

## THE IMPACT OF THE MECHANIZED COTTON PICKER

The mechanical cotton picker had a profound impact on sharecropping and life in the South. Nicholas Lemman's history, *The Promised Land*, describes how on October 2, 1944 a crowd of 3,000 people gathered on Howell Hopson's plantation outside of Clarksdale, Mississippi to witness the first public demonstration of the mechanical cotton picker. In an hour a good field hand could pick 20 pounds of cotton; Hopson's mechanical picker picked 1,000 pounds. Hopson calculated that a bale of cotton (500 pounds) cost him \$39.41 to pick by hand, and \$5.26 by machine. In *Goin' to Chicago*, MaeBertha Carter says once the cotton pickers came in she was told to leave the farm. The planters' insatiable demand for cheap labor - fed first by slavery and then by sharecropping - had finally come to an end. The sharecropping system had become obsolete. (Lemann, p. 17-21)

### QUESTION:

**Can you think of other times when the introduction of a new technology suddenly displaced massive numbers of Americans? How might the negative impact of these economic changes be softened and people helped to make a transition to a new job?**