap the benefits of cheap electricity thanks to Wilson Dam, which was constructed in the 1920s but overtaken by the TVA upon its creation.

#### Benefits of TVA

Because of the TVA, a national spotlight shone upon the Tennessee Valley. The changes the agency made were sources of a renewed sense of optimism and excitement. TVA would bring tangible benefits to the Tennessee Valley, such as improved housing, health conditions, disease control, and overall regional planning and development, including the introduction of affordable electricity. Residents had reason to be thankful for this governmental agency. Also, with all the attention suddenly on the previously overlooked area of the country, southern residents began to feel important and no longer ignored. This excitement was reflected and represented in the newspapers.

TVA was the cause of visits of dignitaries to the poverty-stricken region. When Nebraska Senator George Norris, the “father of the TVA,” made a visit to nearby Sheffield, he was given a standing ovation for being a “valiant warrior of a thousand battles for the rights of the masses.”<sup>5</sup> The *Courier* covered David E. Lilenthal’s visit to nearby Jackson, Tennessee.<sup>6</sup> At his lecture, he called TVA both a tribute and challenge

to the south, meaning the south was lucky to have TVA but at the same time, all individuals would be challenged to help make TVA a success. Lilienthal also called TVA a project that “translates into concrete form a vision of President Roosevelt.”<sup>7</sup> To draw attention from such nationally known individuals made residents of this small, otherwise previously overlooked area feel important, for once.

TVA’s construction at Wheeler Dam seemed to bring members of the small community together. There were public meeting opportunities for the people to outwardly show their support of the TVA, besides just purchasing appliances and securing an electric current. Muscle Shoals, the site of both Wheeler and Wilson Dams, held an Independence Day TVA Appreciation Jubilee, to which President Roosevelt, Alabama Governor Bibb Graves, and numerous Congressmen and Senators were invited.<sup>8</sup> One July 1935 “mass meeting” of an “immense crowd” found “no harshness or criticism ... but the meeting was harmonious and yet was one-sided, that side being for the New Deal.”<sup>9</sup>

TVA was instrumental in giving the economy of Athens and Limestone County a much needed boost. TVA provided new local jobs in a time of economic depression, a valuable asset that benefited even those who may not have begun buying the cheap TVA power. The *Courier* hailed that Athens and North Alabama were reaping benefits from TVA because there were over 1,000 men working to clear floodplains for \$3.00 per day.<sup>10</sup> Even as late as 1936, TVA was still hiring new employees, which meant that TVA brought jobs to the region that lasted for years and helped to bring the area out of depression.<sup>11</sup> Retail workers’ jobs were secure, too. One article states that because of TVA, “the business of our merchants is fine. The people are happy, and everyone is



buying appliances.... The clearing of this land will keep hundreds of men working for months.”<sup>12</sup>

Athens was the first city in Alabama to reap the benefits of TVA’s cheap power, a source of pride for the city. Articles in both newspapers praised the TVA for this honor. In the months leading up to the TVA power surge, articles reported on how residents prepared for TVA power. The *Democrat* mentioned that Athenians were “quite anxious to begin using this current as it will mean a great saving in monthly bills to them.”<sup>13</sup> Edward E. Ward electrical installation company and repairs encouraged potential customers in early 1934 to “be ready” and “prepare for the TVA current.”<sup>14</sup> In August of 1934, just a few months after TVA electrified Athens, the *Courier* praised TVA for improving rural life in the county, saying that “with TVA electricity and all that goes with coming to Limestone County, rural life will be much more desirable and homes as convenient as town homes.”<sup>15</sup> One year after receiving the benefits of cheap electricity, the *Democrat* was still writing of the positive changes TVA made for the county.<sup>16</sup>

A more visible benefit than the new outdoor lights that illuminated the dark country landscape was the increased profit margin for local businesses and the city of Athens. A front-page *Democrat* article explained that in one year, over 400 electric appliances were sold in Athens, which translated to an additional revenue for the city of Athens that year of \$3,432 for all refrigerators, \$3,810 for electric ranges, and \$1,512 for water heaters.<sup>17</sup> Local TVA officials called the cheap power a “great blessing” for Athenians because of the “increase in consumption and the large number of electrical appliances purchased by the citizens of this place.”<sup>18</sup> For the first year TVA produced electricity, its net profit from the City of Athens Electric Department was \$1,501.93.<sup>19</sup>

As the year progressed, more electric current was used by residents, and Athens was soon leading “in the power consumption race with the other TVA areas served.”<sup>20</sup>

Local businesses that sold electric appliances were booming thanks to TVA’s heavy promotion and undeniable presence in the area. Even more numerous than stories about TVA and cheap electricity were the nearly constant advertisements for electrical appliances. The advertisements changed little from week to week and were staples of the papers’ contents. One of the *Democrat*’s main advertisers, U. G. White Hardware Company had a small advertisement of their company’s name to the immediate right of the paper’s title for many issues. In that way, readers could not look at the title of the paper without being reminded that U. G. White’s was there for the community, serving their electrical appliances needs. Alleviating fears consumers may have had about paying for the relatively expensive appliances, U. G. White’s even offered financing options. One advertisement suggested that consumers “buy now, we can finance it for you and you can enjoy the comforts of these General Electric appliances while you pay for them and get the benefit for the cheap electric rates. It will be much cheaper than buying ice and wood.”<sup>21</sup>

Another appliance sales business, the Sam M. Bowen Company, also advertised heavily to promote the purchase of electric appliances. Several of their ads read, “we are cooperating with the TVA ... not only in selling appliances approved by them, but we have display of same on hand.”<sup>22</sup> The *Democrat* once featured a  $\frac{3}{4}$  page ad taken out by Bowen Company for General Electric refrigerators.<sup>23</sup> Reading the Bowen advertisements, one gets the sense that their persuasive technique involved showing the people of Athens that their values were aligned with the values of TVA.

The increased revenue was so important to the area that besides the plentiful advertisements about appliance sales, there were feature stories about appliance sales as well. In the months before TVA brought power to Athens, the *Democrat* published a front-page article claiming that judging from the amount of appliances sold in recent months, people were excited about TVA power. The article cited the example from Sam M. Bowen Company's reportedly selling seven refrigerators in one week.<sup>24</sup> For a town that suffered from an economic depression, this was an extremely positive occurrence. Sales were steady as TVA power became available in mid-summer of 1934, and the *Democrat* asserted sales were expected to double or quadruple as power became available.<sup>25</sup> The *Democrat* believed that "the warm summer months ... will make the people more refrigerator-minded,"<sup>26</sup> suggesting sales would remain steady and perhaps increase soon. Over a year later, the *Democrat* reported that appliance sales were still steady, and that Athens led all other cities with power supplied by TVA for the use of appliances and residential power.<sup>27</sup> Utilizing a bandwagon technique, many companies promoted their products under the slogan, "electric homes are cool."<sup>28</sup> These feature stories about businesses provided a form of "free" advertisement for companies who were experiencing increased profits because of electrical appliance sales.

To celebrate the one-year anniversary of TVA's presence in Athens, the *Democrat* featured a full page advertisement encouraging readers to stop by the Cooperative Electrical Dealers' Association TVA display room that showcased modern electric appliances available for purchase and use. Featuring the TVA logo, a fist holding a lightning bolt, in the center of the ad, it listed ways in which Athens progressed since TVA's inception as well as things that made Athens stand out from other TVA cities,

such as being the leader in the use of electric stoves, forming the first cooperative dealership for appliances, and being first in the amount of usage of TVA power.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the regular advertisers of U. G. White, Sam Bowen and Athens Furniture Company, the Sterchi Brothers Stores and the Rainey Electric Company were featured on the ad. There are two timelines on the advertisement that track Athens' progress. The cooperative dealership celebrates, with Athens, a year of progress with TVA.<sup>30</sup> Residents were asked to help participate in celebrating life in the "world in modern, electrical comfort and convenience."<sup>31</sup>

Residents in the city of Athens certainly benefited from the conveniences of electricity, largely because they had money to spend on both the electric current and the appliances needed to take advantage of it. However, the rural residents who were relocated had little money to spend altogether, much less to spend on things like home appliances. Rural families barely made enough income to provide food and clothing for their families. Less than 25% of families who were relocated in the Wheeler area had annual incomes over \$500, and half of family yearly incomes ranged between \$100 and \$350.<sup>32</sup> Despite the low incomes, only 78 families in this region received federal relief in 1934.<sup>33</sup> Median total expenditures for all household purchases for the year show discrepancies from group to group, as share tenants spent \$63, cash tenants spent \$126, and land owners spent \$117.<sup>34</sup> Appliances would have been expensive for these farmers, then, as an oven cost \$76.50, a 30-gallon water heater cost \$58.95, and the Leonard Special TVA Refrigerator cost \$79.95.<sup>35</sup> For people who spent less than \$100 per year on total expenses, frivolities such as appliances were out of the question. Despite the benefits TVA provided rural families in the way of flood control and erosion prevention

farming techniques, these poverty-stricken people were unable to buy appliances and purchase electricity as their city neighbors.

So, the appliance businesses were not profiting from those who were relocated, who simply were not buying electric appliances. In fact, TVA had to campaign to get those living in the most remote areas of the county to warm up to using electric current, as a lot of rural residents feared electricity because of a lack of education and information about what it would and could do. One way TVA accomplished this was by constructing large community refrigerators. While their neighbors in the city of Athens may have had their own personal refrigerators, residents in the outer areas of the county shared one refrigerator for an entire community to get used to the idea of having personal home refrigerators.

Those who lived farthest away from the city limits were the last to benefit from electricity.<sup>36</sup> In March 1936, individuals who were part of the local farm bureau formed a committee of nine farmers to begin the push for Limestone County farmers to receive electricity.<sup>37</sup> They developed and administered a survey to farmers to judge the “willingness of Limestone’s farm population to participate in the advantages of the TVA program in its fullest sense.”<sup>38</sup> As of April 1936, TVA was still in the process of delivering electricity to all county residents. Thus, the people who were most inconvenienced to make way for the new electric current were the last to receive any benefit from TVA’s cheap electricity, fully two years behind the rest of the county.

Despite this fact, the newspapers promoted TVA as if it was immediately helping rural residents. The *Courier* featured a front-page article that told of the benefits of cheap electricity, specifically for farm families. According to the article, TVA brought together

rural and city life, thus creating a “sounder understanding between American people.”<sup>39</sup> Obviously targeting the *Courier*’s rural audience, it listed benefits of electricity for farmers, all centering around making farm life easier. The article cited such things as electric water pumps, fuel, refrigeration, and radios as ways to improve overall life through electricity.

TVA meant benefits in the areas of rural electricity, erosion control, improved navigation along the river, and overall health benefits, but another category of benefits came from the economic ripple effect of its programs. Businesses improved profits by selling appliances, residents were happier because of a renewed sense of optimism, and people were put back to work to help TVA complete its mission. However, in order to fulfill all of its goals, a group of people had to first be physically moved out of the way of progress.

#### Family Removal

Before TVA could complete construction of Wheeler Dam, thousands of acres of land had to be cleared to make way for the reservoir area for the dam. TVA thus created a special subunit to deal with relocating families that lived along the banks of the river. The purpose of the TVA reservoir family removal section was for “the orderly removal of all families from TVA property who have not been granted specific permission to occupy such property.”<sup>40</sup> The removal section was to remain sensitive to the unique social and economic needs of the people with whom they worked, and a new family removal section was created for each individual dam that was built by TVA to more effectively and locally deal with issues as they arose. The family removal section was strictly a service agency and thus did not provide any direct benefits to families. However, the division

could, and occasionally did, refer families to relief agencies and offer advice where appropriate.

