Land & Power

Sustainable Agriculture and African Americans

A collection of essays from the 2007 Black Environmental Thought conference edited by

Jeffrey L. Jordan
Edward Pennick
Walter A. Hill
Robert Zabawa

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)

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Top right: by Dr. John C. Mayne. Dr. Owusu Bandele with his Southern SARE soil solarization project.

Bottom left: by Marion Post Wolcott. Tim Forehand's wife Minnie scratching Irish potatoes out of their garden patch. Flint River Farms, Georgia." May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-051831-D.

Bottom right: by Marion Post Wolcott. Harvesting Lonnie Smith's oats with Will Miller's binder. Farm supervisor A. M. Fields is directing the work. Flint River Farms, Georgia. May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-051829-D.

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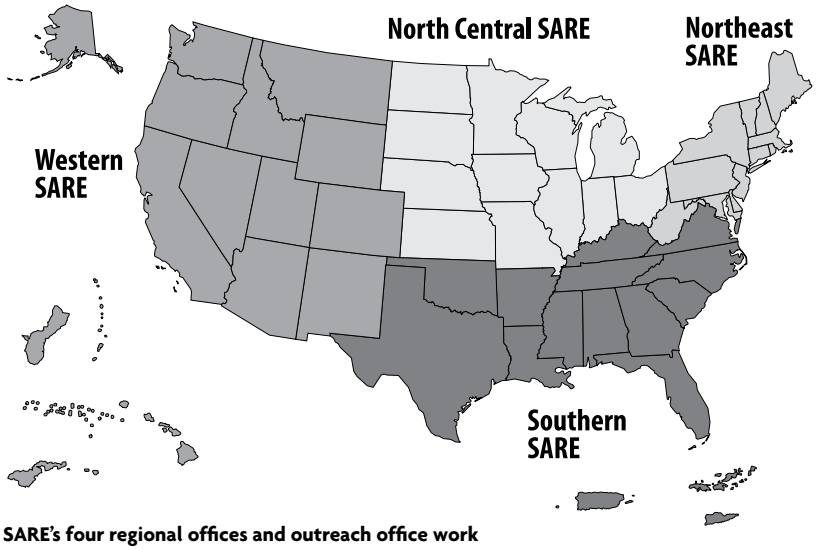

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Sustainable Agriculture and African Americans: Land and Power

Jeffrey L. Jordan, Edward "Jerry" Pennick, Walter A. Hill, and Robert Zabawa

Because a story is story, you may tell it as your imagination and your being and your environment dictate. —Nelson Mandela, Favorite African Folktales, 2002

In May 2007, the Southern region of the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (S-SARE) sponsored a conference at Tuskegee University entitled *Black Environmental Thought: Land, Power and Sustainability* (co-sponsored by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, Tuskegee University, Fort Valley State University, the University of Georgia and the AfroEco Group). The conference was the result of a grant proposal submitted by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives to the S-SARE program. While the grant was not funded in its proposed form, it sparked the idea of this gathering. It was particularly significant that the conference convened at a place where George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington built an important institution. The goal of the conference was to move innovation in Black sustainable agriculture forward and contribute to the overall diversity of thought in sustainable agriculture.

Papers were sought on various topics including: agrarian ethics emerging from slavery and Southern farming; contemporary Black environmental thought in rural settings; the influence of Africanism on Black ecological thought; the symbiotic exchange between Native and African American worldviews and their impact on Black environmental thinking; the interface between justice, sustainability, and landscape; Black perspectives on sustainable agriculture; how African American artistic expression can encourage learning and integration of Black ecological philosophy; and a Black vision for agricultural sustainability. The papers in this volume were only some of the presentations, posters, discussions, and performances that made up this extraordinary conference. The gathering at Tuskegee University was a joyous event that also featured poetry (some included here) and music, including a consideration of the connection between the song and the land presented by Tuskegee University Director of Choral Activities Wayne Barr, as well as a blues performance by the late Willie King and two of his band members. The performance was so vivid, so dynamic that it turned into a space and time where the participants could listen, feel, sing, dance, clap, stomp, and shout in response to the words, rhythms, and tunes shared by Willie King. The conference also included a provocative histo-musical presentation by Queen Quet Marquetta L. Goodwine of the Gullah/Geechee Nation. The interactive presentation led to an open dialogue on using traditional mechanisms in order to keep a sustainable environment in the Sea Islands.

As we gathered the papers from the conference into this volume, we realized that what we had was not so much a discussion of Black environmental thought but Black agrarian thought that takes a new look at sustainable agriculture and Black landownership and more fully incorporates the Black experience in the United States, particularly in the South. Black American agricultural experiences are grounded in unique cultural, historical, and ecological experiences, informed by the values and history of the African diaspora. This includes agronomic traditions brought from Africa, the experience of slavery, sharecropping and tenant farming, the story of migration to the industrial North and the gardening traditions that were carried with them, and concerns about contemporary food-systems issues. In practice, Black Americans for the most part share a common ethic and philosophy regarding land and agriculture, but the literature base relating to it is relatively small and not widely read.

For complex and tragic reasons, there is much we do not know and understand about Black agrarian thought. Through a history of slavery and institutional racism, in Black attempts to build an abiding connection to the land, a complicated and difficult legacy has been generated. In a positive sense, however, the strength and resilience of Black Americans in surviving and overcoming these struggles strengthens their culture, community, and relationship to the land.

As Walter Hill noted in his opening talk at the conference, the story we tell here must include the fact that the original accumulation of capital used in industry in the United States and Europe came from the extraction of wealth from colonies, piracy, and the African slave trade (Manning, 2000). The story also includes the fact that the Constitution of the United States included: Article I, Section 2—for purposes of representation and taxation, each slave counted as three-fifths of a person; Article I, Section 9—authorities could not interfere with the slave trade for two decades; and Article IV, Section 2—all fugitive slaves had to be returned to their owners.

Most of slaves' waking hours were spent in labor on the land, but this labor gave them knowledge of the land that was intimate and precise and, in turn, had material, social, and political usefulness (e.g., nutrition and small profit from gardening, hunting, and crafts). For African American slaves, the wilderness was a place of potential deliverance—a site of healing, a meeting spot, a place where a decisive edge of resources could be added to meager plantation rations, and a place where salvation could be gained, either through worship in the holler, through the strengthening of kin connections, or through stealing oneself away permanently (Stewart, 2006).

The word *Black* extends to people of African descent in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe; that is, *Black* is a global phenomenon. Thus, though the conference initially focused predominantly on people of African descent in the United States, the worldwide connections between people of African descent are an integral part our presentation.

We seek to develop more concrete thinking and identification with Black agrarian thought and its applications to Black American farming, sustainable agriculture, and professional development opportunities.

When the invitation was extended, we expected submissions confined to specific, individual fields of study, sort of the literary counterpart of a conventional, monocropped farm. The papers we received were more like eclectic, diversified family farms. Some writers touched on more than one subject, and some subjects attracted writers from diverse viewpoints. All of the writers, however, place African American farmers, their cultural traditions, as well as the historical circumstances they have faced squarely in the forefront of the sustainable agriculture movement.

For example, we received several papers about George Washington Carver. The three chosen for this collection deliver a multifaceted view of this complicated historical figure. In "George Washington Carver: A Blazer of Trails to a Sustainable Future," John Ferrell stresses how two facets of the Carver story—his advocacy of natural farming methods and his promotion of expended use of farm-grown industrial raw materials—provide perspective on the 21st-century challenge of linking farms to factories sustainably. In "York, Harriet and George: Writing African-American Ecological Ancestors," Kimberly Ruffin examines York (the enslaved body servant of William Clark), Harriet Tubman, and Carver through the eyes of three authors who offer "neo-slave poetry" invigorated by the conceptual crossroads of contemporary activism. Mark Hersey's "The Transformation of George Washington Carver's Environmental Vision, 1896–1918" emphasizes how Carver's interaction with impoverished Alabama farmers radically altered his approach to scientific agriculture. While Carver's distinctive environmental vision owes much to his religious view of nature, his education at the Iowa Agricultural College, and his introduction to the nascent science of ecology, it was no less a product of his growing awareness of the practical difficulties facing the region's African American tenant farmers over his first two decades at Tuskegee. By continually adapting his approach to suit the land and its people, Carver forged a strand of scientific agriculture that rejected some of the central tenets of mainstream agronomy and anticipated the sustainable agriculture movement of today.

Several writers examine attitudes and traditions brought from Africa that have influenced Blacks in the New World. Owusu Bandele's "The Deep Roots of Our Land-Based Heritage: Environmental, Social, and Cultural Implications" traces major agricultural contributions directly to Africa, touching on their implications for medicine, economics, religion, and education. He refers to art, poetry, songs, and political movements to show how agriculture permeates Black consciousness. In "The Cultural and Ecological Contexts of African American Farming," In "Theoretical Perspectives on the Cultural Foundations of Sustainable Agriculture and African American Farmers: Towards a Black Agroecology," Kwasi Densu compares the major traditions and suggests that many problems in Black farming communities could be addressed by returning to the African traditions as characterized by five core features of indigenous African agroecological systems. Densu concludes that contemporary strategies associated with promoting sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty can benefit from remembering the traditions of African American agrarianism.

Two papers present contrasting efforts to improve living conditions for Blacks in the first half of the 20th century. Hargrove and Zabawa have conducted extensive research into the New Deal Resettlement Communities that offered

landless sharecroppers complete farms and the infrastructure to go with them in the 1930s. The communities were self-contained, including everything from land to livestock, houses, and schools. Hargrove and Zabawa's paper, "The Physical and Social Environment of African American Agricultural Communities of the New Deal Resettlement Administration," is a snapshot of what they have discovered about these communities—their pasts, their influence, their current living conditions, and the potential for revitalizing some of them. In particular we see in the resettlement communities the importance of the social aspects of sustainable agriculture. Hargrove and Zabawa note that the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project could be classified as a successful demonstration of community building for a group of people who had previously been limited to the lowest rung of the social and economic ladder of society. The existence of a community school was vital. These extant communities provide a field setting within which to investigate seven decades of community cohesion maintained against a variety of institutional and economic threats. By contrast Sylvia Hood Washington's paper, "Mrs. Block Beautiful: African American Women and the Birth of the Urban Conservation Movement, Chicago, IL, 1917–1954," recounts how Southern migrant Black women in Chicago organized homemaking contests to improve morale in dismal slum conditions. They went on to launch the urban conservation movement.

A passion for place, whether a Southern farm or a Chicago townhouse, is eloquently expressed by poet Louis Alemayehu in three poems: "The Holy Land Is All the Earth," "PachaMaMa Got the Blues," and "Power in the Blood." That passion for place is diminishing in Black youth, according to Jerry Pennick, Heather Gray, and Miessha Thomas. In their paper, "Preserving African American Rural Property: An Assessment of Intergenerational Values Toward Land," they document a declining interest in rural landownership among younger African Americans who don't value land beyond its dollar value. They offer suggestions for increasing interest in rural landownership.

These suggestions are reinforced in papers by Clyde E. Chesney and Walter A. Hill. In "African American Environmentalism: Issues and Trends for Teaching, Research, and Extension," Chesney reports on his decades of research into the environmental heritage of African Americans. He bemoans the lack of more study in the area and suggests it is not too late to reverse the alienation of Blacks from the land through a combination of education (particularly in the 1890 land-grant institutions) and policy change to make landownership and small-scale farming more accessible. Chesney recommends an interdisciplinary model whose basic elements include historical antecedents such as customs and traditions of the major West African ethnic groups, as well as the environmental heritage in the literature, art, and other cultural artifacts of the African American people. Chesney's paper fits well with the others in the volume that examine the African traditions underlying much of sustainable agriculture. And in "Environmental Thought and Activism: An 1890 Land-Grant University Perspective," Walter Hill traces the establishment and maturation of the 1890 land-grant institutions and how their effective use of partnerships benefited the civil rights movement and the sustainable agriculture and environmental movements.

