Definitions

- **Voluntary labor:** A person freely chooses to work and can refuse or leave.
- **Coerced labor:** Pressure, threats, deprivation, confinement, or lack of meaningful choice are used to obtain labor.
- **Peonage:** A system in which a person is compelled to work to satisfy a debt or obligation and cannot freely leave.

Your job today is not to decide whether every flood camp operated the same way. Your job is to examine evidence about how relief, labor, and freedom became entangled during the 1927 flood.

Source A: Red Cross or official relief policy
Focus on camp organization, food, sanitation, labor expectations, or administration.

Source B: Black newspaper coverage
For example, reporting on refugees being prevented from leaving, labor gangs, or unequal relief.

Source C: NAACP/Walter White material
Focus on peonage, mobility restrictions, and complaints about camp treatment.

Source D: planter/local official perspective
Focus on the argument that agricultural labor had to remain in the Delta for economic recovery.

Complete four questions

- What problem does this source think needs to be solved?
- Who has decision-making power?
- What does the source assume about Black laborers/refugees?
- What policy would this source probably support?

Policy Board Rules

- Refugees may leave camp whenever transportation is available.
- All able-bodied adults must perform camp work in exchange for relief.
- Essential camp labor must be paid.
- Plantation owners may request the return of their workers.
- No refugee may be returned to an employer without consent.
- Food and relief are provided regardless of willingness to work.

Class Discussion

1. Was the central problem unequal relief, forced labor, restricted mobility, or all three?

2. At what point does requiring work during an emergency become coercion?

3. Could the Red Cross provide “neutral” disaster relief inside a society structured by racial and economic inequality?