The Wheeler office opened on October 4, 1935 in Decatur, Alabama, a city in Morgan County that was also affected by Wheeler's construction. All 835 affected families were expected to relocate by October 31, although many families did not move until March, 1936. Working under a deadline, the relocation office was formed under a crisis or "emergency" situation. The area affected was divided into sections and distributed to the case workers whose job was to visit each family, gather as much information about them in an effort to completely understand their needs, and help develop plans for removal. The workers were to visit each family as many times as necessary or until they were finally removed from the property.

TVA sent letters in the fall of 1935 to families that explained the relocation process and requested their cooperation. The point of the letters was to officially notify residents of the need to relocate from their present housing. The letters read, "for several months, notices have appeared in local newspapers to the effect that all persons living within the Wheeler Dam area should move out of the area by October 31, 1935."<sup>41</sup> The letter closed by saying "thank you for your splendid cooperation thus far and trust that the completion of our operations will not cause you inconvenience or discomfort."<sup>42</sup> It is interesting that TVA utilized this specific word choice, as if to imply that suddenly uprooting a family and moving to a new house would be no trouble or inconvenience.

Though a TVA report indicated that notices had been published in newspapers for months leading up to the creation of the family removal section office,<sup>43</sup> it was the only time a notice appeared in the *Democrat* or *Courier* from 1934-1936. The *Democrat*

reported once on the necessity of home- and landowners living on the banks of the Tennessee to relocate. However, this one was a brief, four-sentence article buried on page 4, published on September 26, 1935, less than one week before the deadline TVA imposed for final structure removal and family relocation, and it threatened that affected people who did not relocate by the deadline would probably not receive fair market value for their property.<sup>44</sup> The final sentence reminded readers that “TVA is again asking the cooperation of the owners and occupants in the above manner.”<sup>45</sup> Further, many families were still in the process of moving throughout the autumn months, despite the October 31 deadline. Perhaps this prompted the November 14, 1935 article about the impending danger of flooding as noted by Red Cross officials. The article mentioned that “it is feared some inhabitants of the reservoir basin do not realize the urgency of the situation.”<sup>46</sup> This may be accurate, because many residents remained where they were until the following March.

The “Preliminary and Confidential Report” published by TVA with information gathered from family visits sets the stage for a broad understanding of the way of life of families in the Wheeler reservoir area.<sup>47</sup> For the entire area, about 100,000 acres of land were secured by TVA, approximately 52,000 acres were flooded while the remainder formed a barrier around the reservoir.<sup>48</sup> About half of the land was “swamp and wasteland, too frequently flooded and too poorly drained to permit cultivation,” while the other half devoted to agriculture was “fairly productive, but in many places the land is eroded and shows signs of exhaustion.”<sup>49</sup>

The region that was flooded was completely rural, with only 12.7% of the families falling into the “non-farm” occupational classification.<sup>50</sup> The non-farmers’



occupations were fishermen, skilled workmen, non-farm laborers, and “a few men said by their neighbors to be making and selling corn whiskey.”<sup>51</sup> Only 7.1% were land owners; the remainder were tenants or farm laborers.<sup>52</sup> The population was almost equally divided between Blacks and Whites.<sup>53</sup>

Though agriculture was the primary occupation, most farms in the area were small. The median farm size was 34.5 acres; median acres for White farmers was 41.3 while Black farmers’ median acreage was 28.3.<sup>54</sup> Only 14.5% of total farms were larger than 100 acres, and 21.1% were less than 20 acres.<sup>55</sup> The primary crop for this region was cotton, with little land left for livestock. Nevertheless, nearly every family had chickens, 81.7% had at least one cow, and 77% had hogs.<sup>56</sup> Still, the average farm in the United States had livestock valued at over four times what the average value of livestock was for farm families in the Wheeler area.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, when the TVA began clearing the land, it radically changed both the landscape and the lives of the hundreds of families who were forced to leave their homes. When the land clearing began, the *Democrat* focused on the economic impact of putting many men back to work, saying that the “payroll of \$4500 per day, five days in the week ... doesn’t happen to be all of the good news.”<sup>58</sup> The 52,000 acres of land needing to be cleared would eventually require 1,000 more men to help remove what the *Democrat* called “timber, brush, and small growth of woods.”<sup>59</sup> A later article acknowledged that more men were needed to help clear lands near Decatur.<sup>60</sup> The *Democrat* made no mention of the homes that had to be cleared in addition to what was described as insignificant wasteland. More important, according to this article, was that the sale of the land would “bring practically \$1,500,000 to the owners ... nearly \$100 for every man,

woman and child in the county and it is with much satisfaction that the people of Limestone are looking forward to the future.”<sup>61</sup> The *Democrat* said that what was important about the land clearing and relocation was that the process would “turn loose thousands of dollars in the county.”<sup>62</sup> The papers never mentioned the jobs TVA created for another group of individuals – the case workers, or specifically trained individuals who were responsible for visiting each family to ensure relocation.

### The Case Workers

Almost as essential as understanding the people they documented, it is important to know the case workers who kept the files. Though there is little official documentation as to individual personalities, their writing styles and comments lend insight into their opinions on the families, despite their obvious attempts to remain objective and impartial.

TVA understood that the individuals who were entrusted with the delicate but necessary task of working to remove families should possess certain qualifications and characteristics. The chief case worker needed to be a “visionary man” that had good organizational skills, understood the importance of planning, was cooperative, and had “sympathy and understanding of the hill folk, their reluctance to move, their timidity with new problems, etc.”<sup>63</sup> The case workers were middle-aged individuals who were orderly, able to prepare reports, open-minded, and “without prejudices, especially in regard to different localities for people to live, or methods of agriculture.”<sup>64</sup>

Case workers held a variety of educational levels and skills. Although TVA preferred to hire people who possessed at least a high school diploma, personal life experiences were more important for this job than educational degrees. The most effective case workers were those who personally related to the farmers and gained their

trust, so TVA sought men with experiences in farming, county extension work, social service, and in dealing with rural people. The men were expected to have basic knowledge of farm life experiences and “to meet on an equal basis people of this type and gain their complete confidence (confidence building quality most important).”<sup>65</sup> Because the Wheeler removal office was formed in what was noted as an “emergency situation,” in some cases TVA may have settled for reliable employees who did not necessarily meet all minimum qualifications.

Other than their names and salaries, little is known about the case workers, their biographies, or qualifications.<sup>66</sup> TVA hired one chief social case worker, 8 social case workers and 2 stenographers to complete family removal activities in the Wheeler area.<sup>67</sup> All of the case workers paid strict attention to detail and were gifted descriptive writers. Out of the entire group, only one case worker was Black. Mr. Birdie was employed specifically to deal with problems among the Black population. TVA felt that Blacks could relate better to, and perhaps trust more, someone of their own race. Besides the stenographers, Miss Martha Branscombe was the only woman who worked in the family removal office. She was given the title of “principle case worker” and was assigned at the discretion of the other case workers to families that presented special, unique, or extraordinary problems with relocation. Her narratives in the case files were the most in-depth, as she obtained even more information than usual, probing deep into the special case families’ histories in an effort to develop the best way of helping them relocate. Her narratives reveal a nurturing and motherly person, characteristics that were necessary in dealing with some of the most extreme and sensitive cases.

To read their job descriptions, it appears the case workers played the roles of benevolent experts who were there to ensure a peaceful relocation. However, reading their case files, it seems as though the case workers were sent not so much to actually help the families relocate, but to serve a strict authoritarian role to ensure relocation. Though some families received assistance after case worker visits, more often than not the case workers only served the purpose of making repeated visits until the family moved. The case workers did not care where the families moved, just that they were away from flood danger. For some families, the move was as close as 100 yards, but for others, the move was as far away as another city, county, or state. The role of the case worker was also to clarify miscommunication that apparently occurred within the community. TVA supposedly documented such detailed information about all families in order to get a better, broader picture about how they could help their plight. However, the information was specific to each community, so once the information was collected and summarized in Wheeler, the families were already relocated. Details of those families' lives were kept in file folders at the Wheeler branch of the reservoir family removal section and kept confidential at the time of Wheeler's construction. They reveal insight as to what the families felt about relocating, as well as glimpses into their everyday lives.

### The Relocated

The residents of rural Limestone County were similar in their demographic characteristics and in other areas. Their housing conditions were poor, family structures were similar, and many were hesitant and reluctant to leave. Some cases were exceptionally sad or tragic, and they offer a glimpse into lives of the poorest of the poor.

The physical descriptions of the relocated individuals may seem irrelevant by today's standards, but their inclusion in the case files denotes the importance placed on appearance as an assessment, or judgment, of the family. In some cases, estimations on exact weights and heights were made. Others only offered vague descriptions, like that of Sam Lauderdale as a "rather large, red faced man [who] appears to have little energy."<sup>68</sup> A typical woman's description included height, weight, and ability to perform work. For example, Josie Brooks was a "low, heavy-set woman with blond hair and capable of doing her housework while the others are engaged in farm work."<sup>69</sup> Descriptions of Black families are the most in-depth, as notation was made to the shades of their skin, whereas White families were not as distinguished. The Ruffins were described as "yellow negroes" and "a negro family with some pride."<sup>70</sup> Special physical defects, especially those that may have prevented hard labor, were duly noted, as were specific characteristics that demonstrated the case workers' close attention to detail. For Luke Flanagan, the "most notable feature about him is the size of his feet, he wearing a size 14 shoe."<sup>71</sup>

Family structure was largely homogenous. There were no reported divorces, and 89% of homes were composed of a husband and wife living together.<sup>72</sup> The average family size for Whites was 5.6 members as compared to 4.5 members for Black families, a statistic slightly higher than the state average family size.<sup>73</sup> Potential for economic stability was cited as a reason for the large family size, as "a single man or one without children of working age is at a disadvantage in getting land to 'make' a crop."<sup>74</sup> Despite the number of children in the area, the potential for educational growth was "not

reassuring,” as 78.4% of children in farm families that actually attended school were below the normal grade level for children their age.<sup>75</sup>

The land along the river was farmed, but a lot of it was wooded, scattered with brush, and spotted with tents and small structures families called home. Actually finding the houses was quite a task for some of the case workers. The case workers had specific directions to each home, and road names and exact driving or walking mileage was used where possible. Sometimes case workers were forced to omit such details and rely on landmarks instead, becoming a participant in a scavenger hunt for houses. For example, case worker Price found the Perry’s home “between two large Elk River hills, completely surrounded by woods and corn fields ... drive 5 ½ miles, then turn right taking a winding unimproved road down to Elk River.”<sup>76</sup> John Shepherd’s house could be reached after traveling “Hobbs Road one and three-quarters of a mile. Approach two houses, one on right and one on left with large oak tree due southeast. Turn left, drive to oak tree, leave car, walk 100 yards, southwest.”<sup>77</sup>

Once they arrived, case workers often found severely crowded and poor housing conditions. Three rooms was the average home size, though one of those rooms was usually a “lean-to” beside the house. Most homes were frame or built from logs. Only 6.2% of houses were in good condition, none of the houses had a bathtub or inside toilet, and over half of the families had no toilet facilities at all.<sup>78</sup> Only one family had electricity that was supplied by a small private oil plant, and one family had a telephone. Many families did not have enough furniture “necessary to provide a minimum standard of comfort.”<sup>79</sup> One “destitute” family lived in a place with “practically nothing to give it the name ‘home.’”<sup>80</sup> Essie Pitts lived in a “dilapidated four room building almost ready

to fall down.”<sup>81</sup> James and Florence Love lived with their two children in a two room house, which was actually “one-half of what was originally a large log house ... what is left here is in a bad state of repair and if not moved soon will fall down.”<sup>82</sup> Frank Twitty lived in a three room frame house with 11 children and grandchildren, none of whom “seem to have had enough to eat lately.”<sup>83</sup> William Massey and his four children lived in a one-room shack. He told his case worker that though he had not found a place to relocate, if “he had a tent and if he could find a place to pitch it, he would leave his present location immediately.”<sup>84</sup> Jerry and Lera Cosby lived in a one room box house with their ten children, where “it would be impossible for a family to keep warm during the winter in this building.”<sup>85</sup> The barns behind the house of Mary Burnham were in better condition than the six-room house in which she and her family lived.<sup>86</sup>