Above all, the essays in this collection are a starting point for dialogue. They represent the opinions, not always scholarly opinions, of the individual authors and seek to capture the spirit of a unique conference. The essays capture a moment in the early 21st century, preserving what some leaders in various segments of Black American culture were thinking about land and power as it related to sustainable agriculture and Black American traditions.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the other members of the conference planning committee: Barrett Vaughan from Tuskegee University, James Hill from Fort Valley State University and the S-SARE program, and Collie Graddick from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. This volume also benefited from the tremendous work of Gwen Roland, communications specialist with the S-SARE program. It is safe to say that this volume would not have been possible without Gwen's contributions. Mason Chapple provided extraordinary copyediting work for the book. The flow, consistency, and clarity that exists throughout the book is a testament to his diligence. Graphic designer Joanne Shipley visually transformed the book's diverse articles and poems into a unified volume as welcoming as a farm kitchen. We also thank the SARE Outreach Office for publishing this volume. Finally we wish to thank all of those at Tuskegee University that helped to make the conference a success. Not only is Tuskegee University an important part of American history, it is a special place in which to convene a conference on sustainable agriculture and African Americans. One only has to be on campus for a short time to know that the students, faculty, and staff of Tuskegee University are fully justified in the evident pride they have for this unique institution.

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George Washington Carver: A Blazer of Trails to a Sustainable Future

John S. Ferrell

During George Washington Carver's lifetime, journalists portrayed him as a curiosity—a humble Black man, born in slavery, whose scientific wizardry could transform peanuts into everything from ink to face cream.

In reality, Carver's reputation as a scientist was largely based on myth. But his life and work had a larger significance—one that eluded his contemporaries. In his efforts to develop products from renewable raw materials, his attitude toward waste, and his advocacy of natural farming methods, he presaged current efforts to build an ecologically sound future. Furthermore, his work points to a possible new relationship between agriculture and industry as fossil fuels grow increasingly scarce.

We will begin with a brief overview of Carver's life and the myths that have distorted his memory. We will then consider Carver's self-described role as a "blazer of trails" and what significance some of those trails may have for people who are striving to build a more ecologically sound future.

Carver's Early Life

George Washington Carver was born a slave in Diamond, Missouri. He did not know his own birth date, but available evidence points strongly to 1864 or 1865.[1] His mother belonged to Moses Carver, a prosperous farmer. George was told that his father was a slave on a nearby farm who had died in a wood-hauling accident shortly after his birth.[2]

When George was an infant, southwestern Missouri was in turmoil, wracked by conflicting Union and Confederate sentiments and plagued by bands of marauders. One such band kidnapped Carver and his mother. A neighbor managed to find and return George, but his mother was never heard from again. George and his older brother (or more likely half-brother), Jim, were raised by Moses Carver and his wife Susan.[3]

Young George impressed neighbors with his affinity for nature. He recalled that "sick plants were brought by the score, and left for treatment, and I often went to houses, and prescribed for them, much as a physician prescribes for his patients." Carver spent many additional hours in the woods. "I wanted to know every strange stone, flower, insect, bird, or beast," he remembered. "No one could tell me."[4]

Diamond was no place for a gifted Black child. Barred from attending the local school because of his race, he studied for a time with a tutor. Then, when he was

about twelve, Moses and Susan allowed him to move to nearby Neosho, where he could attend a school for Blacks. The boy's need for knowledge exceeded what the local teacher could provide. Nevertheless, by boarding in Neosho with a Black couple, Mariah and Andrew Watkins, Carver received an education of a different sort. Mariah was a nurse and midwife with knowledge of medicinal plants. By passing on her herbal knowledge to Carver, Watkins may have sowed the seeds of her pupil's future fascination with the unrealized potential for plant-based products.[5]

Whatever impact Watkins had on Carver's ultimate course in life, he was slow to find his niche. In the late 1870s, he left Neosho and embarked on a long period of restless wandering. Briefly residing in several Kansas communities, as well as Kansas City, Missouri, he earned his keep in a variety of low-level jobs and added to his store of knowledge, in and out of classrooms. In a foretaste of one of his principal roles in life, he bought land in Ness County, Kansas, and briefly set out to be a farmer. Apparently the life did not wholly suit him. He soon moved on.

Sometime between 1888 and 1890, Carver found himself in Winterset, Iowa. There a local white couple, impressed by his artistic talent, convinced him to enroll at Simpson College, twenty miles away. He was well accepted at Simpson, but one of his teachers, Etta Budd, worried that a Black man would have little prospect of supporting himself as an artist. Budd's father taught at the Iowa Agricultural College (IAC)—now Iowa State University. Knowing of Carver's love for plants, she suggested that he transfer there and prepare for a career in botany.

Carver agreed. After earning his bachelor's degree at the IAC, he stayed on to pursue graduate studies. He also assumed a faculty position as assistant in botany and director of the school's greenhouse.[6]

Rural Outreach at Tuskegee

In 1896, as he was completing the requirements for his master's degree, Carver received an invitation from Booker T. Washington to serve on the faculty of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, a school for Blacks in Macon County, Alabama. Carver was already entertaining an offer from a Black school in Mississippi, and he knew he was welcome to remain at the IAC. But after some hesitation, he accepted Washington's offer, professing a desire to be of service to his own people.[7]

Washington initially entrusted Carver with an immense and varied workload. He administered the school's new agriculture department, its new agricultural experiment station (opened in 1897), and its own farming operations (e.g., poultry yard, beehives, crop production). He taught classes on campus and participated in an ambitious Tuskegee program to provide farmers and their families with training in scientific agriculture and helpful household skills.[8]

Even before Carver's arrival at Tuskegee, Booker T. Washington saw agricultural extension as an important aspect of the school's mission. He hoped that he could help Blacks living near Tuskegee and elsewhere in the South to overcome the culture of dependency described by his associate, Max Bennett Thrasher:

In many cases the farmer owns no land, and as a result must rent a "patch" on such terms as he can make with the landlord, to whom he contracts to deliver a certain portion of the crop for rent. He has little or no money with which to purchase supplies in advance, and so, before his crop is even planted, he has to mortgage the balance of it to some merchant in town for food for himself and family to live on through the spring and summer. As cotton is the readiest cash crop in the country, neither landlord nor merchant wishes to make an advance on any other crop. As a result, the farmer too often is forced to plant only cotton—buying even his corn meal and bacon of the storekeeper, and of necessity obliged to pay almost any price which the dealer may demand.

Thomas Monroe Campbell, who began as a student at Tuskegee three years after Carver's arrival, painted an even starker picture: "Not only near the school, but throughout the Black Belt in Alabama and other Southern States could be seen hundreds of squalid, ramshackled cabins, tenanted by forlorn, emaciated, poverty stricken Negroes who year after year struggled in cotton fields and disease-laden swamps, trying to eke out a miserable existence." Carver himself, with his scientific training and interest in nutrition, was sensitive to additional problems—substantial soil erosion and family diets that were "meager, of the worst type, and poorly prepared."[9]

Four years before Carver's arrival at Tuskegee, the school had begun to host annual conferences where rural families could discuss mutual problems and consider solutions. In the decade following Carver's arrival at Tuskegee in 1896, the school's rural outreach program expanded considerably. There were monthly one-day farmers' institutes on the school campus; annual fairs where farm families could display crops, livestock, needlework, quilts, and canned goods; and a "short course in agriculture" where farmers could receive practical instruction during the slow winter season while their wives and children attended special classes of their own. In 1906, Tuskegee introduced the Jesup wagon (named for a Northern donor), outfitted to serve as a traveling school.[10]

Scientific agriculture was a key element in the outreach program. Knowledge needed to elevate farming to a science had been piling up for generations. Yet many growers were unaware of new discoveries, or dismissed them as "book farming." Agricultural educators, such as Seaman A. Knapp, a former president of the IAC, sought better ways to reach out to farmers, overcome their resistance, and persuade them to adopt new methods. By implementing outreach programs at Tuskegee, Washington and Carver were joining Knapp and other pioneer educators in setting the stage for the Smith-Lever Act, which established a nationwide extension program in 1914.

As a student at the IAC, Carver had been associated with some of the leading lights in scientific agriculture. At Tuskegee he combined his scientific knowledge and his awareness of prudent agricultural traditions (e.g., composting) to produce a program that met the needs of farmers at various levels, including those at the very bottom. *In How to Build Up Worn Out Soils*, a bulletin published in 1905, he explained that "for eight years the Tuskegee station has made the subject of

soil improvement a special study, emphasizing the subject of crop rotation, deep plowing, terracing, fertilizing, etc., keeping in mind the poor tenant farmer with a one-horse equipment; so therefore, every operation performed has been within his reach, the station having only one horse."[11]

At Tuskegee, Carver had the honor of managing the first all-Black agricultural experiment station in the United States. But it was a position that came with significant handicaps. As Carver biographer Linda O. McMurry has noted, "Other experiment station staffs included separate chemists, botanists, entomologists, and mycologists. At the Tuskegee station all these positions were filled by one man—Carver."[12]

Fortunately, he was a generalist by inclination as well as necessity. In his work at the experiment station and in his outreach to Black farm families, he included farming advice, tips on better use of overlooked resources (e.g., "the great quantity of acorns produced in our oak forests, which have been hitherto practically a waste product"), recipes, menus, and advice on food preservation.[13]

From Field to Laboratory

Although Washington recognized Carver's gifts as an educator and researcher, he found him seriously deficient as an administrator. After a series of turf battles with a faculty rival, Carver was left, in 1910, with few management functions. He continued to operate the experiment station, publish bulletins, conduct various kinds of research, deliver special lectures, do some teaching, and (until 1913) run the school's poultry yard.

In part to relieve the humiliation of his change in his status, Carver was promised a "first-class laboratory." Items to stock the facility were slow in coming and did not always meet Carver's expectations. But his access to them helped to spark a further shift in his role at Tuskegee—a shift that accelerated in the years following Washington's death in 1915. Under Washington's supportive successor, Robert Russa Moton, Carver taught fewer classes, issued fewer extension station bulletins, and spent much of his time in the laboratory and on the lecture circuit. In 1925, he announced that he was "dispensing with the plot work" at Tuskegee's agricultural experiment station but would continue the "laboratory work, bulletins, and other forms of cooperative activities."[14]

The Evolution of Carver's Role as a "Creative Chemist"

Carver's laboratory work actually stretched back to his early days at Tuskegee. Soon after arriving in Alabama, he built a makeshift laboratory. Some of his initial research, such as analyzing soils, was hardly exotic. But his discovery of some promising pigments in Alabama clay attracted white investors interested in starting a paint industry. The effort came to nothing, but it was a precursor of Carver's later more extensive efforts to find commercial potential in local natural resources.[15]

By 1916, he could list numerous fruits of his research that he believed to be "ready for the market." Among them were dyes, wood stains, calcimines, toilet powders, and cleansing agents. When the nation experienced wheat shortages during World War I, his process for drying tubers and using them to produce flour garnered serious attention from federal authorities.[16]

But his first important step toward national fame did not come until after the war. In 1919, he informed Moton that he had developed a milk substitute from peanuts. Hopes of exploiting his discovery were dashed by the discovery that someone held a British patent for a similar process. But by then his array of peanut products had drawn the interest of the peanut industry. He was invited to speak at a convention of the United Peanut Association of America in 1920 and was such a hit that four months later he found himself in Washington DC, representing the interests of peanut organizations at a tariff hearing held by the U.S. House of Representatives' Ways and Means Committee. Initially allotted ten minutes to speak, he made such an impression that he was told to continue as long as he wished. Among the peanut-based products he displayed were buttermilk, instant coffee, Worcestershire sauce, face cream, ink, dyes, and mock oysters. His appearance before the committee garnered nationwide press coverage. Carver was on the road to fame as the "peanut man."[17]

Carver the Chemurgist

The non-edible products that Carver made from peanuts, as well as from sweet potatoes and other plant materials, marked him as a pioneering figure in a movement just emerging in the 1920s.

Although the movement was new, it was building on an old idea. Plants and trees had long served as raw materials for many products other than food and clothing. Wood shaped into implements and building materials was a prime example. Such uses required no knowledge of chemistry and no complex technology to produce.

