



Remember My Sacrifice: The Autobiography of Clinton Clark, Tenant Farm Organizer and Early Civil Rights Activist

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On the morning of July 27, 1940, police arrested African American labor organizer Clinton Clark during a parishwide rally in Natchitoches, Louisiana. That day, over 800 black farmers and plantation workers made their way to town to protest for fair payments for their crops and equal access to New Deal assistance programs. Though those arrested with him were released after only three days, Clinton remained in jail for three weeks without charges and faced a possible lynching. News of Clark's captivity reached New Orleans labor organizers and spread to national civil liberties groups, making him a public figure among civil rights organizations. Recounting Clark's life in his own words, *Remember My Sacrifice* is an exceptional first-hand account of the lives of African Americans in rural Louisiana and of Clark's covert efforts to organize sharecroppers and farm workers during the Great Depression.

Born in 1903, Clark grew up in a sharecropping family in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana. Like many of his counterparts, Clark struggled to find work in the 1920s, and in 1931 he moved to California with hopes of finding work. Instead, he was introduced to the Unemployed Benefits Council, a Communist-affiliated relief organization. For Clark, the organization's mission of collective action coupled with respect and relief for the unemployed was the ideal political expression for the frustration he felt within the southern economy. Upon returning to Louisiana in 1933, Clark used his newfound confidence to organize sugar plantation workers and sharecroppers on his own, often hiding out in the woods to escape the persecution of landowners and town officials. Known as the "Black Ghost of Louisiana," Clinton Clark worked to connect rural Louisiana with a larger southern farmers' union movement, an effort that culminated in the formation of the Louisiana Farmers' Union in 1937. Helping small farmers and farm workers -- most of whom were black -- take advantage of President Franklin Roosevelt's agricultural benefit programs and form goods cooperatives that served to break down the tenant farmers' reliance upon plantation commissaries, Clark assisted Louisiana farmers in their search for an equitable income.

In 1942 Clinton Clark penned his autobiography at night while working at a trucking company in New Orleans, and shortly afterwards, he fled Louisiana for New York City. In the years that followed, Clark faced the FBI's Communist surveillance, though his memoir suggests that Clark never wholeheartedly endorsed communism -- he simply wanted equality. With an introduction and thorough annotations by Elizabeth Davey and Rodney Clark, Clinton Clark's nephew, Clark's unique narrative illuminates the relationships between labor and civil rights groups and their important work organizing against racial discrimination in the years before the modern civil rights movement.

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