Some families did not have the luxury of a structure on solid ground. Some lived in houseboats and drifted along the river. Emmett, Virginia, Lillie Sue and Dimple Preston lived in a houseboat that sank shortly after the case worker’s first visit. The houseboat presented a problem, as there was no clear policy on how to handle it and its place in relocation. Because the family eventually raised the boat out of the water and re-tied it farther down the river, they were considered a successful relocation.<sup>87</sup> Another man living in a houseboat had his case immediately closed because of a lack of policy, even though he was still living within TVA property.<sup>88</sup>

There were certain circumstances surrounding the reservoir families that could prove difficult in attempts to relocate them from impending danger. In other words, the relocation effort meant more than just prompting the families to move to another area, as the families had little to no outside resources to help with moving. The best case scenario

for relocation, from TVA's perspective, would have been for the families to move in with extended family members that lived in other areas away from rural Limestone County. TVA quickly realized, however, that "their world is small, and, left to their own devices, most of them will attempt to relocate near to their present homes."<sup>89</sup> Due to an overall lack of financial and material resources, moving proved to be a hardship, and most families either did not have relatives living far away or did not wish to leave the immediate vicinity. This was problematic, too, because TVA secured so much land in the area that there was less acreage to accommodate the same amount of people. Also, the case workers could not rightfully encourage other tenant farmers not affected by relocation to divide their farms into smaller tracts, as Alabama farms were already the smallest in the nation and could barely provide enough income for families. Finally, it was difficult for the families to find new farms or places to live because of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's attempts to reduce the number of tenant farmers. Thus, there was a real danger that many former tenants, after leaving their farms and being unable to find new ones, would be reduced to the status of farm laborer, placing them in the lowest economic group in the region. This would result in a class and lifestyle change for the worse.

However, the TVA was not opposed to reducing families to this level, and saw these effects as "unfortunate."<sup>90</sup> The only promising element of relocating families came from the programs of the Federal Resettlement Administration (FRA), an agency that helped families move to better locations. Acknowledging the importance of collaborating with this agency, it was noted that "every effort should be made by the Authority to coordinate the work of relocation in the Wheeler area with the work of the Resettlement



Administration.”<sup>91</sup> Indeed, TVA Director H. A. Morgan asked Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace for permission to allow relocated families to continue to grow cotton on their new lands despite the AAA’s attempts to reduce the number of cotton farms. Morgan made a case for the families, saying that “this condition was created by a sovereign act of the United States for Government purposes ... the plan proposed ... would enable the tenants to re-establish themselves by means of growing cotton, the only cash crop with which they are familiar.”<sup>92</sup>

Case workers noted special problems that would hinder the relocation process. Some were uncomplicated and expected, such as “finding a place on which the rent is low enough for him to make a decent living.”<sup>93</sup> Most problems were simply to find a new place to live.<sup>94</sup> The problems of relocating were even more complex and difficult as a result of racial problems. Black families had difficulty relocating because some communities and farms would not allow Blacks to live nearby.<sup>95</sup> Though about half of the population of this region was Black, the case workers seemed surprised that their ways of life and standards of living were not drastically different than their White neighbors. The Ruffins lived in a five-room structure that the case worker described as “unusually clean for a negro rural home.”<sup>96</sup> The McDonalds had furniture that was “typical of the negro farmer.”<sup>97</sup> Case worker Cunningham expressed surprise in the Dobbins’ family’s living conditions, commenting that the fair condition of the house, adequate furniture and curtains were “unusual among colored farm families.”<sup>98</sup> Some White individuals moved to areas where Blacks were a majority, thus leading to dissatisfaction. Pierce Brooks was not satisfied with his new location, but the case worker commented that “he should be because he is living on one of the best farms in the

County. He is living in a community where negroes are in the majority, and that is why he doesn't like his new location."<sup>99</sup>

Some families were problematic because of their reluctance to be relocated in a timely manner. Families blamed their hesitancy to move on different things. One popular excuse was to blame the weather conditions for a failure to relocate. Mary Burnham used her widowhood as an excuse to take her time with relocating. The case worker noted "she is handicapping herself through self-pity. She has probably been influenced by her son in her feeling of resentment toward TVA."<sup>100</sup> She was also "emotionally disturbed" by the relocation process, and the case worker cited this as the "chief cause for their failure to move."<sup>101</sup>

Other families had positive attitudes toward the TVA, especially those who relocated to better locations because of soil, housing or health improvements.<sup>102</sup> Robert and Unity Smith were content before and after relocation, and they "appeared happy and contented with their lot in life ... each seemed to be pulling with the other to make the best of their surroundings. The attitude toward TVA was favorable."<sup>103</sup> Case worker Salter visited the Smiths weekly throughout the month of January until they were, by Mr. Smith's own account, satisfactorily relocated, despite moving to a house of poor repair.<sup>104</sup> Lee Pack and his family were relocated to a better location. Formerly living near a swamp which caused health problems for the entire family, including chills and malaria, and being located near a "negro settlement," the new location was "in a white settlement" of higher elevation which meant potential health improvement.<sup>105</sup> Ernest Ruffin's overly friendly attitude surprised his case worker so much so that he concluded Mr. Ruffin did not fully understand what was happening to him. Mr. Ruffin did not blame TVA for

forcing him to relocate, and it even seemed to the case worker that “he thought [TVA] was the ones he owed.”<sup>106</sup>

Understandably, though, some families were either not happy or had their quality of life lessened with relocating. The Saspers were a problem because Irvin’s reputation as a bootlegger hindered him from gainful employment, and despite multiple visits he showed no intention of leaving. Mr. Sasser died near the beginning of March, at which time Mrs. Sasser relocated with some other people to a nearby tent, to a place that guaranteed no farming activity for the next year. Despite the family being “not very satisfactorily relocated,” the case was pronounced closed on March 30, 1936, after the entry detailing this sequence of events. The Hill family was relocated from fertile land and a potentially “beautiful place, situated at the edge of Wheeler Lake,” to land that was less fertile and rougher.<sup>107</sup> Luke Flanagan, a fisherman, had to move four miles from the Elk River, thus the case worker classified him as not satisfactorily relocated, but noted that if he chose to farm instead, he would be satisfactorily relocated.<sup>108</sup>

When declaring a case “closed,” the case workers often did not seek to ensure that the family was better off, rather that the family was removed from immediate danger of living in a flood zone. One family of five lived in “a two-room house which is about ready to fall in ... the roof is practically gone. It is in a remote and desolate section ... the toilet stands only a few feet from the house, is poorly constructed, and results in a rather serious sanitary situation.”<sup>109</sup> Soon after the first visit, the house burned down, which forced the family to move in with a relative. Even though the family lost everything they had in a house fire, TVA left the family alone and considered that case closed, because of the family’s forced relocation. No additional assistance was offered to

them. Elisha Perry was relocated to an area that provided him no place to farm and, thus, no employment for 1935. Despite this, the case worker felt that “he should be well pleased with his new location”<sup>110</sup> and closed the case. Charlie Malone was required to physically move his house behind the TVA taking line, allowing him to farm the same general land area. The case worker noted, despite the labor required to move his house, that “TVA operations, other than the moving of his house, have not affected him.”<sup>111</sup> James Wright’s family, who said that TVA made false promises to him about relocation, “claimed to have lost by moving.” Since their overall living conditions were improved, however, the case worker did not feel that they had been inconvenienced,<sup>112</sup> and closed the case with no other discussion.

Other families’ cases were considered closed even though they were not “satisfactorily relocated.” William, Malissie, Lorena, Reba and William Sullivan were one such family. The worker “did not note any special or unusual physical defects that might prevent this family from being self supporting.”<sup>113</sup> Mr. Sullivan preferred cotton farming, but was having difficulty finding a new location that would yield crops to provide enough income to support his family. Case worker Price made six visits from December 1935- January 1936, prodding the family to move but apparently offering no assistance. Finally, the family moved three miles northwest of their old location to a “very poor farm,” resulting in a family that was “not very satisfactorily relocated.”<sup>114</sup> Despite the poor location, after the Sullivans relocated, the case was officially closed with no follow up visits.<sup>115</sup> The story was similar for Tom Warner, an “old, gray-haired, slim, yellow Negro” that had “farmed all his life, and seems to be an intelligent Negro.”<sup>116</sup> Despite having four members in his family that were capable of doing heavy

farm labor, they moved to a location that compared “unfavorably with the old one. Therefore, Tom is not very satisfactorily relocated.”<sup>117</sup> Robert Townsend moved to a place where neither the house nor the land was as good as he had before. Interestingly enough, the case worker noted that Townsend was “not as pleased, but best they could do. Attitude favorable.”<sup>118</sup> Lloyd Parsley’s attitude toward TVA was also favorable, despite the fact that after relocation, his housing was “not as good and is overcrowded” and his “general health and sanitary conditions poor.”<sup>119</sup> The same case was true for Everett Parsley.<sup>120</sup> Posey Wright had a favorable attitude as well, despite the lesser quality of land and his dissatisfaction with the new location and farming.<sup>121</sup>

Some were in a state of disbelief or denial about relocating. George Clark simply did not believe he had to move.<sup>122</sup> After four visits by case worker Price, Gilbert Warner still had not left. His landlord, Mr. Smith, seemed to believe that “he has some kind of agreement with the TVA, whereby he may retain his houses on TVA property.”<sup>123</sup> Warner was eventually “satisfactorily relocated,” though his new location compared unfavorably with the old.<sup>124</sup> Jessie Scoggin told her case worker that “they had no plans to move, as they did not think they would have to move from TVA property.”<sup>125</sup> Mary Burnham claimed that “TVA did not pay her enough for her land and that she is not satisfied with the deal they gave her.”<sup>126</sup> Her special problem was to convince her that she would “eventually have to move off of the property bought by TVA.”<sup>127</sup>

Miscommunication was common. Henry Townsend “asked if TVA would not provide land and equipment with which he might continue to farm. The worker explained to him that if he had heard anything regarding this matter, it was a mistake.”<sup>128</sup> Earl Legg, who only had to relocate 100 yards away, heard from an unnamed source that

he would not have to move.<sup>129</sup> Case workers' frustration was apparent with this miscommunication, despite their obvious attempts to remain impartial. John Shepherd's was one such case. His file reads:

He stated that he had been informed that all families within the Wheeler Basin would be cared for by TVA. Worker explained to him that although it was time that TVA had acquired quite a bit of property in the area, it was not necessarily obligated to furnish him or any other person a house and any number of acres of land. From John's attitude he would have one think that he had honestly believed that he would be supplied with forty acres of land, a team and equipment with which to farm same.<sup>130</sup>

Similarly, Nancy Wright claimed that she was unable to relocate by the deadline imposed by TVA and expressed unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the Land Acquisition Division of TVA. She said they "promised her that if she would sell, she could make a crop that year on the land. She claimed to have been promised that she would never actually have to move, or stop cultivating the land above contour."<sup>131</sup> She threatened a lawsuit before she moved. On February 25, the case worker apparently allowed her to vent, then explained that "after March 1 she would have the status of a trespasser and all buildings might be possessed by TVA."<sup>132</sup> The family claimed that "they would never have sold the property except for the promises which had been made them."<sup>133</sup>

Despite these individuals and families who were obviously inconvenienced, misinformed, or unhappy with the happenings that seemed beyond their control, there is no mention in TVA literature that a formal group organized to protest relocation. In the newspapers, the only evidence of dissent towards TVA on anyone's part was seen in two

similar, full-page advertisements for the Tennessee Valley Landowners Mutual Aid Agency that were published a year after construction on Wheeler Dam began. One appeared in the *Courier* on December 20, 1934, and one appeared in the *Democrat* on December 15, 1934.<sup>134</sup> According to the advertisements, this agency was created to protect home and landowners who felt that TVA was not paying full market value for their lands. The accusatory advertisement alleged that TVA was not treating landowners fairly, saying that “never before have we seen a Federal agency indulge in tricks and deceit to carry their point.”<sup>135</sup> The agency existed to investigate any claims of unfairness as brought about by landowners.