In the 19th century, more sophisticated products had begun to emerge. In 1839, Charles Goodyear learned how to vulcanize rubber, and in 1868, John Wesley Hyatt produced a plastic material from cellulose. Both discoveries opened the door to many new developments. By the time Carver started his rise to fame as a creative chemist, cellulose was being used in products as diverse as rayon fabrics, eyeglass frames, brushes, piano keys, table-tennis balls, and dental plates.[18]

Although such products were already ubiquitous, Carver, in the 1920s, was part of an unorganized vanguard pushing for wider use of homegrown renewable raw materials. Thomas Edison was another member of that vanguard. Concerned that America needed a homegrown rubber supply, the inventor set out to find domestic plants with suitable rubber content. After he and associates collected and tested thousands of plants, he announced that goldenrod was the most promising. Meanwhile, with far greater resources than Carver could hope to muster at Tuskegee, the chemical engineering department at Iowa State College (the renamed IAC) explored a wide array of plant-based possibilities, including plastic from straw, incense from corncobs, and insulation board from cornstalks.[19]

As with Carver's peanut work, such research and development had little practical impact in the short-term, but demonstrated that the nation could, if it chose, draw greater benefit from its renewable resources. In 1926, agricultural journalist Wheeler McMillen and chemist William J. Hale both initiated efforts to make that case to the country. They had limited success, but in the early 1930s, with farmers struggling to survive the Depression, the idea of using renewable

resources as feedstock for industry began to gain prominent support. The most visible enthusiast was Henry Ford, who used soybeans to produce exterior enamel and small parts for his automobiles. In 1935, at the invitation of Ford and his son Edsel, leading figures in science, industry, and agriculture gathered in Dearborn, Michigan, to discuss how use of renewable raw materials could be expanded. The gathering spawned a vigorous national movement centered on the Farm Chemurgic Council. The word *chemurgic*—coined by Hale—meant "chemistry at work." Movement members were called "chemurgists," and what they espoused was called "chemurgy."[20]

With the chemurgists calling attention to an idea that Carver had long promoted, it suddenly seemed possible that the nation would put local renewable resources to much more productive use. In 1937, he spoke at the Chemurgic Council's annual conference. There, he met Henry Ford, and the two became fast friends.[21]

In his final years, Carver retained his interest in both natural agriculture and chemurgy. In 1938, he told how the South could rebuild its soil through wide use of compost. In 1942, he wrote of his success in producing a soap composed, in part, of refuse scraped from the floor of a peanut-shelling plant. Carver died on January 5, 1943.[22]

Stripping Away the Myths

By the end of his life, Carver's admirable efforts to build rural self-reliance and spark new industries were so cloaked in myth that it was hard to separate his real achievements from the exaggerations. Certainly he was a remarkable, multi-talented man who started with little, rose to a position of influence, and worked hard to help others live better lives. But as his fame grew, so did his legend. Writer James Saxon Childers, for example, claimed that according to "experts," Carver had "probably done more than any other living man to rehabilitate agriculture in the South." Christy Borth, in a book chronicling the chemurgy movement, called him the "first and greatest chemurgist," and Henry Ford said he thought that Carver was "one of the world's greatest scientists in his field." After years of hearing Booker T. Washington and others at Tuskegee criticize his failings as an administrator, Carver must have found such words particularly satisfying. He did not work overtime correcting the record.[23]

Certainly the peanut industry valued Carver's role as an unofficial spokesman. But his involvement with that industry did not come until peanuts were a well-established crop in the South. It is impossible to know how much the publicity surrounding him boosted the sale of peanut products or inspired farmers to plant the legume. But Carver himself observed, seventeen years after his first peanut bulletin, that few were being grown in Macon County.

Furthermore, few of his own peanut creations ever left his laboratory. Carver had no entrepreneurial bent, and his own efforts to commercialize his discoveries were notably unsuccessful. There is also the question of how far he went in the laboratory. During 1942, when someone from the War Production Board asked about the rubber product he had made from sweet potatoes years earlier, he admitted that his efforts had not progressed "into the essential pilot plant or

process development stage that it should have." He regretted that he could not supply the necessary data.[24]

G. Lake Imes, who served on the staff at Tuskegee for many years, said of Carver, "Many visitors have come to his laboratory expecting to pick up some valuable facts by direct questioning, but have had to content themselves with enigmatic replies." Nevertheless, Carver did forthrightly claim that divine inspiration played a role in his work. In 1924, he described his unusual approach to an audience at Marble Collegiate Church in New York. As reported in an Associated Press story, he said, "No books ever go into my laboratory. I never have to grope for methods; the method is revealed at the moment I am inspired to create something new. Without God to draw aside the curtain, I would be helpless."[25]

Regardless of where Carver looked for his original inspiration, it would be reasonable to expect him to keep a record of his processes. According to one visitor who asked him about that, Carver smiled and said, "I have all of these formulas but I haven't written them down yet." If he ever did, the whereabouts of his notes were a mystery to William R. Carroll and Merle E. Muhrer, two members of the University of Missouri's Department of Agricultural Chemistry who prepared a report on Carver's scientific contributions two decades after his death.[26]

A Blazer of Trails

At the very least, Carver's approach to laboratory research was eccentric and not in keeping with the usual image of a "great scientist." But people who claimed that role for Carver—or questioned it—overlooked a different kind of legacy. In a popular biography published three months after Carver's death, writer Rackham Holt made an astute observation about her subject:

> *His discoveries, with the exception of his mycological work, did not properly belong in scientific journals. They were not revolutionary in themselves. Anyone with the proper education could milk the peanut or abstract paper from suitable fibers, or rubber from the sweet potato or any other vine which secreted latex. His special contribution was to expose these hidden properties in plants to the public view and, by dramatizing them, serve as a signpost pointing the way for those who had the facilities to incorporate them into the contemporary pattern of living.*

Holt's assessment accorded with Carver's self-description. "I am not a finisher," he admitted. "I am a blazer of trails, new trails. Little of my work is in books. Others must take up the various trails of truth and carry them on."[27]

What were Carver's "trails of truth"? One was a trail that Blacks in the rural South could travel toward richer, more satisfying lives based on wise use of nature's gifts. A second could more aptly be described as a highway—one that all Southerners could travel—toward greater prosperity based on local waste materials and plant-based resources.

Taking a short-term view, one could easily conclude that Carver's "trails of truth" had some inspirational value in his own day, but little long-term significance.

Neither he nor Booker T. Washington foresaw how opportunities in the North would draw away much of the Black rural population they were trying to help. Carver's food innovations based on peanuts and sweet potatoes were intriguing to journalists but apparently not to hardheaded businesspeople. And the hopes of Carver and the chemurgists for expansion of renewable raw materials in industry gave way, within decades, to cheap petrochemical alternatives.

But, viewed in light of present-day concerns, Carver's "trails" take on new meaning. Certainly he had no exact picture of the social and environmental concerns that humanity would face in the early 21st century. But his approach to two significant challenges—establishing sustainable forms of agriculture and expanding the use of renewable resources in industry—had intriguing implications for today and tomorrow. Let us look more closely at his work in each of those areas and consider what perspective his overarching vision may offer to people on those same "trails" today.

Carver Anticipates Sustainable Agriculture

The term sustainable agriculture refers to a set of goals rather than to a specific farming system. There is no universally accepted definition, but one published in 1989 by the American Society of Agronomy captures the essence of the concept:

> *A sustainable agriculture is one that, over the long term, enhances environmental quality and the resource base on which agriculture depends; provides for basic human food and fiber needs; is economically viable; and enhances the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.*[28]

George Washington Carver was not a conscious proponent of sustainable agriculture. At the time he was managing Tuskegee's farms, running its experiment station, and counseling Black farmers, the term and the concept did not exist. In fact, during Carver's first several decades at Tuskegee, there was no alternative agriculture movement in a form that we would recognize today.[29]

Carver did often employ or recommend simple natural methods. For example, in a 1902 farmers' leaflet, he counseled readers to "Have your garden as rich as possible. Your plants will then be more apt to overcome the attacks of insects and any other enemy which come upon them." And, although he used some commercial fertilizers, he placed considerable emphasis on natural alternatives, such as plowing under vegetable matter and applying composts. For years, he used no commercial fertilizer on three acres of Tuskegee's experiment station, instead applying a compost comprised of leaves, muck ("rich earth from the swamp"), and barnyard manure.

In part, such aspects of Carver's practice and teaching reflected economic reality. Tuskegee Institute, as well as many of the farmers that Carver sought to counsel, had limited financial resources. Natural remedies could stretch dollars. In a 1916 leaflet, Carver described how to make the compost and use it with wood ashes and waste lime. He assured his readers that "it will take only one or two trials to convince you that many thousands of dollars are being spent every year here in the South for fertilizers that profit the user very little, while Nature's choicest fertilizer is going to waste."[30]

To gain perspective on Carver's approach, it is important to recognize that practices which might be viewed today as "alternative" were not necessarily far removed from the mainstream in Carver's day. Describing his own farm boyhood during the 1890s and 1900s, Wheeler McMillen exaggerated only a little when he observed, "We were organic farmers and ate organic food, although, of course, we were not aware of that fact." McMillen also claimed that "the rotation of crops in those years was an established and widely accepted principle that all good farmers followed."

When Carver touted the benefits of compost, he was suggesting a logical strategy with a long history. Furthermore, in making his case for the benefits of natural fertilizers to Booker T. Washington, Carver could quote no less an establishment authority than Seaman Knapp: "Commercial fertilizers are costly; their excessive use tends to hasten the depletion of the soil, and they should never be considered a substitute for green crops or barnyard manure."[31]

Nevertheless, Carver was not just a creative extension educator with a special appreciation of basic, natural, low-cost farming methods. He approached his work with a unique perspective—one that combined a lifelong affinity for nature, a mystical outlook, and an understanding of ecology. It is difficult to separate these threads in Carver's makeup because for him, the weave, rather than the thread, was paramount. He explained that he loved "to think of Nature as wireless telegraph stations through which God speaks to us every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives." And when a *New York Times* writer criticized him for speaking of divine inspiration in the laboratory, he responded, "Inspiration is never at variance with information; in fact, the more information one has the greater will be the inspiration."[32]

To Carver, the very concept of waste was illusory. "The earnest student," he wrote, "has already learned that nature does not expend its forces upon waste material, but that each created thing is an indispensable factor of the great whole, and one in which no other factor will fit exactly as well."[33] That belief was a major touchstone of Carver's career. He believed—and repeatedly sought to demonstrate—that the creator had surrounded even the poorest farm families in the South with resources they could readily tap to improve their lives. It was his mission to call attention to this bounty and teach others how to recognize and make use of it.

Nevertheless, he recognized that he could not do these things alone. He was appalled by how many people he encountered who were ignorant of "the commonest things about us." He applauded the national nature-study movement that had emerged in the 1890s, and he made his own contributions to it in the form of curricula and suggestions for children's programs. He was also pleased that "many of our best colleges and academies" were spreading what he saw as vital information about the natural world. But he envisioned something more ambitious: "a mighty campaign of education, which will lead the masses to be students of nature." One of the fruits of that effort would be better farming. "The highest attainments in agriculture," he said, "can be reached only when we clearly understand the mutual relationship between the animal, mineral, and vegetable kingdoms, and how utterly impossible it is for one to exist in a highly organized state without the other."[34]

The German zoologist Ernst Haeckel had coined the term *oekologie* in 1866. A few years later he provided a definition that began as follows:

> *By ecology we mean the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature—the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and to its organic environment; including above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact.*

As time passed, the meaning evolved. A succinct modern definition, from *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*, is "a branch of science concerned with the interrelationship of organisms and their environments." The same source defines the related concept ecosystem as "the complex of a community of organisms and its environment functioning as an ecological unit."

If Carver's reference to mutual relationships made him sound like an ecologist, then some of the credit likely belongs to Louis H. Pammel, the IAC faculty member who guided Carver's graduate studies. Ecology was still an emerging concept in the 1890s, and Pammel's book *Flower Ecology* was probably the first book published in English to use the little-known term in its title. He followed in 1903 with a textbook simply titled *Ecology*. Carver believed that Pammel was the person to whom he owed the deepest "debt of gratitude" for his success. The two men became close friends and stayed in touch long after Carver departed for Tuskegee.[35]

The meaning of the Greek root for both *ecology* and *economics* is "household." In his extension efforts at Tuskegee, Carver recognized how ecological wisdom could improve the economic status of rural households. But he also saw that success in agriculture—and in rural living—was more than a matter of better soil, more abundant cash crops, and money in the bank. Through better understanding of nature's gifts, rural families could also have more enjoyable food choices, better health, longer lives, and more attractive surroundings—all at little or no cost.