The advertisements explained detailed steps the TVA were supposed to take in proper, legal land acquisition that included filing a petition in federal court, send three people to evaluate and assess the value of the land, while TVA footed the bill. Accusations were made that TVA was being unfair in their land acquisition processes. It claimed that TVA was utilizing fear tactics to acquire land, saying it targeted “owners of small farms, widows and those oppressed by mortgage, telling them that unless they accept the price offered they will be dispossessed by the courts... thus frightening some people into accepting low prices.”<sup>136</sup> The ads go on to say that 1930 assessment of all lands by the War Department Engineers valued land prices at an average of \$90.00 per acre including buildings, while TVA agents were paying an average of \$35.00 per acre for land acquisition.

The Mutual Aid Agency established a degree of credibility with their advertisement in reprinting an article from the *Journal of Commerce and LaSalle Street Journal* about land acquisition of the TVA. The article reprint cited “peculiar

fluctuations” in the amount paid by TVA agents for similar lands and provided examples of a Black man being paid \$15.00 per acre while his White neighbors were paid \$53.00 per acre. According to the article, some Black men were “frightened into taking \$7.00 per acre.”<sup>137</sup> The *Democrat* ad proclaimed that TVA offered “according to court records, less than one-half of prevailing prices for lands of a like character.”<sup>138</sup> Hinting that TVA used coercive tactics to gain land, it mentioned that “agents will tell you that some TVA board has given them a limit which they can not exceed. TVA can not fix the price for your land.”<sup>139</sup> While the advertisements did request that concerned people send their name, address, and what amount of land they sold at what prices, it did not request a payment of any sort. An address, telephone number and manger’s name were listed as contact information.

In sum, the relocated families lived in cramped, substandard housing with little material or financial resources. They were rushed to relocate to other areas. Some felt happier and were healthier after the move, while others felt misinformed, inconvenienced and disenfranchised. There was no indication that any family was totally ignored and sent to a watery grave, so the family relocation for Wheeler was a success in the sense that all families were eventually removed from danger.<sup>140</sup> Not all cases went as smoothly.

#### Extreme Cases

Though the quality of life in Limestone at the time of Wheeler’s construction was poor, there are a few families whose stories bring those statistics to life. The following stories highlight the worst in this area with regards to living conditions and the extremities of poverty. While the rest of the families sometimes had similar problems,



the following cases tell the story of people who presented some of the most difficult cases with which case workers dealt.

The Campbells lived in a two room shack that was “in such dilapidated condition that it barely provides shelter ... the roof is full of holes and is no protection from rain ... the house was filthy and unkempt, and flies and mosquitoes swarmed over everything.”<sup>141</sup> The family was described as “poorly clothed and very dirty. The whole group presented a picture of destitution. They are obviously shiftless, lack initiative, and have neither person nor community pride.”<sup>142</sup> Mrs. Rogers was a single mother raising her three children in a two-room log building. Her only resource was the \$35 worth of furniture in her humble home. Her father, who reportedly made and sold whiskey for a living, attempted to find a place for her and her family to relocate, but with little luck. Finally, she relocated to the home of her brother-in-law, which was an “unsatisfactory location due to the small house”<sup>143</sup> and nine people that lived there. Despite the family’s troubles, TVA left the case closed after receiving confirmation that she was removed from the former area,<sup>144</sup> another example of the case workers’ concern with relocation, rather than the person being relocated.

On January 30, 1936, the same date that Mrs. Rogers explained to her case worker that her father could not find them a better place to live, the Ritz Theater in downtown Athens was showcasing a film called “March of Time.”<sup>145</sup> This film was to educate Athens residents on both sides of the debate about publicly or privately owned power, a relevant issue to this area, especially with the Supreme Court ruling on the constitutionality of TVA and its power-owning practices. In May 1936, the month that Mrs. Rogers’ case file was officially closed, the *Courier*’s front page story was about “A

Trip Through West Limestone.”<sup>146</sup> The reporter mentioned the “many houses torn away on the drive to give way to the backwaters” as only an aside to the “many nice, well-tilled farms between Cairo and Salem with a fine graveled road to drive on.”<sup>147</sup> The papers were oblivious to the gravity of social problems present in the rural areas of the county, and still mentioned nothing of the families who had to relocate other than to say that their houses gave way to better road conditions.

Henry and Bessie Ward fared no better, but their experience was especially tragic given the impact of relocation on their family. Henry and Bessie lived in a “tent made of sacks, pieces of old tents and discarded tins”<sup>148</sup> with their five children ranging in age from eleven to three who were “very dirty and had barely enough clothing to cover their bodies.”<sup>149</sup> According to Mr. Ward, the state of the family was “brought on by sickness and the depression.”<sup>150</sup> Case worker Snell was so distressed by the children’s condition that he requested their placement in an orphanage, a request their father denied. Snell visited the family twelve times from December 1935 until February 1936, during which his main concern seemed not just to relocate the family but to remove the children from the situation completely. The family made no effort to improve themselves or their surroundings. Mrs. Ward left Mr. Ward for another man and deserted her children. Mr. Ward relocated his family, tent and all, to nearby Decatur, where he sent the children to beg for bread on a regular basis. Finally, Mr. Ward relented and turned the children over to the orphanage, where they “adjusted rapidly and easily.”<sup>151</sup>

At the same time the Ward children were being moved to an orphanage, the papers again ignored larger social issues in the county to talk positively about TVA. The papers focused on how Limestone County should use land in accordance with TVA

guidelines, and suggested that farmers take TVA's advice in correct ways to plant row crops and leaving some land to grow only grass.<sup>152</sup> Here again, Limestone County papers ignored larger social issues to focus on ways in which TVA provided benefits and help to residents.

Henry Lucas's story is especially sad. This family of five lived on the river bottoms in a one-room box house. The room was "filthy and unkept and shows the absolutely shiftlessness of the occupants."<sup>153</sup> The children were "ragged and dirty and apparently under-fed."<sup>154</sup> Indicating a racist ideology that Blacks were inferior, case worker Price noted that "a negro family of this type is hard to describe with any note of accuracy because they all seem somewhat alike, but this family seems to be an able bodied one."<sup>155</sup> Mr. Lucas had no resources to help him relocate. The family's regular diet was nothing more than "corn meal mixed in water and cooked on top of an improvised stove."<sup>156</sup> During one of the last visits the case worker found the house especially cold and Mr. Lucas's youngest child "wrapped in rags on an improvised cot."<sup>157</sup> Upon the January 24, 1936 visit, the case worker found that Mr. Lucas had frozen to death. At this point, the children were turned over to the mother, who had since moved to another city. Immediately, the case was closed with no further visits or attempts to help provided by TVA.

One interesting case was found with John and Mary Moore. The case file opened with a hand-written note from Mr. Moore's daughter. It read, "Dear Sir, Will you please tell me if my daddy has him a place yet, and where he is. I can't find where he is at."<sup>158</sup> Mr. Snell replied with a typewritten note explaining that Mr. Moore had been relocated to the Cumberland Mountain Farms in Scottsboro, and he mentioned that "it would be nice

for you to write him, and encourage him in any way you can, and to advise that he take every advantage of the opportunity offered him in his new location.”<sup>159</sup> Mr. Moore’s case file noted that upon first visit, his attitude toward TVA was not very good, “due to the fact that M. will be forced eventually to leave his present location.”<sup>160</sup> He refused to move, feeling it was the responsibility of TVA to find him a new place to live. After the case worker coordinated plans with Mr. Moore’s son, he relocated to a temporary shack near his son.<sup>161</sup>

When relocation was completed, an article proclaimed that TVA moved 835 families for the Wheeler area.<sup>162</sup> Mr. J. T. Belue, the relocation supervisor for the Alabama extension agency, “congratulated the county agents and others in this area for the co-operation they have given in relocating the farmers.”<sup>163</sup> The fact that some families were fully two years behind the rest of the county in receiving power was mentioned as an aside in later articles. The papers acted like the rural residents should be the most thankful for TVA, as they were the families who were the most poverty-stricken and those who needed help the most. Nothing was ever mentioned about the hardships these 835 families may have faced, and no one offered thanks to the families who sacrificed so much in the name of progress.

## Conclusion

As is evident by the frequency of information printed about TVA, it was one of the most newsworthy events of the mid-1930s for Limestone County. TVA was a source of pride for Athens and Limestone County, and many residents praised TVA for the suggestions on farm improvement the agency offered, the jobs the agency provided, and

the overall renewed sense of optimism that was present. Though the benefits of TVA were evident, Limestone County newspapers' perspective on TVA was largely one-sided in that they did not seem to care about the families who were inconvenienced in relocating. Despite the sacrifices many individuals made to clear the way for TVA, their story was not told in the papers – it was told to the case workers. As the articles and advertisements demonstrate, newspapers focused on touting TVA's benefits for those individuals who could already afford to purchase appliances and would, in turn, mean more profits for the City of Athens through electricity payments and local business that sold the appliances.

The attitudes of the families who were relocated as expressed in the case files as compared to the newspaper coverage of the family relocation process reveals points of similarity and difference. It is evident that feelings about relocation were individual and changed from family to family, but it is also evident that the image of TVA in the newspapers was largely homogenous and positive. Thus, the disconnect in the two texts provides part of the answer to the question, what were the attitudes toward TVA as held by the families affected by the construction of Wheeler Dam, as compared to newspaper coverage of TVA and relocation? The attitudes and newspaper coverage differed in many cases. Explanation of the implications of this idea, analyzed against both historical and theoretical contexts, is presented in the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> *Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* (Philadelphia, Pa.: N. W. Ayer and Son, Incorporated [1935]).

<sup>2</sup> Final Report on Family Removal Activities in the Wheeler Area, National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region, RG 142 Box 71.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence L. Durisch, "Preliminary and Confidential Report: Families of the Wheeler Reservoir Area," Research Section, Social and Economic Division, Tennessee Valley Authority, 9 August 1935, RG 142 Box 72, National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region, 9. (hereafter cited as Durisch, "Preliminary and Confidential Report.")