He encouraged people to plant gardens, and he provided recipes as well as advice on food preservation. People in the rural South were especially fortunate, he believed, because their climate made it possible to eat vegetables straight from the garden every day of the year. "Fresh fruits and vegetables," he explained, "have a medicinal value, and when wisely prepared and eaten every day will go a long way towards keeping us strong, vigorous, happy, and healthy, which means greater efficiency and the prolonging of our lives."[36]

Carver even saw a connection between flowers and good health. After all, they were "soothing and restful to the tired body and brain." Moreover, as a scientist who could still describe himself as "an artist by taste, training, and profession," Carver was drawn to nature's aesthetic potential. He described how residents of Macon County could produce "bewitchingly beautiful" color washes from local clays and use them to decorate their homes and schools. And, he noted, a flower-filled dooryard could bring pleasure while enhancing property values.[37]

Sustainable Agriculture's Evolution

By 1925, when Carver announced that he was ending plot work at Tuskegee's agricultural experiment station, rural America was in a period of rapid change.

Expanded markets during World War I had prompted many growers to purchase mechanized equipment. This trend continued during the following decades, with new equipment contributing to the overproduction that drove down prices and pushed farmers off the land. In 1919, the discovery of arsenic-contaminated pears at a Boston fruit stand had prompted the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to look seriously at heath risks associated with pesticide residues on fruit. And a dispute centered in Carver's own state of Alabama highlighted the growing importance of chemical fertilizers. There, in the early 1920s, Henry Ford unsuccessfully sought the right to produce fertilizer using hydropower from the Muscle Shoals hydroelectric site.[38]

As time went on, the changes in mainstream agriculture intensified. An ever-diminishing number of growers reaped larger harvests on bigger farms using more elaborate equipment and a more potent array of chemicals. Many observers portrayed such transformations in positive terms. It became a cliché to call American agriculture "the wonder of the world." But others questioned the costs: the vanishing small-scale family farmer, the decline of rural communities, and the damage that followed when farm fields were treated as factories rather than ecosystems. Some critics of these changes promoted alternative systems, such as biodynamic agriculture, organic agriculture, and eco-agriculture. These systems varied in details and emphasis, but the goals of the people who espoused them echoed Carver's own—healthy crops grown in fertile soil by growers who were firmly rooted in a place, used chemical amendments sparingly (or not at all), and looked to nature as a principal model for good farming practice.[39]

Alternative agriculturists began to see ecological dimensions to their concerns. In 1945, *Organic Gardening* publisher J. I. Rodale predicted, "Further studies in ecology...will open up many vistas of agricultural thought." Four years later, Jonathan Forman, a leader in Friends of the Land, an agriculturally focused conservation organization, explained that his group was "doing extension teaching in the ecology of man. We point out that the strength of the land is in its fertility, and that decreased fertility carries through to social erosion." And in 1970, long-time biodynamic farmer Bob Steffen sounded much like Carver when he said, "The science of ecology can help us because it does put man in his proper place in the web of life. We simply must try to understand more of God's laws of nature, act accordingly, and all things will begin to fall into place. It will require much study from all of us."[40]

Steffen's comment appeared in print just months after the first Earth Day. The environmental movement, which had emerged in the wake of Rachel Carson's critique of pesticides in *Silent Spring* (1962), was drawing new attention and new converts to alternative agriculture. The hardy farmers and gardeners who had clung stubbornly to natural techniques now looked like ecological pioneers, and J. I. Rodale drew the attention of mainstream media. He marveled over the sudden change:

> *The time was when the organic movement was not in good repute, and we were called all kinds of names, mostly vituperative and insulting. All of a sudden… or shall I say, gradually over a short period of a year or two we have become respectable. No longer are we considered crackpots.*[41]

The Energy Dimension

After Rodale's death in 1971, his son Robert became the most visible alternative agriculturist. Already perceptive in noting how his concerns related to ecology and the new environmental movement, he watched with interest as attitudes changed in response to the "energy crisis" touched off in 1973 by policies of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC):

> *People suddenly realized that almost all of our food production methods relied on oil…The giant factory-like farms, which produce so much of our food, not only need much energy to run their equipment, but require far larger amounts to take the food they produce to processing plants and markets often located thousands of miles away. A more organic food-producing system, based largely on smaller farms located near markets, suddenly began to seem like a very practical idea. The suggestion that we might need organic methods in the future to feed ourselves and others began to be discussed as a serious possibility.*[42]

In 1980, a USDA study team released its *Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming*. It acknowledged that "organic farmers use appreciably less total energy for producing most crops than do conventional farmers. Considerable quantities of energy are saved on organic farms by the use of crop rotations and the application of organic wastes in place of chemical fertilizers, especially nitrogen." That same year, a group of scientists at Washington University in St. Louis reported the results of a five-year study comparing organic and conventional farms in the Midwest. The study found that the organic farms used only about forty percent as much energy as their conventional counterparts.[43]

Thus, when the term *sustainable agriculture* came into common usage in the last decades of the twentieth century, the ecology and energy dimensions of sound farming systems were already becoming clear. But as interest revived in chemurgic production during the same period, the two causes remained distinct. Why didn't people favoring "green" products and renewable fuels make common cause with people committed to "green" agriculture? Why, for example, did proponents of ethanol not automatically insist that it be made from crops grown by farmers who used sustainable methods that were themselves energy-conserving?

A partial answer lies in the path chosen by the old chemurgy movement—a path that ignored the model Carver supplied of a dual commitment to sustainable agriculture and biobased production.

Chemurgy and Sustainability

In April 1935, the month before the chemurgists held their first conference in Dearborn, the Soil Conservation Service was established in the USDA. That spring, residents of the southern Great Plains were entering their fourth year of severe Dust Bowl conditions, and some of the dust even blew over Washington DC, darkening the sky. The need for better soil conservation was entering the public consciousness, and the following year, the Chemurgic Council reflected this new state of affairs by suggesting, rather vaguely, that a "non-political, scientific soil building program" would be a good idea.[44]

Despite this lip service, Carver may have been the only leading chemurgist that present-day proponents of sustainable agriculture would instantly recognize as a kindred spirit. A few years before his death, he wrote enthusiastically about the results of a recent compost experiment on the Tuskegee campus. He saw it as a model for the South. If only "every farmer, gardener, and householder" with accumulations of suitable material "would build a little pen and make his own compost," he said, "it would not take the South long to build up a soil almost or quite equal to its virgin fertility with practically no cash outlay."

But Carver also bemoaned the ecological blindness he saw in his region. In 1940, a writer in an Atlanta newspaper quoted him as follows:

> *Conservation is one of our big problems in this section. You can't tear up everything just to get the dollar out of it without suffering as a result.*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *It is a travesty to burn our woods and thereby burn up the fertilizer nature has provided for us. We must enrich our soil every year instead of merely depleting it. It is fundamental that nature will drive away those who commit sins against it.*[45]

Carver referred to "wastes" that could be used as chemurgic resources, but for him, there really were no wastes. There was an appropriate purpose for each resource in the "great whole." Other chemurgists typically applied the term "waste" to any biological material that hadn't found a useful purpose in a bar of soap, a can of paint, or a suit of clothes. Little attention was given to the possibility that such material had a more fitting destiny in the "great whole." Perhaps it should be placed on a compost heap or left to rot on the ground.

Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace raised another concern about chemurgy. In 1939, he referred to an unnamed chemurgist who seemed to assume that an unlimited quantity of farm products could be produced on the nation's soil. "But the danger from his erroneous assumption," said Wallace, "lies in this—that if the soil is to be exploited to produce farm products for industry, very soon there won't be any soil left to draw upon, and industry and agriculture will both be left holding the bag."[46]

Wallace was not condemning chemurgy outright. His blunt warning amounted to "proceed with extreme caution." And it was an interesting response in light of Carver's early influence on Wallace's life. The son of one of Carver's teachers at the IAC, Wallace, as a boy, had joined Carver on nature walks. Carver had praised his ability to identify species of grasses. "He made so much of it," Wallace recalled, "I am certain now that, out of the goodness of his heart, he greatly exaggerated my botanical ability. But his faith aroused my natural interest and kindled an ambition to excel in this field."[47] Perhaps Carver's mentoring also helped to kindle the kind of ecological outlook that throws up warning signs when people speak too blithely about the exploitation of nature.

Given Carver's own belief in the importance of "relationships," the question arises why, during his last years, he didn't raise similar red flags about chemurgy and seek to place it on an ecologically sound path. The simplest answers are that

he was old, his health was declining, and—despite his comments about the South's ecological shortcomings—his natural tendency was to emphasize promise rather than impediments. Furthermore, he died before mainstream agriculture entered its highly industrialized postwar phase.

But not long after Carver left the scene, some alternative agriculturists—people whose ideas had much in common with his own—warned that chemurgy was linked to the wrong kind of farming. In 1945 an anonymous writer in Bio-dynamics, the magazine of the Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, referred to potential chemurgic use of such waste materials as corncobs, oat hulls, peanut shells, and sugarcane bagasse. "The bio-dynamic farmer and gardener," the writer observed, "would use these materials for compost and finally humus."

The following year, Russell Lord of Friends of the Land observed, "The social and political consequences of our advancing skill in chemurgy are far from resolved." So, too, said Lord, were the agricultural impacts. "Soy beans raised in rows for plastic factories have reduced parts of Illinois to the appearance of cotton-gullied Georgia. New frontiersmen of the test-tube incline to be as insensitive to soil ruin as were their forebears of the axe and the cleaving plow."

J. I. Rodale, in his 1945 book *Pay Dirt*, associated chemurgy with the kind of "large-scale monocultural practices" his organic movement was determined to oppose. Rodale acknowledged that some chemurgic products were "highly ingenious." But he believed that over time, "this new field of endeavor, if not curbed or controlled, may prove harmful to society, for it may extend the single-crop technique of land-mining with all its attendant evils of soil exhaustion and erosion." He suggested that "lands which for one reason or another are not fit for growing food crops should be designated as sub-marginal, and for use in chemurgy." Furthermore, "Reforestation, on a vast scale and carefully regulated, can supply a large chemurgic need for wood-cellulose for all the varied uses."[48]

Like Carver, Wheeler McMillen had feet in both camps. In addition to serving as president of the Chemurgic Council, he was a board member of Friends of the Land. Although his ecological consciousness was superficial compared to Carver's, he did have concerns about chemurgy's potential impacts. In 1948 he noted that "a new esteem for the crop residues has arisen. New interest surrounds the functions of organic materials in the soil. While mineral elements can be supplied by purchase, on many kinds of land they do not appear to be by themselves sufficient to keep the soil in its healthiest and most productive condition. Farming methods have tended to deplete the supply of 'humus.' In consequence the biological activities which make for fertility are presumably reduced."

The situation, McMillen acknowledged, raised some important questions: "Will chemurgic markets for these bulky organic materials lead to further soil depletion? Are straw and stalks worth more when returned to the soil than cash markets are likely to pay? Will cash markets tempt farmers to deprive their soil of organic materials which should be returned to the land?"

Chemurgy's Decline and Renewal

McMillen doubted that anyone had "unqualified answers" to those questions,[49] and before such answers appeared, chemurgy went into decline. The USDA's 1950–1951 *Yearbook of Agriculture* devoted considerable attention to chemurgy and even included a biographical sketch of Carver. But only six years after its publication, McMillen, in his *Farm Journal* column, complained:

> *The retreat of agriculture has gone about far enough. While we have rammed ahead to pile up production, we have let the calculating, researching, scientific industries push us back from markets we once had. They sell people their synthetic fibers instead of our cotton and wool. They sell synthetic detergents instead of soap from farm fats and oils. They make industry's alcohol out of natural gas instead of using grain and molasses. Now they are putting synthetic rubber into paints instead of farm-grown oils.*[50]

The Chemurgic Council had long since dropped its support for ethanol—a cause that had incurred financial losses and strong opposition from the petroleum industry. Now the chemurgy movement was seriously challenged by petrochemicals derived from petroleum or natural gas. Some markets for renewables remained, but the movement faded. The council closed its doors in 1977.[51]

Since alternative agriculturists and chemurgists were, for the most part, members of distinct groups that did not see each other as allies, it is understandable that their successors—sustainable agriculturists and proponents of biobased fuels and raw materials—have not rushed to join hands. Perhaps if the linkage had been made in the beginning, with Carver as an inspirational connecting figure, then important questions about biobased development would have been answered much earlier. But today, old questions are joined by newer ones. Will markets for energy crops set off a "food versus fuel" competition? Will the temptation to clear new lands for fuel crops threaten biodiversity? Does it make sense to turn corn stalks into fuel if leaving them in the field will help maintain soil fertility as well as reduce erosion and evaporative water loss? And how much "net energy" is actually available after accounting for all the energy required to produce biofuels from crops grown with conventional methods?[52]

The Role of Industrial Ecology

Such questions lend themselves to analysis by industrial ecologists, members of an emerging field that seeks to improve industry's efficiency and environmental performance by emulating nature's own cyclical processes. Industrial ecologists recognize that in industry, as in nature, the leftovers from one process can be food for another. As Carver realized more than a century ago, wastes are resources in disguise. In fact, it is tempting to think that if Carver were alive today, industrial ecology would be his professional field of choice.

In 2003, a special issue of the *Journal of Industrial Ecology* explored the industrial ecology of biobased products. In an opening editorial, issue editor

Robert Anex acknowledged that "attempts to reverse the trends of the last century and a half, and return to satisfying significant amounts of the human appetite for power and materials using plant-derived raw materials, will have complex social and environmental impacts." But he also admitted that "obviously there is a great deal that we do not know about the impacts of the coming bioeconomy."[53]

Carver and the Bioeconomy of Tomorrow

In his own way, of course, George Washington Carver was anticipating a "coming bioeconomy." In many respects, he knew less about its potential impacts than today's industrial ecologists. After all, he lived when some of today's pressing global challenges were unrecognized, nonexistent, or of smaller magnitude. Among these are global warming, accelerated species extinctions, and population pressures on land, food, and water. Nevertheless, there are persistent threads in Carver's life and work that strongly suggest how he would approach the challenge of building a bioeconomy in the 21st century.

Of course he would begin with the assumption that "nature does not expend its forces upon waste material." And he would counsel finding the appropriate place of "each created thing" in "the great whole."

With the distinctions between conventional and sustainable agriculture now much more starkly drawn than they were in his lifetime, he would likely insist that biofuels and biobased products come only from crops grown sustainably. He would recognize the essential absurdity of making "renewable fuels" from crops grown using conventional fossil-fuel-intensive methods.

And he would see no need to expend massive amounts of fuel to carry crops from one end of the country to the other. Like many of today's sustainable agriculture advocates, Carver emphasized local production and use. He wanted to see healthy local farms contributing to healthy local economies. This goal included local farmers' supplying more of their own needs. In 1902, he told how one of his recent breakfasts, consumed in Alabama, had included bacon from Kansas, grits from Massachusetts, flour from Nebraska, oranges from Florida, bananas from Cuba, sugar from Louisiana, and coffee from Java. At the same time he observed how farmers themselves would drive to town to purchase foods they should have grown themselves. To his way of thinking, it was a set of circumstances that made no sense.

By extension, Carver's 21st-century vision would include local factories producing biobased fuels and products from local crops. As one Southern editorial writer put it, "The industrialized farm community is to [Carver] the answer to the important questions facing this section of the world."

And Carver would, of course, make room for what he called "the man fartherest down." A bioeconomy would not be all about complex chemical processes to produce fuel, plastics, paint, and lubricants. It would also include education designed to show even people with few material possessions that they were, in fact, surrounded by the creator's bounty. They could eat better food, improve their health, supply more of their own needs, and add beauty to their daily lives, all at little or no cost.

Carver would likely also push for a broader ecology curriculum, "brought down to the every-day life and language of the masses." Everyone—not just industrial ecologists—would need to understand the mutual relationships in the natural world if they were to benefit from its bounty rather than pull it apart.[54]

All in all, Carver's vision would be of a decentralized society, with people in closer touch with nature and one another than is typical in America today. Those people would have a strong ecological understanding, and that understanding would provide them with a means to acquire a basic sufficiency of food and other necessities. But it would also open the door to many creative endeavors, both artistic and practical, that could further enrich their lives.

The most obvious application of such a vision would be to a village-based sustainable development project—one that might also include such "appropriate technology" elements as simple solar technology or micro-hydroelectric systems. But even in a 21st-century American urban environment, some people live at least a part of Carver's vision: planting gardens, getting to know their local ecosystems, and living simply.

And if, as some expert observers now predict, the world is on the verge of "peak oil" status—that is, the point at which petroleum production reaches full capacity and begins its decline—then Carver's vision may take on a new relevance for many of us. Modern cities and suburbs are heavily oil-dependent, and it is not at all clear that substitute energy sources, biobased or otherwise, will pick up the slack. That could mean that many people, even in advanced, industrialized countries, will scramble to find a measure of security in the countryside. In such a scenario, Carver's vision of rural communities with small farms, vegetable gardens, and local industries could end up looking more like the future than the past.[55]

Notes

Many of the items cited below are from John W. Kitchens and Lynne B. Kitchens, eds., *The George Washington Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives* (Tuskegee, Alabama: Tuskegee Institute; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International [distributor], 1975). References to these items will be followed by the letters CM (for "Carver Microfilm") and then the pertinent roll number—for example, "(CM/59)."

1 Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 9–10; Anna Coxe Toogood, *Historic Resource Study and Administrative History, George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri* (Denver: National Park Service, July 1973), 8–21 (CM/59).

2 McMurry, 4–5, 10; George Washington Carver (hereafter cited as GWC), untitled biographical sketch, ca. 1897 (CM/1); GWC, "A Brief Sketch of My Life," ca. 1922 (CM/1).

[3] McMurry, 9–13; Robert P. Fuller and Merrill J. Mattes, "The Early Life of George Washington Carver" (Diamond Grove, MO: George Washington Carver National Monument, typescript, November 26, 1957), 12–18 (CM/59).

[4] GWC, "Nature as Our Greatest Educator," *Guide to Nature* (October 1908): 216; GWC, "A Brief Sketch of My Life," ca. 1922 (CM/1).

[5] McMurry, 18–20, 131; Fuller and Mattes, 44.

[6] McMurry, 21–39; Fuller and Mattes, 51, 53–68; GWC, "A Brief Sketch of My Life"; Jessie L. Guzman, notes of interview with Etta M. Budd, June 16, 1948 (CM/63).

[7] McMurry, 41–44.

[8] McMurry, 52, 54, 100–103, 115–129.

[9] Max Bennett Thrasher, *Tuskegee: Its Story and Its Work* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1900), 104–105; Thomas Monroe Campbell, *The Movable School Goes to the Negro Farmer* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969 [first published in 1936]), 80–81; GWC, "What Chemurgy Means to My People," *Farm Chemurgic Journal* ("Dedicated to the Proceedings of the Third Dearborn Conference") (September 17, 1937): 40.

[10] Allen W. Jones, "The Role of Tuskegee Institute in the Education of Black Farmers," *Journal of Negro History* (April 1975): 258–263.

[11] Joseph Cannon Bailey, *Seaman A. Knapp, Schoolmaster of American Agriculture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945); GWC, "How to Build Up Worn Out Soils," *Tuskegee Institute Experiment Station Bulletin 6* (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1905): 4 (CM/46).

[12] McMurry, 75, 80.

[13] McMurry, 80; GWC, "Feeding Acorns," *Tuskegee Institute Experiment Station Bulletin 1* (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1898): 6 (CM/46); GWC, "How to Grow the Peanut and 105 Ways of Preparing It for Human Consumption," *Tuskegee Institute Experiment Station Bulletin* 31 (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1916) (CM/46); GWC, "Three Delicious Meals Every Day for the Farmer," *Tuskegee Institute Experiment Station Bulletin* 32 (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1916): 3–12 (CM/46); GWC, "When, What, and How to Can and Preserve Fruits and Vegetables in the Home," *Tuskegee Institute Experiment Station Bulletin* 26 (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1915) (CM/46)

[14] Booker T. Washington to GWC, February 26, 1911 (CM/4); McMurry, 53, 58–67, 69, 130, 136–141,159, 162, 164–167.

[15] McMurry, 130–135.

[16] McMurry, 167–171.

[17] McMurry, 171–174, 176; GWC to Lyman Ward, November 29, 1921; "Convention of the United Peanut Association of America, Montgomery, Alabama, September 13th and 14th, 1920" (C/M 60); "Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, on Schedule G, Agricultural Products and Provisions, January 21, 1921," *Tariff Information, 1921* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 1548–49 (CM/60).

[18] Edwin E. Slosson, Creative Chemistry (New York: The Century Company, 1919), 135, 161–162; Williams Haynes, Cellulose: The Chemical That Grows (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1953), 19, 135–137.

[19] Byron M. Vanderbilt, *Thomas Edison, Chemist* (Washington DC: American Chemical Society, 1971), 286–294; Alan I. Marcus and Erik Lokensgard, "The Chemical Engineers of Iowa State College: Transforming Agricultural Wastes and an Institution, 1920–1940," *The Annals of Iowa* (Winter–Spring 1986): 184–197.

[20] Wheeler McMillen to Christy Borth, August 29, 1938, *Wheeler McMillen Papers*, Box 4, University of Oregon; Wheeler McMillen, *New Riches from the Soil* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1946), 26–36; "Ford Exposition Gates Open," *Ford News* (June 1934): 104; Christy Borth, *Pioneers of Plenty: The Story of Chemurgy* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1939), 23, 45–46.

[21] Austin W. Curtis Jr., "Memoirs of His Life and Work with Dr. George Washington Carver and Henry Ford," interview conducted by Dave Glick and Doug Bakken, July 23, 1979, Archives and Library, Henry Ford Museum, 11–22. Curtis, who served as Carver's assistant, accompanied Carver to the conference but mistakenly says in the interview that it occurred in 1936. According to the *Farm Chemurgic Journal* ("Dedicated to the Proceedings of the Third Dearborn Conference"), September 17, 1937, the gathering took place May 25–27, 1937.

[22] "Top Soil and Civilization," typescript reproducing an editorial from the *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 21, 1938 (CM/61); GWC to Grady Porter, February 3, 1942 (CM/40); "Obituary: Dr. Carver Is Dead; Negro Scientist," *New York Times*, January 6, 1943: 25.

[23] James Saxon Childers, "A Boy Who Was Traded for a Horse," *American Magazine* (October 1932): 25; Borth, 226; James H. Cobb Jr., "Ford and Carver Point South's Way," *Atlanta Journal*, March 17, 1940 (CM/62); Barry Mackintosh, "George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth," *Journal of Southern History* (November 1976): 523–524; McMurry, 155.

[24] McMurry, 171, 176, 219–220, 224–225; Mackintosh, 514–515; William R. Carroll and Merle E. Muhrer, "The Scientific Contributions of George Washington Carver" (unpublished report, dated 1962, prepared for the National Park Service, 1962), 22–23; Carver to Charles W. Greenleaf, September 14, 1942 (CM/42).

[25] G. Lake Imes, *I Knew Carver* (Harrisburg, PA: J. Horace McFarland Company, 1943), 7 (CM/59); Glenn Clark, *The Man Who Talks with the Flowers: The Life Story of Dr. George Washington Carver* (Shakopee, MN: Macalester Park Publishing Company, 1994; originally published in 1939), 17, 21; Wheeler McMillen [writing under the pseudonym W. W. Wheeler], "'Great Creator,' I Said, 'Why Did You Make the Peanut?'," *Farm and Fireside* (November 1928): 8; "Negro Scientist to Revolutionize Three Food Crops," Associated Press story (name of newspaper obscured on microfilm image), November 19, 1924, clipping (CM/60).