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- <sup>4</sup> Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96
- <sup>5</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 25 November 1934, 4.
- <sup>6</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 5 July 1934, 1.
- <sup>7</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 5 July 1934, 1.
- <sup>8</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 13 June 1935, 1.
- <sup>9</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 25 July 1935, 1.
- <sup>10</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 29 August 1934, 3.
- <sup>11</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 20 February 1936.
- <sup>12</sup> *Alabama Courier*, (Athens, Al.), 29 August 1934, 3.
- <sup>13</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 17 May 1934, 1.
- <sup>14</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 2 April 1934.
- <sup>15</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 23 August 1934, 1.
- <sup>16</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 30 May 1935, 1.
- <sup>17</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.).
- <sup>18</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 23 April 1936, 1.
- <sup>19</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 1 August 1935, 1.
- <sup>20</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 5 September 1935, 5.
- <sup>21</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 7 June 1934.
- <sup>22</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 14 June 1934.
- <sup>23</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 23 February 1935.
- <sup>24</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 12 April 1934, 1.
- <sup>25</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 31 May 1934, 5.
- <sup>26</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 31 May 1934, 5.
- <sup>27</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 8 August 1935, 1.
- <sup>28</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 8 August 1935, 1.
- <sup>29</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 20 May 1935, 5.
- <sup>30</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 20 May 1935, 5.
- <sup>31</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 20 May 1935.
- <sup>32</sup> Durisch, "Preliminary and Confidential Report," 16.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>35</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 7 June 1934.
- <sup>36</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 2 April 1936, 1.
- <sup>37</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 12 March 1936, 8.
- <sup>38</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 12 March 1936, 8.
- <sup>39</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 6 September 1934, 1.
- <sup>40</sup> Research Section, Social and Economic Division, Tennessee Valley Authority, "Final Report on Family Removal Activities in the Wheeler Area," RG 142 Box 71, National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region, 4. (hereafter cited as TVA "Final Report.")
- <sup>41</sup> W. G. Carnham to Mart Tuders, 21 October 1935, typewritten, RG 142 Box 70, National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*,
- <sup>43</sup> TVA "Final Report."
- <sup>44</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 26 September 1935, 4.
- <sup>45</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 26 September 1935.
- <sup>46</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 14 November 1935, 5.
- <sup>47</sup> Durisch, "Preliminary and Confidential Report."
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

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- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 13.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 12.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>58</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 9 April 1934, 1.
- <sup>59</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 9 April 1934, 1.
- <sup>60</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 12 July 1934, 1.
- <sup>61</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 9 April 1934, 1.
- <sup>62</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 24 January 1935, 1.
- <sup>63</sup> TVA Final Report, 1.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., 2, emphasis in manuscript
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>68</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Sam Lauderdale," RG 142 Box 66, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>69</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Pierce Brooks," RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>70</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Ernest Ruffin," RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>71</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Luke Flanagan," RG 142 Box 64, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>72</sup> Durisch, "Preliminary and Confidential Report," 7.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.
- <sup>76</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Elisha Perry," RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>77</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "John Shepherd," RG 142 Box 69, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>78</sup> Durisch, "Preliminary and Confidential Report."
- <sup>79</sup> Durisch, "Preliminary and Confidential Report," 12.
- <sup>80</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Lessie Green," RG 142 Box 65, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>81</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Essie Pitts," RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>82</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "James Love," RG 142 Box 67, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>83</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Frank Twitty," RG 142 Box 70, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>84</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "William Massey," RG 142 Box 67, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>85</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Jerry Cosby," RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>86</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Mary Burnham," RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>87</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Emmett Preston," RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>88</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Dewey Moore," RG 142 Box 67, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>89</sup> Durisch, "Preliminary and Confidential Report," 19.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., 20.

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- <sup>91</sup> Ibid., 20.
- <sup>92</sup> H. A. Morgan to The Honorable Henry A. Wallace, typewritten, 19 August 1935, RG 142 Box 72, National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region.
- <sup>93</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Jesse McCune,” RG 142 Box 67, National Archives - Southeast Region.
- <sup>94</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Pierce A. Brooks,” RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>95</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Hunzie Watkins,” RG 142 Box 70, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>96</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Ernest Ruffin,” RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>97</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “James McDonald,” RG 142 Box 67, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>98</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “John Wesley Dobbins,” RG 142 Box 64, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>99</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Pierce A. Brooks,” RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>100</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Mary Burnham,” RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>102</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Jesse McCune,” RG 142 Box 67, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>103</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Robert & Unity Smith,” RG 142 Box 67, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>105</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Lee Pack,” RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>106</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Ernest Ruffin,” RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>107</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Sidney Hill,” RG 142 Box 65, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>108</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Luke Flanagan,” RG 142 Box 64, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>109</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “James Cooley,” RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>110</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Elisha Perry,” RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>111</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Charles Malone,” RG 142 Box 67, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>112</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “James Wright,” RG 142 Box 71, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>113</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “William Sullivan,” RG 142 Box 69, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>114</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “William Sullivan,” RG 142 Box 69, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>115</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “William Sullivan,” RG 142 Box 69, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>116</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Tom Warner,” RG 142 Box 70, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>117</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Tom Warner,” RG 142 Box 70, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>118</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Robert Townsend,” RG 142 Box 70, National Archives – Southeast Region.



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- <sup>119</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Lloyd Parsley,” RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>120</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Everett Parsley,” RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>121</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Posey H. Wright,” RG 142 Box 71, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>122</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “George Clark,” RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>123</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Gilbert Warner,” RG 142 Box 70, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>124</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>125</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Hugh Scoggin,” RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>126</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Mary Burhnam,” RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>127</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>128</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Henry Townsend,” RG 142 Box 70, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>129</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Earl Legg,” RG 142 Box 66, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>130</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “John Shepherd,” RG 142 Box 69, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>131</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “James Wright,” RG 142 Box 71, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>132</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>133</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>134</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 20 December 1934, 10; *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 15 December 1934.
- <sup>135</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 20 December 1934.
- <sup>136</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 20 December 1934, 10.
- <sup>137</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 20 December 1934.
- <sup>138</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 15 December 1934, 8.
- <sup>139</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 15 December 1934, 8.
- <sup>140</sup> Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96
- <sup>141</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Eugene Campbell,” RG 142 Box 63, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>143</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Nervie Rogers,” RG 142 Box 68, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>144</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>145</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 30 January 1936, 4.
- <sup>146</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 7 May 1936, 1.
- <sup>147</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 7 May 1936, 1.
- <sup>148</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Henry Ward,” RG 142 Box 70, National Archives – Southeast Region.
- <sup>149</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>150</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>151</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>152</sup> *Alabama Courier* (Athens, Al.), 12 March 1936.
- <sup>153</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, “Henry Lucas,” RG 142 Box ??, National Archives – Southeast Region.

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<sup>154</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "Henry Lucas," RG 142 Box ?,  
National Archives – Southeast Region.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Family Relocation Case File, "John Moore," RG 142 Box 67,  
National Archives – Southeast Region.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 13 February 1936, 1.

<sup>163</sup> *Limestone Democrat* (Athens, Al.), 13 February 1936, 1.

V. NEWSPAPERS, CASE FILES, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO IDEOLOGY:  
AN ANALYSIS

She placed the valuables – the faded, cracked picture of her wedding day, her mother’s patchwork quilt, and her grandfather’s Bible – in a wooden milk crate for safe travel. Her husband finally got the TVA case worker to leave them alone, only after he found a new place to live at a farm on the hill in Shanghai, just a few miles down the road from their current location at Cairo Hollow. At least they were somewhat close to home; their neighbors weren’t so lucky and had to move all the way to Decatur. As she carefully placed the crate in the back of the truck they borrowed from the landowner, Mr. Bates, she stepped back and took one last look around at their peaceful cove on the river. She still didn’t really believe that it would soon be under water, much less did she understand how it would happen. She watched her husband across the dirt and gravel road saying goodbye to the other men of the community. Their three children, relieved from the usual heavy farm chores for the day, were, for once, smiling and playing. Her oldest teenage son asked, “Momma, why do we have to move?” She thought for a moment, and replied, “Well, son, TVA is coming. So we have to move. It’s just the way it is.”

For Limestone County residents who lived during the Great Depression, the promise of improvements of quality of life, better housing, and more financial resources

were enough reasons for many residents to celebrate the arrival of the Tennessee Valley Authority. For residents in the way of reservoir areas, the TVA's arrival was not so much cause to celebrate as a source of stress and more hardships. Somehow, messages about this agency needed to be communicated to residents about the changes TVA would make and how lives would be affected. During the 1930s, newspapers were one way to communicate information while simultaneously communicating dominant beliefs, or what the residents *should* think, about TVA. As the previous chapter demonstrated, most newspaper messages about TVA in Limestone County, Alabama were positive, in every area from articles to advertisements. But many of the people relocated by TVA were among the last group of people to receive benefits from TVA, namely affordable electricity.

So, what were the attitudes of the relocated families as compared to what was communicated about TVA and relocation in newspaper coverage of the event? The attitudes of the relocated families were mixed. Some were satisfied to relocate, especially if it meant moving to an area of better housing or land. Some families, though, were hesitant to leave. Some were misinformed about the process of relocation. And some blamed the TVA for causing them and their families more harm than good. In all cases, however, the relocated had no choice but to move, regardless of how they felt about it. In contrast, newspaper coverage of TVA and relocation was overwhelmingly positive. Relocation and relocated families were only mentioned in a few articles during a three-year time span. Papers praised TVA for bringing benefits to the entire region. So, to answer the research question, the attitudes of the families about relocation were mixed, while newspaper coverage of relocation was overwhelmingly positive.

The difference in attitudes between the relocated and newspaper coverage was the result of power. The answer lies in understanding that the dominant mindset of the time granted one group of people power over another and that the powerful group maintained its hegemony through symbolic processes. This chapter explains how the research question has been answered and offers historical and theoretical justification for the reasoning; first, through an overall view of newspaper coverage and how it contributed to the dominant ideology, then, through an overview of the relocated and how their powerlessness was maintained, and finally, a comparison and explanation from the standpoint of political economy.

#### Newspaper coverage of TVA and Family Relocation

From 1934-1936, the *Alabama Courier* and the *Limestone Democrat* communicated weekly messages about the changes that happened to this small, rural county that resulted in national attention. Nearly every week during those years, articles and advertisements promoted the TVA and its cheap electricity. Numerous stories about the tangible and visible economic benefits TVA would bring filled the *Courier* and the *Democrat*. Individuals were put back to work clearing land and constructing Wheeler Dam. More jobs meant more money into the economy, which meant more profits for businesses. Newspapers attributed those profits to TVA through many articles stressing how vital TVA was to turning around the economy of Limestone County. TVA meant more revenue for the city of Athens through electricity sales, which the newspapers asserted was an exceptionally positive turn of events for an area that struggled with poverty for years. Advertisements reflected positively on TVA, too. Appliance sales increased, which meant sustained advertisements in papers from businesses that

specialized in electric appliances. In other words, businesses that sold electric appliances happily supported the TVA because of the increased profits the agency indirectly brought them. Electricity was finally introduced to the area at an affordable price, and advertisements encouraged readers to take advantage of the new blessing. The newspaper messages said that everyone supported, and should support, TVA. All in all, newspapers promoted TVA as a welcomed presence in Limestone County, one that was nothing but positive for its residents.

One wonders why coverage was so positive if, in fact, not everyone felt that TVA was good, at least at the beginning of its intrusion to the Tennessee Valley. It is accurate that TVA meant economic benefits for many people, and it meant an improved way of life for many. It is also accurate that the significant sacrifices of the relocated were perceived as less important than the needs of the upper and middle classes whose interests were immediately served with the coming of electricity and its attendant economic benefits. Thanks to TVA, businesses saw profits in a time of economic depression, especially those businesses that sold electric appliances that were finally usable in this rural area. Newspapers' profits increased because of the businesses continuing to advertise and encourage people to purchase appliances. Also, newspapers had something interesting to write about and maintain readership, as TVA brought changes quickly to the area. So, newspapers covered TVA in a positive way because of the economic benefits it brought to the area and to the upper and middle classes, especially newspaper owners and the businesses that supported them.

TVA also meant an improved way of life for most people. Socioeconomic conditions in the rural south during the Depression communicated a distinct class

structure. TVA's changes were brought first to those of middle and upper class economic status, who could afford to purchase electricity and appliances. After the needs of the upper classes were served, the relocated finally began to see benefits. The lower class of individuals, mostly made up of poor White and Black tenant farmers who struggled to provide food, shelter, clothing, and income for their families, endured undue hardship in the process of relocating and finding new places to live and farm before they received benefits from TVA. The powerful elite made the decision for the families to move, under the guise of knowing what was best for them. Those in the most remote and rural areas who needed relief, or those who needed it the most, eventually saw benefits because of TVA, but only after the upper and middle classes received the economic and social benefits.