[26] Mackintosh, 511; Carroll and Muhrer, 27.

[27] Rackham Holt, *George Washington Carver, An American Biography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1943), 269; Frank H. Leavell, "George Washington Carver: An Interview for Students," *Baptist Student* (November 1938): 6 (CM/59).

[28] Quoted in David Norman, et al., *Defining and Implementing Sustainable Agriculture*, Kansas Sustainable Agriculture Series, Paper #1, (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, 1997). Published on the Internet at http://www.kansassustainableag.org/Library/ksas1.htm.

[29] In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt established a Commission on Country Life, which completed a report the following year that addressed a variety of rural issues, from "soil depletion and its effects" to "speculative holding of lands." Although the Commission—and the country life movement that continued for some years after it submitted its report—recognized that all was not right with rural America, they were not the genesis of the "alternative agriculture" sentiment that first appeared in the United States in the 1930s and '40s. Despite the chapter on soil depletion in the commission report and some subsequent calls from movement members for restored "fertility," such concerns did not take the kind of central position within the country life movement that they did among the later alternative agriculturists. And as William L. Bowers observes in *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900–1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, c.1974), the movement included a variety of rhetoric, with some members emphasizing the need to make farming a business, others stressing that farming was a way of life, and still others declaring that it was both. The "way of life" position was later strongly associated with alternative agriculture, and the "farming is a business" position went hand in glove with chemical-intensive mainstream agriculture.

[30] Quoted in Peter D. Burchard, *George Washington Carver: For His Time and Ours* (Special History Study: Natural History Related to George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, MO, 2005), 36; GWC, "The Need of Scientific Agriculture in the South," 322; McMurry, 90; GWC, "What Shall We Do for Fertilizers Next Year?" (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, November 1916).

[31] Wheeler McMillen, *Ohio Farm* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 55, 62; Richard A. Wines, *Fertilizer in America: From Waste Recycling to Resource Exploitation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 8–9, 11, 19, 84, 89, 155; GWC to Booker T. Washington, January 26, 1911 (CM/4).

[32] GWC, "The Love of Nature," *The Guide to Nature* (December 1912): 228; GWC, Iowa State College *Alumnus* (April 1925): 239, clipping (CM/60).

[33] GWC, "Grafting the Cacti," Iowa Horticultural Society *Transactions* (1893): 257, quoted in McMurry, 38.

[34] GWC, "The Need of Scientific Agriculture in the South," *American Monthly Review of Reviews* (March 1902): 320–321; GWC, "A Few Hints to Southern Farmers," *Southern Workman and Hampton School Record* (September 1899): 352; GWC to A. C. True, September 18, 1902 (CM/2); McMurry, 99.

[35] Robert P. McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology: Concept and Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 7–8, 29; Mark Hersey, "Hints and Suggestions to Farmers: George Washington Carver and Rural Conservation in the South," *Environmental History* (April 2006), published on the Internet at http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/eh/11.2/hersey.html; *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*, published on the Internet at http://www.merriam-webster.com/. Sources vary on the year that Pammel's book *Flower Ecology* was published. McIntosh says 1893, Hersey says 1896, and the FirstSearch WorldCat catalog says 1890.

[36] GWC, "Twelve Ways to Meet the New Economic Conditions Here in the South," *Tuskegee Institute Experiment Station Bulletin* 33 (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1917): 5 (CM/46); GWC, "How to Grow the Peanut and 105 Ways of Preparing It for Human Consumption," 10–35; GWC, "When, What, and How to Can and Preserve Fruits and Vegetables in the Home"; GWC, "How to Dry Fruits and Vegetables" (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1917) (CM/46); GWC, "Three Delicious Meals Every Day for the Farmer," 3–12.

[37] GWC, "Twelve Ways to Meet the New Economic Conditions Here in the South"; GWC, "Nature as Our Greatest Educator," 217; GWC, "White and Color Washing with Native Clays

from Macon County, Alabama," *Tuskegee Institute Experiment Station Bulletin* 21 (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1911) (CM/46).

[38] Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 89–92; Russell Lord, *The Care of the Earth: A History of Husbandry* (New York: New American Library, 1963), 208–210; James Whorton, *Before Silent Spring: Pesticides and Public Health in Pre-DDT America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 95–96, 122–132; Judson King, *The Conservation Fight: From Theodore Roosevelt to the Tennessee Valley Authority* (Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 98–122.

[39] Inspired by the agricultural theories of Austrian mystic Rudolf Steiner, the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association was established in 1938. Inspired in part by Hugh Bennett and his work as chief of the Soil Conservation Service, Friends of the Land was founded in 1940. J. I. Rodale, a Pennsylvania electrical equipment manufacturer and publisher, was inspired by the ideas of British soil scientist Sir Albert Howard to begin *Organic Farming and Gardening* magazine (the predecessor of today's *Organic Gardening*) in 1942. Natural Food Associates, which included both organic and biodynamic advocates, was founded in 1952, and *Acres U.S.A.*, a magazine that promoted a natural system called eco-agriculture, was established by Charles Walters Jr. in 1971. There were substantial differences within the "alternative" camp, but also basic agreement on the core principles that later characterized "sustainable agriculture." For a study that contrasts the philosophies of alternative and conventional agriculturists, see Curtis E. Beus, et al., *Competing Paradigms: The Debate Between Alternative and Conventional Agriculture* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University, 1991).

[40] J. I. (Jerome Irving) Rodale, *Pay Dirt: Farming and Gardening with Composts* (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1945), 187; Russell Lord and Kate Lord, eds., *Forever the Land: A Country Chronicle and Anthology* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 260; Bob Steffen, "The Crisis in Agriculture," *Organic Gardening and Farming* (August 1970): 55.

[41] Wade Green, "Guru of the Organic Food Cult," *New York Times Magazine* (June 6, 1971): 30–31, 60, 65, 68; J. I. Rodale, "Organic Miscellany," *Organic Gardening and Farming* (August 1971): 67.

[42] Robert Rodale, "A Fresh Look at Organic Methods," *Organic Gardening* (December 1979): 22.

[43] U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Report and Recommendations on Organic Farming* (Washington DC: Department of Agriculture, 1980), 80; Bayard Webster, "Federal Studies Support Rise in Organic Farming," *New York Times*, September 30, 1980, C1.

[44] D. Harper Simms, *The Soil Conservation Service* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 16; R. Douglas Hurt, *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 3; Dearborn Conference of Agriculture, Industry and Science, *Proceedings* (New York: Chemical Foundation, Inc., 1936), 350, 353.

[45] "Top Soil and Civilization"; Cobb, "Ford and Carver Point South's Way."

[46] From press release of a speech by Wallace on October 18, 1939, at the dedication of a new U.S. Department of Agriculture regional laboratory in Peoria, quoted in Arnold Daum, *Power Alcohol, History and Analysis* (New York and Chicago: Committee on Motor Fuels, American Petroleum Institute, 1940), 24–25.

[47] Russell Lord, *The Wallaces of Iowa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947), 124–125.

[48] "Alcohol or Humus," *Bio-dynamics* (Autumn 1945): 35; Russell Lord, "The March of Chemurgy," *The Land* (Winter 1946–47): 494; Rodale, *Pay Dirt*, 112–113, 239.

[49] Wheeler McMillen, "The Topsoil Challenge," *Chemurgic Digest* (December 1948): 28.

[50] U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Crops in Peace and War: The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1950–1951* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1951); Wheeler McMillen, unpaginated clipping from "All of Us" column in *Farm Journal*, May 1957, Wheeler McMillen Papers, University of Oregon.

[51] David E. Wright, "Agricultural Editors Wheeler McMillen and Clifford V. Gregory and the Farm Chemurgic Movement," *Agricultural History* (Spring 1995): 273–274, 277–280; Wheeler McMillen, *New Riches from the Soil*, 37, 40–41; Wheeler McMillen, *Feeding Multitudes: A History of How Farmers Made America Rich* (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1981), 406.

[52] Lester R. Brown. *Plan B 2.0 Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 30–31, 34–36; Robert Anex, "Something New under the Sun?: The Industrial Ecology of Biobased Products," *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 7, no. 3–4 (2004): 3.

[53] Anex, Ibid., 1–2.

[54] GWC, "The Need of Scientific Agriculture in the South," 321; Carroll Kilpatrick, "Utilizing Waste Farm Materials Offers Vast Wealth Possibilities," clipping from *Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1936 (CM/61); McMurry, 290.

[55] Brown, *Plan B* 2.0, 36–37.

York, Harriet, and George: Writing African American Ecological Ancestors

Kimberly N. Ruffin

[The conservation] movement [is] accustomed to extraordinary leadership. The pantheon is awesome: the legendary elders John Muir and Gifford Pinchot; Bob Marshall, the wilderness maker; Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson, who turned science into ethics; the majestic troublemakers, from Rosalie Edge to David Brower; the policymakers, from Teddy Roosevelt to Stewart and Morris Udall. These and hundreds of others have left their individual marks on history. Because of each of them, something changed.

—G. Jon Roush, *Voices from the Environmental Movement: Perspectives for a New Era*

If human beings, over time, when free to perform or not perform a given act, in fact invariably perform it, it is safe to assume that they need to perform it. [...] Ancestor worship is not alone the exotic preoccupation of quaint people mired in superstition in some remote corner of the world. Larger-than-life evidence of its industrialized-world variants can be seen in virtually every public park in America. [...] Obviously Americans, like all other people, need to worship their ancestors, either privately before cracked sepia photographs of stiff unsmiling long-dead kin or publicly at shrines like Mount Vernon, George Washington's home on the shore of Virginia's Potomac River.

—Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*

Introduction: Out of "Hundreds of Others"

Although author and activist Randall Robinson has decided now to "quit America"[1] and live in St. Kitts, he details ideas about improving the relationship between African Americans and America in his book *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*. One idea is to increase public acknowledgment of African American "ancestors" who have helped to build the nation. His statement about the idea of "ancestor worship" may be discomforting for those who consider themselves too intellectually sophisticated and technologically advanced for such notions. However, Robinson suggests industrialization and its aftermath have not removed what he feels is a basic human need: the activity of identifying and memorializing the accomplishments of people who have preceded us. He notes that this activity is varied and pervasive. From his vantage point, Robinson sees ancestor

acknowledgment as a key activity in shaping collective identity. His lament is that tributes to African American ancestors are neither a significantly visible part of the national capital's landscape nor of collective narratives that encompass the nation's consciousness.

In an example that supports Robinson's ideas about the need to venerate our predecessors, G. Jon Roush (see epigraph) names several European Americans who foreground the conservation movement in the United States of America. His identification of these leaders suggests how important they were to our contemporary experience of the nonhuman natural world in America. Indeed, Roush's language, particularly the use of amplifiers such as *extraordinary*, *pantheon*, *awesome*, *legendary*, and *majestic*, is as grand as the physical expanse and ecological variety of the USA itself. While he stresses the "*individual*" (italics in original) accomplishments of his exalted pantheon, he also marks them as important to a collective aim: conservation. Implicit in his praise is the notion that awareness of these "essential and enduring contributions to conservation" (Roush, 18) can embolden and energize contemporary activists and everyday people alike.