The dominant ideology, or commonly held beliefs about class, asserted that the interests and needs of the middle and upper classes were more important than the concerns and needs of the lower classes that had no choice but to follow the dictates to move. The upper and middle classes had money, power, and ideological hegemony, and the lower class was made up of those individuals who had no money, no power, and no resources; those who lived along the Tennessee River and were forced to relocate. The dominant ideology promoted the interests of businesses, and middle and upper classes.

An ideology maintains its dominance through coercion and consent. Obviously, the relocated were coerced into relocating, as they were given no choice but to move. But, it is important to remember that the relocated also consented to the ideology, thus consenting to the TVA, the decisions of the upper classes, and the relocation itself. The relocated accepted the decisions of the upper classes, despite the inconvenience it caused

them. The ideology, and its acceptance by all classes, especially by the relocated, maintained the hegemony of the moneyed classes.

The dominant ideology among Limestone Countians was simply that TVA was good because of the economic, developmental, and regional improvements it promised. This ideology was produced and maintained in Limestone County newspapers in two main ways: the constant positive stories published about TVA and the many advertisements for suddenly thriving businesses that were visible reflections of an improving economy. The ideology about TVA was the result of symbolic processes all around the people of the Tennessee Valley telling them that they needed help, and that TVA was a source to be trusted. Newspaper messages were one part of the many symbolic processes contributing to the ideology. The collective mindset about TVA certainly was influenced by the newspapers, but it is important to remember, too, the underlying historical context for the reason TVA was such a major factor in the lives of poor southerners: the Depression.

The nation was experiencing the worst economic depression in its history, and Americans were struggling and felt an intense desire to rid themselves of the ills of poverty. The people of Limestone County, like their neighbors throughout the South and across the country, were jobless for too long. Those who had jobs or farmed were making marginal profits that barely sustained their families. TVA promised to help, which transformed the future from one of hopelessness and despair to one of hopefulness and optimism. Because the ideology was so strongly linked to the economic depression that affected everyone, individuals were discouraged from opposing any program or agency that intended to help. This was evidenced in newspaper articles that suggested



any who opposed TVA were wrong. The dominant ideology with regards to the Depression was that any person or program that provided a way out of poverty was a good thing, a benefit to the region, and a force to accept and embrace, regardless of any personal sacrifices that some might have to endure.

President Roosevelt promised that the TVA would act as a Messiah for the south, and in many ways, it did. For middle and upper classes, TVA meant overall life improvements at no intrusion or disturbance. For these individuals, TVA provided cheap electricity, which provided justification for purchasing electric appliances to make their lives easier, which provided a boost in the economy and help towards getting out of the Depression. TVA had a ripple effect of good things for southerners, not just those living in north Alabama. TVA meant consistent jobs for people who were previously out of work – jobs that were mostly physical in nature and something of which the men of the region were proud. Considering that these events took place in the historical context of the Great Depression makes the ideology seem even more powerful.

Through their overwhelmingly positive slant about TVA, the papers did not try to protect the public interest in the stories they published about TVA. If they protected the public interest, they would have offered balanced coverage of TVA and the family relocation process, including stories on what was happening to the relocated and how the relocated felt about moving. Had the *Democrat* or *Courier* attempted to cover this event, the papers could have found many people who were not upset about having to relocate, so covering the event still could have made TVA look like a positive agency. However, both papers failed to report on relocation and chose to focus on the economic benefits TVA meant for the region. It is clear why monetary benefits overshadowed the hardships

of the families forced to move. The dominant mindset during the Depression dictated the region should have more jobs and more money, and if a few poor, rural farmers had to be moved against their will, so be it. The families who moved did so because they were forced, a fact that was generally ignored by the newspapers that had a responsibility to serve as a watchdog for the public.

Attributing the papers' stance on TVA to political economy makes sense for another reason. Newspapers exist to make a profit. Profits are made in newspapers through two ways: subscriptions and advertisements. For the most part, the people of rural Limestone County who were relocated by the TVA did not read current literature. It is evident that newspapers weren't targeting the relocated. Their target audience was those who read current literature, who could afford to the \$1 yearly subscription rate, and, more importantly, who would buy appliances and thus support the businesses that advertised with them. Thus, when the papers reported on TVA and its impact on the public, they defined "public" as those who bought their papers and advertising spots. Their public was the moneyed class, clearly not the relocated.

Newspapers likely made much more money on the advertisements they sold than on the subscriptions or individually sold papers. The papers' most consistent advertisers were businesses that sold electric appliances. TVA's cheap electricity meant that more residents would be able to afford electricity for their homes, which also meant that residents would need to purchase electric appliances. This meant that businesses that sold appliances and electricians who were needed to make homes able to receive electricity were making profits in a Depression-era economy, thanks to TVA. These extra profits allowed them to continue to advertise their services, which allowed them to

continue to recruit customers. So, for the newspapers, TVA didn't just mean electricity for more rural residents. It translated into profit. Papers told their readers to purchase TVA current not only because it would make their lives easier, but also because it was the "right" thing to do.

To summarize, the newspapers in Limestone County during Wheeler Dam's construction promoted overwhelmingly positive ideals about TVA and Wheeler Dam. Stories and advertisements promoted the benefits of using TVA's cheap power current in an effort to secure success for TVA operations, increase profits for businesses, and maintain profits for the newspapers through advertising. The newspapers communicated a reality that said TVA was beneficial to the region, and the reality that was communicated also overlooked the relocated families, symbolically annihilating them from coverage. This maintained the dominant ideology that TVA was completely beneficial to the region and it maintained the power of the middle and upper classes in this region of the country.

#### Newspaper Coverage of the Relocated

Fitting with the dominant ideology that men needed employment, families needed money, and businesses needed customers, TVA provided a solution for all of those problems and thus was constructed as a savior for the region. It was true that hundreds of men obtained gainful employment at a time of economic depression from the clearing of thousands of acres of land, which increased income and bolstered the economy. But, articles in neither the *Democrat* nor *Courier* mention the homes that had to be cleared in addition to the woodlands, bush, and lowlands. The decision to omit any mention of people's homes being destroyed, or the great migration of people from the riverbanks

outward, makes sense if one considers the historical and economic context of the Depression. The houses were, for the most part, poorly constructed structures that did not contribute aesthetically to the landscape. If given the choice between leaving these decrepit structures and bringing jobs for over 1,000 men, in a time of economic depression, the dominant ideology obviously favored the creation of employment and the creation of revenue and income. So, the houses were readily destroyed and overlooked in newspaper coverage not because of their outward appearance or because they were inadequate shelter, but because they represented the lowest class of individuals in the county, one that had to be removed in order to make room for a decision that represented hegemonic interests clothed in the symbols of “being good for everyone.” True, from the perspective of TVA and the businesses that were suddenly profiting from a better economy, there was a better way of life. For a long time, though, it was only “better” for those who could afford to purchase appliances and electricity, or the upper and middle classes.

The relocated families were the epitome of what it meant to be poverty-stricken in the Depression-era south. In Limestone County, most families farmed and made minimal profits, barely enough to provide food and clothing for their family. Housing conditions were deplorable. Individuals had very few outside resources or material goods, and even less money. In other words, they needed assistance. They were unable to pull themselves from the poverty-stricken lifestyles they had led for years, because of the characteristics of the antebellum southern economy and the impending nationwide economic depression.

TVA was sent in order to, among other things, provide for these families. While in reality rural residents needed help, this argument promoted the hegemony of the government and the middle and upper classes who saw definite, immediate benefits from TVA. Though TVA translated to improvements for many aspects of life, it's important to understand that above all else, TVA existed to make money. In order to make the most profits, it needed to build dams. In order to build dams, it needed rural river-bottom dwellers to relocate. So how did TVA convince these people to go along with its plans? Symbolic processes all around the rural families communicated that relocation was for their own good, and it was their only choice.

Those who were relocated participated in their own oppression because of the dominant ideology. Signs all around them told them that TVA was good, and that moving their homes to other areas was "right." The class dynamic itself prevented the relocated from speaking out against TVA or its practices. The relocated were powerless in the face of a powerful governmental agency that was fully supported by the locally powerful. The case workers were powerful in that they were more educated and of higher economic class than those with whom they worked. That means that the relocated probably didn't think that they could openly disagree with what the TVA was doing on their lands. There were some who attempted to fight back in subtle ways, such as by postponing relocation for months by making excuses about the weather or relying on other people to help, or by commenting to case workers that they felt TVA was unjust in its actions. The actions of those individuals were simply ignored, as the case workers persisted until each family living along the riverbanks finally relocated. The dominant ideology thus forced the relocated to participate in their own oppression.

Thus, the reality for families living along the Tennessee River was that they had to relocate, whether they liked it or agreed with it. Theoretically, the relocated perhaps could have fought back more strongly, such as by forming a union among themselves to formally oppose the TVA and its actions. However, as already noted, the ideology strongly discouraged the lower classes from opposing the upper classes. The repercussions of the lower class ignoring the ideology, or the signs around them saying that help was on the way, the promise of an improved way of life, and the hope that poverty would soon no longer be the normal standard of living, could have been severe. Had the lower classes formally organized and stopped the TVA, they would have killed not only the vision of Senator Norris, but also that of President Roosevelt and the board of directors, and more immediately salient to the relocated, killed the promise of money in a time of Depression. To oppose a governmental agency that promised sustained jobs, cheap electricity, disease control, and educational programs was absurd and challenged “conventional wisdom.” Essentially, because of this and because the lower class had little to no outside resources or education that would have given them ideas on how to accomplish a successful protest, the relocated could not oppose the TVA. Thus, the relocated were left with no other choice but to move.

In this way, the relocated participated in their own oppression. The relocated were the powerless group. Their powerlessness was maintained by a number of communication processes. In one sense, the relocated rural southerners accepted their prescribed status in accommodating the wishes of the upper class because they had no resources with which to fight them. Hegemonic processes contributed to a socially constructed reality for Limestone County residents that allowed one way of thinking to

become steeped into the minds of a group of people so much so that they in some ways participated in their own oppression for the good of the group.

### Comparison

The attitudes of the relocated families about relocation and TVA were mixed, positive and negative, while local newspaper coverage of relocation was positive. This difference was the result of a powerful ideology and its adherents exercising and maintaining power over another.

The federal government is a powerful institution in the United States. The dominant ideology about the government was and still is that it is a powerful force with which to reckon. In other words, the ideology about the government is that it has great institutional power. The TVA acted as an agent of the federal government, which gave it intrinsic authority. Case workers, too, were powerful, because they were agents of TVA, which made them agents of the federal government. Thus, TVA and case workers were the most powerful group in the picture. From a local perspective, two other groups also had power. The newspaper was a powerful structure, because its writers and editors were essentially the opinion leaders in the small community. The second local group with power included businesses and business owners. They had money, and money means power. The newspapers and businesses had a special relationship, as the newspapers profited from the businesses profits thanks to advertising dollars.

There was a powerful connection between the TVA, newspapers, and local businesses. The businesses were in a position to make long-term profits off TVA power, thanks to increased appliance sales and the need for electricians to make homes ready for electric current, so they were supportive of TVA's rural electrification initiatives. They

advertised their products and services in local newspapers, which resulted in advertising revenues for the papers. The newspapers reported positive stories about TVA and what electricity would mean for the Tennessee Valley, which made people want to purchase appliances and take advantage of affordable electricity. The newspapers allowed businesses to maintain their power, and their profits.

In other words, the powerful maintained ideological hegemony by acting as agents of federal government, taking advantage of newspaper and local business support, and by the major profits TVA meant for the region. Because TVA brought money to the city of Athens, local businesses, and newspapers, TVA maintained its power. The more money TVA meant for these powerful groups, the more powerful they became.