Roush is not alone in his praise of European Americans involved in the conservation movement. In *National Leaders of American Conservation*, Richard H. Stroud writes, "From the start, the conservation movement attracted men and women who symbolized the social conscience of America...they were the founders of a movement that has been one of the most glorious and most productive manifestations of our democratic republic" (17). For Roush and Stroud these European Americans are an essential part of appreciating and developing environmental activism in the United States; they serve as ancestors who have "claimed Earth"[2] and imbued a new generation to continue their work. Yet the lack of racial diversity apparent in the history and present of American conservation challenges Stroud's totalizing claims about the movement's exemplary democratic "manifestation" and "social conscience." In the same collection of scholarly essays in which Roush's work appears, Charles Jordan and Donald Snow write:

> *Most conservation leaders across the United States readily admit that their organizations hold little appeal to people of color…The history of the conservation-environmental movement, coupled with the fundamental philosophy of most mainstream environmental groups, offers important clues to the lack of involvement by nonwhite constituencies…The roots of exclusion in the American conservation-environmental movement reach back to the overt racism prevalent at the turn of the century; they remain watered today through the well-worn habits of largely unconscious organizational behavior (71–99).*

The absence of racial signifiers in Roush's and Stroud's histories suggests that race is not an important concern for conservation, making it a "universal," culturally neutral realm open for people of any racial/cultural background. Jordan's and Snow's work provides a counter-narrative that signals, in a similar fashion to Robinson, that the absence of a multicultural "pantheon" of ancestors may indeed point to undemocratic elements of America's past. They paint a picture quite different from the culturally neutral record of Roush and Stroud: Jordan and

Snow claim that the history of conservation in the United States is inseparable from the concurrent history of racism and exclusion. While conservation in the United States includes impressive accomplishments by European Americans that, theoretically, all may enjoy (e.g., the national parks), its history is also beleaguered by agenda, attitudes, and actions that discourage multicultural identification with "environmental" issues. Despite the democratic claims of its scribes, the mainstream conservation-environmental movement has an exclusionary, monocultural legacy that does not represent the broad-based constituencies needed to match the urgent ecological issues facing the nation and the world.

Indeed, the contemporary experience of "environmental" movements often is bifurcated along racial/ethnic lines. Typically, traditional environmentalist concerns about nonhuman nature (and human access to it) are the domain of middle- and upper-class European Americans, while the "Environmental Justice" movement (characterized by concerns over the unequal distribution of environmental burdens) is populated by Americans of Indigenous, African, Asian, Latino and European working-class descent. This gap has left the mainstream environmentalist movement with a predominately middle- and upper-class European American cultural identity.

Frank X Walker, Quraysh Lansana, and Marilyn Nelson, the three authors in this study, offer "neo-slave poetry" invigorated by the conceptual crossroads of contemporary environmental activism. By creatively interpreting the life of an enslaved African American, each poet directs readers to one of the "hundreds of others" (Roush, 18) who are rarely acknowledged as part of the nation's environmental legacy. In fact, their literature reaches beyond the limitations of the term *environmental* to identify them as "ecological" ancestors that challenge the dualism of anthropocentrism and biocentrism in American thinking. Because the connotations and denotations of *ecology* do not separate human beings from nature, writers who use an ecological focus are better able to underscore the contributions of early, and oftentimes enslaved, African Americans to national legacies. Ernest Callenbach explains the term:

> *[T]he science of ecology studies all interactions among living beings and their environment, whether we humans are involved or not…In recent years 'ecology' has gradually come to include studies of how humans and other living beings interrelate on the planet, of our increasing interference with ecological processes, and of how we might improve our relationships to the living world around us. (34–35)*

Murray Bookchin's concept of "social ecology" emphasizes the role of human systems because he suggests it "seeks to eliminate the concept of the domination of nature by humanity by eliminating the domination of human by human" (77). He is dissatisfied with environmentalism because "[i]t does not bring into question the underlying notions of the present society [and] reflects an 'instrumentalist' or technical sensibility in which nature is viewed merely as a passive habitat, an agglomeration of external objects and forces (77–78). Bookchin's critique of environmentalism submits that protecting nature cannot be divorced from

improving society-at-large; the systems that support natural degradation are intimately linked with systems that support human degradation. Along with an intimate knowledge of nonhuman nature, the historical African Americans here (i.e., York [the enslaved body servant of William Clark], Harriet Tubman, and George Washington Carver) had a keen understanding of "the domination of human by human." Clearly their accomplishments differ from those of the European American ancestors/elders of the environmental movement. Typical goals of conservation such as governmental/public land stewardship and habitat preservation were outside the purview of people who had to fight to own their own bodies. Nevertheless, their achievements as ecological agents anchor our understanding of early American culture in a much wider sea of knowledge and vision. The neo-slave poetry about their lives highlights their ecological import and makes an "ecocritical" reading of them possible. Walker, Lansana, and Nelson create literary monuments that illuminate how people among those at the bottom of human hierarchies can help us to better understand the impact of human systems on ecological experience.

York: "Big Medicine" for Westward Expansion

As a founding member of the Affrilachian Poets, Frank X Walker wrote literature that contradicted the culturally homogenous image of the central Appalachian region, in particular his birthplace of Kentucky. His work *Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York* debunks a culturally homogenous picture of the ecological history of the USA and one of its defining journeys: the Meriwether Lewis and William Clark expedition. To prepare to write *Buffalo Dance*, Walker spent six months reading books about the expedition, watching documentaries, traveling to the American West, reading slave narratives, and corresponding with friends of his in the area of the Lewis and Clark expedition. His writing process included immersing himself in York-related material just before going to sleep in the hopes that "York would wake him up" (Walker, Interview). Although York "participated in all of the expedition's hardships and dangers; performed the same duties as [everyone else on the trip and more]; risked his life during a violent storm to search for Clark; and proved a valuable asset in [interacting with] a number of Native American tribes [they] encountered" (Holmberg, 152), his depictions in written record are awash in myths that belittle or exalt him. Walker, who writes in the voice of York throughout the book, sought to strike some middle ground in this mythology and depict York as a person capable of the full range of human emotions who was both humorous and accessible (Walker, Interview).

Presumed to be "the first African American to cross the United States from coast to coast and the North American continent north of Mexico" (Holmberg, 151), York provides an opportunity to identify the human experience of the narrative of empire in one of the founding moments of U.S. ecological history. As the enslaved "body servant" of William Clark, York participated involuntarily in the necessary footwork for the West to be incorporated into the U.S. empire and the frontier myth to flourish, although his presence provided a potential counternarrative to this myth. In his book *Black Masculinity and the Frontier Myth in American Literature*, Michael K. Johnson explains the myth's racial dimensions. He writes:

> *As a much repeated ideological narrative in American culture, the frontier myth has most often served the interests of the dominant race, class, and gender, providing a mythic justification for the positions of power held by middle-class white males. The myth is based on a racial opposition between the "civilized" (white) and the "savage" (non-white, usually American Indian but often African American or even lower-class whites or white immigrants) and tells the story of the evolutionary inevitability of the triumph of civilization over savagery and the dominance of the white race over all other races. The frontier myth is the narrative of the civilized individual's journey westward into the savage American wilderness. (Johnson, 7)*

The empire-building goals of the Lewis and Clark expedition would enrich the coffers of European American ruling-class males in the United States while the expedition also did the necessary physical work for a frontier myth to be born that ensured other European Americans would have the ideological/governmental support and physical space to homestead. However, Walker uncovers a counternarrative to the frontier myth in his depiction of human encounters that he envisions went on under the radar of the expedition leaders. In doing so, he casts new light on the ecological impact of the expedition.

Aspects of environmentalism (e.g., the concept of deep ecology and radical activist groups such as Earth First!) identify the dangers in taking a solely anthropocentrist approach to nature. At the same time, Walker's depiction of the human-to-human contact during the Lewis and Clark expedition demonstrates the benefits of highlighting human interpretations of nature's variety. Native American responses to York and to the human biodiversity he represented and York's response to Native American cultures (including his relationship to Sacagawea), are a key part of Walker's treatment of York's ecological legacy, accounting for a significant portion of *Buffalo Dance*. The reciprocal affirmation of human culture in the text offers a dialogue that countered racist ideologies of the time.

While African American and Native American relations in early America were far from uniform, York's experience among several Native American tribes along the expedition revealed a positive impression of his Blackness.[3] Betts writes, "To those Indians who had never seen a black person, York was a remarkable phenomenon, 'big medicine' to be viewed with astonishment and awe, thereby enhancing the prestige of these white strangers" (4), and more specifically "[York] proved to be instrumental in keeping the Shoshonis from departing with the horses needed for the expedition to cross the Rockies" (147). Because of these Native American responses to the human biodiversity he represented, York would enjoy a break from the racist interpretation of Blackness as a sign of inferiority and ugliness. The poem "Wasicum Sapa" (a Sioux word for "Black man") details an incident in which a Hidasta chief tried to rub off what he thought might be a disguise of York's true appearance. York invites him to touch his "wooly head" and, "[s]atisfied that I was not a black white man / [the chief] looked deep into [York's] eyes / an stared at his own reflection" (Walker, 16). This moment of recognized human biodiversity yields interpersonal communion rather than racist behavior. Along the journey,

male expedition members had sexual relations with Native American women. "No Offense" conveys the jealousy from "Capt. Clark" over the Native American interest in York's striking physical features, which were so highly regarded that some Native American men invited York to impregnate their wives. "Nomenclature" contrasts the negative responses from European Americans to York's "big nose an wooly hair"—for example, "the closer to black a person is / the more mule he be"—to the responses of the "Indian world" that felt York's "blackness / is a thing to be worshipped / [his] nose a sign of power" (36). Walker allows York to signify on his master's opinions of Native Americans, remarking, "Capt. Clark call these beautiful / an kind peoples *ignorant savages*. / But it don't take a edjacated man / to guess what they think / a his thin nose an pale face" (36). The first poem memorializes that his nickname of "Big Medicine" came from Arikara and Mandan communities who thought his "tobacco skin" and "wooly head" made him akin to a buffalo "who walk like man" (1). The contours of Native Americans' positive response to York emphasize that ecology includes how people interpret human biodiversity and treat them accordingly as much as it does how humans treat plants and nonhuman animals.[4]

Walker imagines York's response to Native American culture throughout several poems. He lauds the superior tracking, animal-calling, and hunting skills of "Indians" in the poem "Ornithologists": "[t]hey know the calls an movements / a birds an animals / so much so, they can mock anything / in the woods, even deer / an them don't hardly speak" (33). In "Spirit Mound," Walker quotes a portion of Clark's journal that accuses York of being "fat and unaccustomed to walk as fast as I went" to introduce a rebuttal that reveals York's appreciation of Native American religious landmarks. Part of the poem reads:

I didn't want to go no place
so sacred even the Indians afraid to step,
so I pretends to be more tired than I was.

This piece of land so full a spirits
I felt little hairs praising on the back a my neck
but Capt. Clark don't seem to understand
what be sacred to others any more
than he see the difference
tween me ana pack mule. (15)

Clark's inability "to understand" and respect Native American religiosity is compared with his inability to see York as anything more than a beast of burden. On the other hand, York is ready to assign religious significance to the natural world, as he does in "God's House." Walker suggests York says, "Now, I ain't what you would call / a scripture quoter, / but the first time / I seen the water fall at M'soura, / felt a herd a buffalo stampede / an looked down from top / a Rock Mountains, / it was like church" (5). The waterfall, buffalo, and mountains that York sees compel him to think of the natural world, rather than a human-made sanctuary, as the

dwelling of God; indigenous religiosity reinforces his idea that the natural world is the locus of the supernatural. Disassociating himself from "scripture quoter[s]," he finds spiritual comfort in a text all can read.

A combination of Native American and African American culture emerges in several poems. Walker makes two parallels between Native American and African American cultures through York's eyes in his recognition of similarities in culinary approaches ("Prosperity" and "Pastry Chef") and storytelling traditions ("Ananse"). However, Walker expands York's affinity for comparing the two groups to the area of religious syncretism in the titles and imagery of "Vision Quest" and "Vision Quest II." "Vision Quest" opens with a translation of a Teton Sioux song that includes the image of a hooting owl and calling crow. In the midst of a dream, York envisions an old woman offering him "a gift a tobacco tied to an eagle feather"; he puffs the "sacred pipe," rolls around in "high grass," and transforms into a buffalo listening to the old woman singing. Walker writes:

When she stopped her song she took a long pull a water
an spit in the four directions an bade me look behind me.
Old York, his Rose, my wife an all the slaves I knowed
back in Virginy an Kentucke was rolling 'roud on the ground
turning themselves into a small herd.