The relocated families who lived in rural areas along the Tennessee River were the powerless group in the situation. They were powerless for several reasons. First, they had no money. Second, they had no valued social status; in the local hierarchy, their living conditions, lack of money, and way of life constituted their lowest class status. Third, they had no real outside resources and may have felt it was pointless to go against a powerful system, like the federal government or even local businesses. While the dominant ideology of these people was that TVA would eventually be beneficial, that ideology was the result of the symbolic processes all around them. The ideology encouraged the relocated to accept their own oppression in order to make way for the powerful TVA. The reality that the newspapers communicated was different than the reality for the relocated, as the in the newspapers' realities, TVA translated to instant benefits for the entire region.



Reality told individuals in the South living through the Depression that there was little money, little resources, and little hope for salvation if they did not cooperate with the TVA and its projects. This reality was socially constructed, and it sent a very clear message: get out of depression by whatever means possible. The ideology was consistent with this reality. Newspapers produced, maintained, and repaired a reality and symbolically communicated the dominant ideology through publication of positive news stories about TVA and the benefits it meant for business and the economy.

Taken in the context of the Depression, the dominant mindset was that TVA was a positive thing for the Tennessee valley. Residents went along with relocation because they felt no other option. For them, it was just the way things were. Also, TVA seemed to care genuinely about the people. Everything around them said that TVA was good – they were visible in the community, home extension agents, more jobs, meaning more money. But, this was actually a move in the game that was crucial to TVA's success. In other words, TVA was not necessarily the benevolent proprietors of all that was promising for the south. Rather, it was crucial to TVA's success that someone purchase their electricity. The people had to go along with the idea that TVA was good for everyone.

Reality and dominant ideology were maintained through hegemonic processes of the newspapers printing mostly positive information about TVA while neglecting to print stories about TVA causing any individual or group of people inconvenience in the process. In the case of residents who lived along the river, the reality that they were being forced off their lands was somewhat repaired by the local newspapers whose stories focused on the positive aspects of the TVA and reminding residents that making

room for the TVA would be beneficial for everyone. The reality that was produced in the papers was one that said that TVA was good and had no negative side effects.

Newspapers marketed electricity to the upper and middle classes. They were the ones who could afford it, and they were the ones that read newspapers. If the newspapers could get the community excited about utilizing TVA's electricity, it meant that the community would continue to jump on the bandwagon to purchase appliances and that, in turn, would mean stable, consistent advertising from the appliance stores that were suddenly doing great business.

### Conclusion

The answer to what comparisons can be made between the attitudes of the families who were relocated as related to newspaper coverage in Limestone County during Wheeler Dam's construction can be attributed to dominant ideology with regards to class and power. The newspapers produced a reality that the Tennessee Valley Authority was going to save the region, and that reality was maintained by hegemonic processes. More importantly, the entire culture was the result of symbolic processes put in place to maintain hegemony, or the already established authority, of the upper classes.

TVA needed the residents to believe that it was the best thing to ever happen to the Tennessee Valley. TVA needed to accomplish several things in the cities in which they were present. First, they needed the families who lived along the riverbanks to move to make way for the reservoir areas. Second, they needed to provide jobs for the local economy, and they did that through hiring men to clear the land that was to be flooded and by hiring individuals for construction on dams and other side projects. Thirdly, TVA needed the general public to accept it and its practices. That meant

ensuring that local newspaper coverage promoted their ideas and goals. Finally, it was crucial that people actually purchased the electric current provided by TVA. One way to get people to purchase electricity was to promote and advertise for new, helpful electric appliances. TVA in that sense, then, was helping the local businesses who before were struggling and could not have sold electric appliances. All the goals of the TVA were thus interconnected, and all parts must have been successful for the TVA to be a success.

Clearly, the newspapers' target audience was not the rural people of the Wheeler reservoir area. This could explain the lack of coverage of the family relocation process, despite their immediacy to the problem of relocation. But more realistically, the papers did not target the relocated because they were not buying their newspapers, nor were they supporting the businesses that advertised so much during the time of Wheeler's construction. Thus, the lack of coverage in the newspapers about family relocation can be attributed to reasons of political economy and perpetuating a dominant ideology during the Depression that more jobs and more income were the best remedy for the dying economy, no matter the cost.

The story of the family that has paralleled each chapter in this thesis was fiction based on true events of relocation. Because the family was created from a compilation of the most interesting and common information in the case files, their story was historically accurate. The sequence of events I explained could very well have been what happened to any of the 300 families who were impacted in Limestone County by Wheeler Dam's reservoir creation. In the end, the families who were relocated either slowly struggled to gain better economic footing or remained poverty-stricken until the next generation. Residents in Limestone County today still talk about how wonderful TVA was for the

area. Lifelong Limestone residents mention how great it was for TVA to give their ancestors jobs and pull their families from economic depression. The dominant ideology seems to be the same today as it was then – it didn't matter that families had to be relocated. TVA was there to stay, and it provided as many benefits then as it does today. Families along the riverbanks simply had to get out of the way. It was “just the way it was.”

## VI. DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES ARE STILL DOMINANT: CONCLUSIONS

In March 2005 a lifelong resident of Athens, Alabama wrote that “land use is undergoing a change of epic proportions in Limestone County. Farm land is being diverted for building sites, commercial uses... at what seems to me a very rapid pace...”<sup>1</sup> The writer was a farmer whose comments were published in the *Athens-Limestone News Courier*. His family farm “lost over half its rented land to subdivisions,” but he hoped that those who live in houses where his farm once thrived “enjoy[ed] living in these homes as much as we enjoyed farming the fields.”<sup>2</sup>

Though the economic stronghold of modern-day Limestone County is still agriculture, the economy is shifting away from its agrarian roots. Perhaps this economic shift is what TVA wanted for the south. Though much has changed in Limestone County since the TVA relocated families in the 1930s to make way for “progress,” one thing has remained the same. The dominant mindset is clearly and eerily similar – the needs of the upper and middle classes, those who can afford to purchase land and create housing developments, are more important than the needs of the working classes, or those who continue to farm for a living. This ideology was evident in the newspaper coverage of TVA in the 1930s, as it is evident in newspaper editorials and continued TVA coverage today.

This thesis asked the question, what were the attitudes of families about relocation as compared to newspaper coverage of the event? The attitudes of the families were both positive and negative, while the newspaper coverage was overwhelmingly positive.

Taken in historical and theoretical context, this difference can be attributed to the class status and power structures in place, and by symbolic processes that maintained ideological hegemony of the powerful over the powerless.

### Overview

The Tennessee Valley Authority was created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in May, 1933. Its primary purpose provided for the regional development of the rural south. TVA was a multi-purpose agency, focusing on flood control, improved navigation, recreation, regional development, rural electrification, and water quality improvement. TVA constructed a series of nine dams along the Tennessee River in Tennessee and north Alabama to achieve its missions. The creation of dams resulted in reservoirs, which meant that a considerable amount of land was flooded and thousands of families were forced to leave their homes along the fertile riverbanks. The removal of those families from flood danger areas is known as family relocation. The family relocation process is an area often overlooked in TVA literature, despite its necessity to achieving TVA's goals.

TVA created a special subunit, the Family Relocation Division, to ensure that all families knew about the need to relocate, and to make sure that they, in fact, did leave the flood danger zones. TVA hired and specially trained case workers to personally and repeatedly visit each family until no residents lived in reservoir areas. While TVA purchased the land from the landowners, they offered little outside assistance in finding new places to live. It was up to the individual to relocate him/herself and family. Sometimes this meant the family moved to better locations with more fertile farmland, but sometimes it meant the family moved to worse quality land and locations. Thus,

opinions about family relocation among those who were directly affected by it were mixed, positive and negative.

While relocation occurred in Limestone County, Alabama, newspaper coverage of TVA and the construction of Wheeler Dam was overwhelmingly positive. TVA resulted in monetary benefits for the city of Athens, affordable electricity for residents to improve the overall quality of life, and more profits for businesses who were able to sell electric appliances. These businesses had a special relationship with the two newspapers in Limestone County, the *Alabama Courier* and the *Limestone Democrat*, in that the businesses' profits allowed them to continue to advertise in the papers. Thus, newspapers indirectly made more money because of TVA. It was in the newspapers' interests to promote TVA as a positive presence in the region, regardless of the hardships TVA caused over 200 families in Limestone County due to relocation. Newspapers overlooked the families that were relocated in their coverage of TVA. Those rural families were, as the dominant ideology communicated and hegemony maintained, unimportant and powerless.

TVA and the story of the relocated are set in the historical context of the Great Depression. The Depression was severe, and it affected so many aspects of individuals' lives that the dominant mindset during this time told people that anything that meant more money and jobs for the economy was good. TVA certainly meant more jobs and an improved economy for the struggling rural south. But, this economic boost came at a cost. Thousands of families were put through the hardship of relocation in order to accommodate the TVA. Because TVA meant more money, though, the dominant ideology as communicated in newspapers told the relocated that if they had reservations

about moving, they didn't matter. According to the papers, the only people who mattered were the moneyed classes.

The communication perspective of this history helps understand the answer to the research question. Carey asserts that communication is a “symbolic process whereby realities are produced, maintained, repaired and transformed.”<sup>3</sup> Through publication of positive stories about TVA, the newspapers in this case symbolically produced and maintained a reality that reminded residents that TVA was for their own good. If one happened to be part of the upper or middle class, then that reality was congruent with their personal experiences with TVA, as they were purchasing affordable electricity and using home appliances, and seeing profits in their small businesses. If one happened to be part of the lower class, though, the reality as communicated in the papers was incongruent with many of their experiences with TVA, as they were the ones who were inconvenienced in the name of progress. Because signs all around them said so, the relocated had to accept TVA. In other words, the relocated accepted the newspapers' ideological hegemony of the upper class.

This research tells us much about family relocation and TVA that was previously unknown. It reveals that the families in Limestone County that were relocated because of Wheeler's construction were overlooked by newspapers, a powerful force in their struggles to find new places to live. Newspapers overlooked these families because it was more beneficial to their profit margin, and the profits of their main advertisers, for the remaining residents to accommodate TVA, mainly to begin using its electricity. Finally, this research demonstrates that it was in TVA's best interest for the public to



focus on the economic benefits the agency meant for the region. The families were overlooked, then, because they didn't matter.

### Limitations

Because of the need to keep this project narrowly focused on one aspect of family relocation, oral histories and promotional materials published by and about TVA were not included in the analysis. Speaking to current residents in Limestone County about TVA, or speaking to descendants of residents who were affected by relocation, would have provided more depth and understanding of the ideology of the relocated.

Another area of limitations is the consideration of social desirability in residents' answering of case workers questions. There is no evidence that the relocated were pressured to give certain responses to the case workers' constant questioning. However, considering the difference in class status (the case workers being of a higher educational and monetary class standing than the relocated), it is possible that some of the residents who said they were happy with relocation may have hidden their true feelings in hopes that it would please the authority. Through the course of their visits, the case workers became very well acquainted with the families. Thus, it would have been difficult for families to hide physical aspects of their lives from the case workers, and it probably appeared to a lot of the families that keeping the case workers happy would be in their best interests. Case workers were direct agents of the TVA and of the federal government, more educated, and probably more articulate than the residents with which they worked. Thus, the class differential was probably readily apparent to all involved. In order to keep the case workers, a source of authority, happy, some residents may have offered positive comments about TVA in hopes of somehow receiving even more

benefits. Also, no research was presented that gave indication of how the workers were trained or what they were told to accomplish with each relocated family. This information would have provided better insight on the relationship between the case workers and the families.

Another area left out of this research is explanation of the turmoil within the TVA as an organization. Complete understanding of TVA and how it operated would have required lengthy explanation of the controversy surrounding the TVA itself, as well as the public battle for power ownership. Had more time been devoted to explaining the three original directors, their personal conflicts, and their personal visions for the organization, it would have yielded another facet for analysis – namely, how the personal visions of the directors impacted or influenced how the case workers handled the families.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

This thesis has great heuristic value in that there are several avenues for further research, as despite the large amount of literature about the Tennessee Valley Authority, very little has been written about family relocation, and this thesis only fills a small gap left by TVA historians.

This event took place in recent history, and many residents who were relocated remain in Limestone County and continue to raise families in Limestone. Thus, there is a great amount that could be learned by conducting oral histories of Wheeler's and other dams' constructions. Speaking with residents who were relocated, or their family members, or individuals who were associated with TVA during Wheeler's construction would make a valuable addition to this research. It furthers the perception that these

people and their history is as relevant as the dominant ideological perspective of the event.

This project could be expanded to research other TVA dams besides just Wheeler. It would be valuable to know if the dominant ideology was as strong in other areas along the Tennessee, and it would also be interesting to know if newspaper coverage in other areas was as overwhelmingly positive as it was in Limestone County. Likewise, this project could be expanded to include analysis of other newspapers in larger cities or with larger circulations, such as national newspapers, to see what other people outside the Tennessee Valley said about TVA.

TVA expanded its operations to include more than producing just hydroelectric power. TVA is also responsible for the creation and maintenance of several nuclear power plants in the southeast. The history of these power plants warrants study to determine if the same controversies surrounded their creation, to understand what, if any, political battles and decisions surrounded their development, and to find out if their location is a result of class or political issues. For example, Limestone County became the home to Browns Ferry Nuclear Power Plant several decades after the construction of Wheeler. As Limestone has one of the lowest per-capita incomes in North Alabama, the decision to construct the nuclear plant there could have been related to class issues. Perhaps the dominant ideology with regards to the construction of the nuclear plant was also one that the upper classes knew what was best for the lower classes, and local residents had to accept the dangerous nuclear reactor being placed in their own backyards. TVA's nuclear plants, too, may have been constructed in low income areas

for “the good of the residents.” So, studying other aspects of TVA projects would further this research as well.

One could analyze the same texts using the same general theoretical context, and tell a different story. For example, future research could focus on the race issues within the TVA and surrounding relocation. Relocation and dam construction took place at a time in our country’s history when prejudices toward Blacks and other races were extreme, especially in the rural south. It would be interesting to find out if TVA indeed treated Blacks and Whites differently, or if they were fair in their hiring practices and treatment during relocation. Also, one could analyze how gender roles were communicated by TVA officials. Case files make clear distinctions between masculine and feminine individuals, and it would be interesting to discover if traditional masculine and feminine roles were played out in case files, newspapers, or other communication surrounding TVA or relocation.

This thesis could have taken a number of theoretical standpoints, even within the realm of communication. One obvious alternate theoretical context would be from an organizational communication standpoint. The TVA itself has warranted much research, but a future study could thoroughly examine the communication practices of the organization as evidence of how TVA treated employees, and how communication among directors influenced the controversies and conflicts in TVA’s early years. Also, one could do a complete study of the case workers, their place in the overall organization, how they were trained, what they were told to expect, and how they handled the intensity of their jobs.

The family relocation process could be examined as a public relations case study. TVA published many promotional documents, not only to educate the people about its purposes, but also to show people how beneficial it would be to their communities. Examining TVA brochures, home demonstrations, and other promotional activities from a public relations theoretical perspective would cover another facet of family relocation that has yet to be explored. Expanded even further, one could research the public relations efforts surrounding the creation of TVA's nuclear power plants, specifically the strategies used to get the communities in which the power plants were constructed to accept the dangerous presence of nuclear reactors.

Another direction for future research would be to examine another aspect of relocation, such as the relocation of physical structures besides houses that TVA flooded in creating reservoir areas. Though most of the land and physical structures were cleared before the land was inundated, some things were undoubtedly left in place, such as graveyards. Supposedly, TVA relocated most of the graveyards, but left the graveyards that were predominately Black to be flooded. Graveyard records are available in the National Archives and Records Administration Southeast Branch in Atlanta, Georgia, and a comparison of them and the case files would make an interesting study, especially if one wanted to examine the event from a race perspective, or examine the class issue further.

Case files tell us much about the lives of Wheeler families affected by relocation. However, there are things that case files don't tell us about the relocation process. For example, case files do not tell us how much TVA paid per tract of land. This information would paint a clearer overall picture of the relocated and how they were treated.

Additionally, the Tennessee Valley Mutual Land Owner's Agency could be researched, to see if this agency actually materialized, if it was valid, and if it helped any of the relocated families, and if so, in what capacity.

Another thing case files don't tell us is what constituted a successful relocation. As seen in the files, the case was considered closed after the case worker classified the family as "successfully relocated." However, a concrete definition of successful or unsuccessful relocation was never presented. What did it mean to be "successfully relocated?" Judging from case files, for most cases, the family was successfully relocated if they were away from danger of being under water. This would make an interesting direction for future research.

This research can also be used as a starting point for researching today's TVA. For a broader perspective on the politics of TVA, one could research the board of directors: who has served on it, why, and what political purposes the board has served in the past as well as purposes for the future. For example, despite TVA's presence and importance in Alabama, no Alabama resident has ever served on the Board of Directors of TVA.<sup>4</sup> Why this is the case would make another interesting study.

Finally, the most modern form of research that is relevant to this thesis, there is current interest throughout the Tennessee Valley about TVA's current land usage policies. TVA did not flood all of the land it secured for flood control. Some of the land was "cushion" around what became reservoir areas and subsequently was never flooded. Now, decades after Wheeler's construction, land acquisition and relocation along the Tennessee River, TVA is selling a substantial amount of land to corporations for the purposes of creating riverfront neighborhoods. Apparently, TVA does not have a clear-

cut policy on selling land it possesses. In other words, TVA is probably making a considerable amount of money from selling land that it basically stole from poor, oppressed southerners decades ago. Future researchers could investigate TVA's land use policies, especially how the agency determines when it is appropriate to sell land it owns, who may purchase the land, and for what price. Considering the hardships that securing the precious and valuable land long the river caused for 14,785 families not too long ago, this is perhaps the most current, controversial and important area for future research.

One suggestion for future research would include examining issues of power and hegemony, media messages, and other groups who were forced to relocate. TVA families were not the only group of people in our nation's or world's history who have been forced to relocate away because it was the "right" thing to do. Around the same time of TVA relocation, Jews in Nazi Germany were being relocated to concentration camps under the guise that work would set them free. A few years later, Japanese-Americans were relocated in the United States in the interest of national security. And during our nation's beginning years, Native Americans were forced away from their homelands in droves. Looking at media messages surrounding these events would provide a broader perspective on how dominant ideologies are communicated and power is maintained through symbolic processes.

### Conclusion

TVA still has a commanding presence along the Tennessee River. The dams that were constructed decades ago still provide affordable electricity to residents in north Alabama. TVA still provides economic benefits to the region, as it is a major employer and still provides revenues for many cities all along the Tennessee, including Athens in

Limestone County. And, interestingly enough, the dominant ideology with regards to TVA is still the same as it was upon its inception. Talk to any Limestone County resident about TVA, and they'll all say the same thing, "I hate to think about where we'd be without TVA. It did so many good things for us." Usually such statements are followed with a personal story about how TVA put a father or grandfather back to work during the Depression, or memories about TVA trucks invading playtimes to spray for mosquitoes in an effort to control malaria outbreaks. True, TVA meant good things for the Tennessee Valley. But, only when someone else mentions relocation do they comment about the families who were inconvenienced in the name of progress. The relocated families were overlooked at the time of Wheeler's construction, as their memory is often overlooked today.

It's peaceful at Wheeler today, a stark juxtaposition from its noisy intrusion to the Tennessee Valley in the 1930s. On a clear spring afternoon, all that can be heard at the dam are sounds of cars whizzing across its 6,324 foot bridge, birds chirping as they dive down for fish, and the gentle hum of larger-than-life turbines that constantly churn to provide electricity for a region. From the Wheeler overlook area, one can truly appreciate a view of nature at its most beautiful – the waters are calming, the trees along the riverbanks provide shady spots for picnicking, and somehow, the power lines in the middle of the water don't seem out of place next to the thousands of tons of concrete structure alongside them. The Wheeler powerhouse overlooks the valley as a symbol of authority.

The sign welcoming visitors to Wheeler identifies TVA's 6 multi-purposes, or "areas of responsibility." They are navigation, flood-control, power supply, land use,



water quality, and recreation. Overlooked in the list of Wheeler's multi-purposes was perhaps the most compelling reason of all for TVA to come to the region, and the most compelling for all the time, money, and lives used in its construction – the short-term and long-term monetary benefits for many individuals and groups of people. Overlooked is the multitude of profits brought in to cities all across the south thanks to affordable, reasonable electricity sales. Overlooked still are the lives that were affected in a negative way, in the name of profits, as there is no recognition for those families anywhere around Wheeler's visitor center. And overlooked today, with the current debate about what to do with the "leftover" TVA lands, is the hardships TVA caused those families who gave up that fertile farmland so that others could have electricity and the region could finally be pulled from an economic depression.

Overlooked is what lies beneath those peaceful waters – tree stumps, once fertile farmland, the graveyards that were left alone instead of relocated, and remnants and ruins of humble homes. The houses along the riverbanks today are different than the houses in the same location of the 1930s. They are solid structures. There are no shacks. They are, in some places, expensive and even luxurious. In the 1930s, the homes along the riverbanks were there for practicality, as they needed the fertile land for farming. Today, they are there for recreational convenience and luxury, as homeowners need the riverbanks for launching their boats and jet skis. There are no farms along the riverbanks, but beyond the well-developed area along the river there are a few small houses and vast expanses of land, obviously where humble farmers still live and work.

In closing, TVA did many good things for the south. One wonders if the progression of the south would have been hindered had it not been for this federal

agency. TVA improved the quality of life for many southerners through improved navigation along the river, improved water quality, creation of jobs during the Depression, educating residents on modern farming techniques, and by providing affordable electricity by harnessing the power of water. Despite the benefits, though, the truth remains that a group of people were discounted in light of the benefits TVA meant for the Tennessee Valley. More importantly, rural residents were relocated were overlooked because the dominant ideology said they were unimportant.

The ideology that the wealthy are more important continues, as evidenced by the expensive homes along the river, the lower class of farmers who live just beyond the river's reach, and TVA's willingness to sell land to private developers at lucrative prices. The *Athens-Limestone News-Courier*, the current daily paper that resulted from the merging of the *Courier* and *Democrat* in 1962, still perpetuates that ideology. Headlines still praise TVA for the monetary benefits it brings to the region. Athens Utilities Manager Gary Scroggins attested to how beneficial TVA's 2004 \$4.7 million tax equivalent payments for Limestone, and \$80.9 million in tax equivalent payments statewide, have been for the economy. These payments are based on the previous year's profits from power sales and TVA-owned property. Scroggins said, "TVA has also proven to be an excellent corporate citizen by investing in Limestone County over the years."<sup>5</sup> TVA Chairman Glenn McCullough was quoted in the same article, saying, the record amount of payments of TVA benefits people in local communities across Alabama and throughout the Tennessee Valley by helping fund schools and many other needed programs and services . . . payments along with reliable,

affordable power help enhance economic growth for the people we serve through local distributors of TVA power.<sup>6</sup>

Truly, though the standards of living in Limestone County are much better these days than during the Depression, little has changed with regards to the dominant ideology, attributing to the power of a collective mindset.

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<sup>1</sup> *Athens-Limestone News Courier* (Athens, Al.), 23 March 2005.

<sup>2</sup> *Athens-Limestone News Courier* (Athens, Al.), 23 March 2005.

<sup>3</sup> James Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Boston, Ma.: Unwin-Hyman, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> *Athens-Limestone News Courier* (Athens, Al.), April 2005.

<sup>5</sup> *Athens-Limestone News Courier* (Athens, Al.), 22 March 2005.

<sup>6</sup> *Athens-Limestone News Courier* (Athens, Al.), 22 March 2005.

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