When I turned back to where the old woman was sitting
she was holding a bowl a water an bade me look into it.
All I saw was her smiling face an a giant Crow
staring back at me.
Then as a strong wind came an carried me off
I hollas back to the herd an say
"One day I will return an bring all a you wings." (39)

This first vision quest animates a York who desires to free enslaved people, particularly his family members. In "Vision Quest II," York's spiritual rite of passage embodies an integration of Native American spirituality and African American biblical iconography that positions him as a prophet who is able to prophesy slave revolts such as Nat Turner's uprising at Harper's Ferry; dreaming, this time, gives him an out-of-body experience that supplies the vision of "a storm cloud / heading east like a runaway bull / lighting itself up as it go." He remarks that "when I make to stare at it / it put me in mind ova buffalo Jesus, wooly, / angry, an full a the revelations" (41). This imagery recounts the biblical book of Revelations in which a messiah with "hair like wool" fights the devil in a final apocalyptic battle of good and evil. Walker conveys that one of the ecological benefits of the expedition was the introduction of York to a liberating vocabulary, which encompassed the nonhuman natural world and cathartic human-to-human experience that gave him temporary relief from racist interpretations of his human biodiversity. Focusing on human-to-human contact on the expedition, Walker's poems "represent and

endorse forms of intersubjective communication in which rugged and autonomous individualism is rendered subject and reactionary" (Rushdy, 232).

Another of Walker's poems, "Medicine Men," contrasts the doctoring styles of Lewis and York and points to a long tradition of African American herbalism. Lewis's "doctoring" produces violent, if successful, reactions in many of the expedition members; however, York is also called on to "doctor" as well. In York's voice Walker explains:

It was me that was called to attend to Sgt. Floyd

before he died an Sacagawea the last moon

before her child come.

Capt. Clark must have let on

that I picked up a thing or two 'bout roots an wild grasses

from Old York an his Rose (13).

Far from being merely a slave along to "cook an carry," York was an herbalist who brought the botanical knowledge that he learned from his parents ("Old York" and "Rose") with him on the journey. He applied this knowledge to soothe Sgt. Floyd on his deathbed and to aid Sacagawea while she was in labor. Recent historiography about African American culture stresses that York's individual experience as an herbalist was common among enslaved African Americans. Sharla Fett writes in *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*:

> *A former slave from Maryland recalled, "The old people could read the woods just like a book. Whenever you were sick, they could go out and pick something, and you'd get well…" The sheer volume of herbs listed in the vernacular by African American elders born into slavery suggests a detailed knowledge of wild-growing medicines, even from the distance of several decades…It bears repeating that African American herbalism was indeed a sophisticated body of knowledge. (73–74)*

York applied part of this "sophisticated body of knowledge" (built from careful observation of the natural world) to the healing of expedition members. As "Big Medicine," York brought a facet of African American ecological engagement along with him in the journey west.

In "Revisionist History," Walker suggests that when the expedition's success was to be enjoyed upon their return to St. Louis, York's "blackness" is reduced to a marker of his enslavement, not a marker of his unique perspectives or contributions to the journey. The poem's final verse reads, "Them twist the tales an leave out my parts in it / so much so, that directly I become Massa Clark's boy, again / just along to cook / an carry" (61). Indeed, York's experience symbolizes that of African Americans generally who, through centuries of forced and voluntary agricultural work, developed an "intense generational intimacy" (Deming and Savoy, 10) with the land yet are marginalized in contemporary environmental discourse. Addressing this absence in the national environmental imagination is important particularly

because the pernicious aspects of concepts such as the frontier myth still have an impact on present-day culture. "The frontier myth is still one of the central cultural narratives by which the United States continue to define themselves, a powerful imaginative pattern that has long served to justify and defend dominant national developments while also providing a model against which other, alternative visions have been set" (Gerhardt, 14).

By imagining the voice of an enslaved African man who participated in an expedition that fueled the frontier myth, Walker provides an early root to cultivate an alternative vision to the frontier myth that challenges histories of racism, genocide, displacement, and exploitation. Indeed, taking a rigorous examination of the human relationships on the expedition enables readers of *Buffalo Dance* to ponder the impact of such myths on both humans at the bottom of human hierarchies and nonhuman nature. *Buffalo Dance* re-envisions the enslaved York as an integral part of this incredible journey in U.S. ecological history, and in doing so it engenders a reconsideration of one of America's master environmental narratives through the experience of negatively racialized people. In addition, the poems' representation of York's ancestral legacy allows readers to acknowledge the ecological ramifications of human-to-human encounters, African American herbalism, and an African–Native American religiosity that embraces nature.

Harriet: Escaping with Ecological Knowledge

Harriet Tubman has garnered the most acclaim of the three historical figures in this study. Well renowned as an Underground Railroad "conductor" who returned to slaveholding states repeatedly to help direct enslaved Africans to freedom, she was also a nurse, spy, and scout for the Union Army in South Carolina during the Civil War; women's rights advocate; abolitionist; institution builder; and champion of the poor and elderly. Catherine Clinton, in an epilogue entitled "Harriet Tubman's Legacy" in her recent study of Tubman, notes that institutions as broad-ranging as elementary schools, museums, "hot lines and shelters for fugitive women and children," and a "*digitized* research facility at York University in Ontario" are all associated with her name (Clinton, 219). Clinton also points out the living legacy associated with Tubman. She writes, "For countless American Blacks living today, Harriet Tubman was not just a mythical figure but a flesh-and-blood liberator who delivered their ancestors to freedom. There are by now *thousands* of African Americans whose grandparents or great-grandparents trace their freedom to Tubman...Their deliverance was a concrete gift of freedom" (Clinton, 220).

An example from children's literature imagines how, first, Tubman prepared for her own escape and self-liberation.[5] *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman*, by Alan Schroeder, depicts the ecological education that primed Tubman, first, to free herself, and then so many others, as it imagines that Tubman's father at one point in her life made routine trips to the woods to transmit his ecological knowledge. "Old Ben" expresses his love for his daughter and honors her passion and commitment to being free by preparing her to navigate a potentially deadly journey. Among Harriet's lessons are "how to read a tree" and the location of the "Drinking Gourd" (i.e., the Big Dipper). Their interactions convey the high level of African American engagement with the nonhuman natural world. While wilderness

could be a site of racialized violence, for many African Americans it became a site of geographic transition; there were those who chose to escape slavery temporarily to visit friends and family in neighboring areas and those in marooned communities who found a site of refuge and lived permanently in the wilderness.

Despite the ecological expertise needed to lead people under cover of night (usually during winter when there was the most darkness), Tubman is not usually written into the annals of U.S. ecological history, as are European American women such as Rachel Carson. Nevertheless, the 21st century has experienced a recent surge in Tubman interest with the publication of Jean M. Humez's *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Life Stories* (2003), Catherine Clinton's *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (2004), and Kate Clifford Larson's *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (2004).[6] Lansana's *They Shall Run: Harriet Tubman Poems* gives a collective portrait of survivalism in African American experience of the natural world during escape; his collection inhabits the bodies, minds, and images of fugitives in motion. Through his artistic rendition of Harriet Tubman's world, Lansana focuses on both the physicality of escape and the psychological tools that helped fugitives maintain themselves as they fought for freedom. His ability to communicate the physiological consequences of life at the bottom of human hierarchies challenges the dualism of anthropocentrism and biocentrism.[7]

As the title suggests, *They Shall Run: Harriet Tubman Poems* builds a collective portrait of Tubman and the world around her. This is in keeping with the patterns in neo-slave narratives and changes in the "nature writing" genre. Ashraf Rushdy, in his book *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*, writes, "The Neo-slave narratives contest [the] premise of individualism and challenge the singular voice in which it is articulated...these novelists dwell more on the communal subject positions of the antebellum slave narrators" (229). In a multicultural collection of essays about ecology entitled *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*, Alison Deming and Lauret Savoy note:

> *Many of the early luminaries of [nature writing] wrote about solitary explorations of pristine nature from a poetic, philosophical, or scientific perspective… Contemporary nature writing has moved beyond narratives of solitary encounter in the wild to explore how people and cultures have been shaped by and have shaped the land. It bears witness to the wounded relationship between people and the Creation and explores how literature might have political agency in reshaping that legacy. (Deming and Savoy, 6)*

Lansana's poems "bear witness" to collective experiences of "the wild" in the past, extending the relevance of multicultural perspectives on America's nonhuman nature back in time. Before poem titles, Lansana often includes names to distinguish which communal subject is the poetic voice; many poems are in "harriet's" voice but others include "revolver" (the weapon Tubman sometimes used to motivate fugitives to continue their journey), "joe" (Tubman's first husband), "negro hunter," "negro dog," and "john ross" (Tubman's brother). In addition, four "dreamprints" honor the interpretation of dreams, a practice Tubman valued as

part of the information that shaped her trips. Over the course of these varied poetic voices and styles, the ecological pertinence of Lansana's collection highlights the role of physical movement and the psychological facets to survivalism in the enslaved's relationship to nature.

Christian imagery of "heaven," "hell," and "purgatory" marks the fugitive slave's life at the beginning of this text. Lansana quotes Tubman as saying that "slavery is the next thing to hell" and uses this image to frame what he describes as "purgatory": the period between escaping and before reaching free land (which "harriet" refers to as "promised lan"). *They Shall Run* conveys intermediacy fluidly. The first poem, "purgatory," employs couplets and enjambment to distinguish the intermediate space where fugitives are on "this path of becoming" (1). Various elements reinforce interstitial place: "callous feet muster creek / rock between toes," Tubman's situatedness ("half her body / lost in river / the other in stars"), a "young man's" position between Tubman and his wife and child, and the "broken ones / in back" (behind the young man's family) plagued by "ghosts" who "rattl[e] their bones" (1). The layout of "dreamprint two" reiterates intermediacy as well. Lansana writes:

endless *trembles*
water *whispers*
groaning *wind*
belly *rumbles*
gash *sunlight*
crimson *clouds*
alabaster *carving (16)*

The space between lines and words invite multiple readings of this "dreamprint": both words on a line can be read together in traditional left-to-right fashion or columns of words can be read individually from top-to-bottom creating the effect of two stanzas aligned right next to one another. Regardless of the reading manner, the sparse poem captures the sensory experience of the fugitive slave whose hunger and fear spawn a keen awareness of his or her environment. Through imagery that fuses the natural world and the body, Lansana suggests this "path of becoming" brings fugitives closer to the environment ruthlessly. Finally, Lansana's poetry inhabits intermediacy through the perspective of a dog used to track fugitive slaves in "thoughts on the matter of runaways." The "negro dog" complains that the slave master "doesn't let me out / for anythin else / i live to run / this cage makes me crazy / leaves my blood funny" (23). Here, the dog anxiously awaits the next opportunity to "trai[n] or chas[e]," and its predicament of being locked in a cage until it is able to run reminds the reader of the limited movement faced by the enslaved. In both human and nonhuman animal facets of *They Shall Run*, liminality predominates.[8]

Elsewhere, Lansana details the psychological result of this intermediate existence between slavery and freedom. The poem titled "the leaving" portrays

"isaiah's" sheer anxiety about Tubman's practice of leaving fugitives in the woods while she procures information and/or resources from a nearby area. The poem explains that he and thirteen other fugitives are left "in de middle / of pitch black sky" with only the moon to see them; they "pray starin back / from de murky river" (13). His frustration over "crossin / wide water wid no ripple" makes him cry "she gone again my lord / why here aint de red sea / where she go when she go" (13). Isaiah makes reference to a story deeply embedded in antebellum African American culture: the Exodus narrative that details the enslavement of Hebrews, who were able to cross the parted Red Sea with Pharaoh's army behind them and the Promised Land ahead of them. The poem "burdens" delves into Tubman's response to the immense responsibility she faced as a liberator who earned the nickname of "Moses" because she did indeed get all of her "passengers" across the Red Sea (the wilderness), between slavery and freedom. Lansana writes in her voice:

folk live in my bones
breathe ma breath
we night like skin

i bear de weight
ma back bent ta light

draggin de moon
like a shackle

i pray dis night is silent as dawn's feet. (14)

Here nature is treacherous, as seen in the simile comparing the moon to a shackle. During the slaves' attempt to transform their environment and live as free people, natural elements such as the moon and rivers become burdens and obstacles. Their struggle to own their own bodies eclipses the experience of nonhuman nature as comforting, yet emphasizing intermediacy allows Lansana to allude to the idea that this relationship can change if they can subvert the human institutions that oppress them. Lansana gives voice to negative perceptions of the nonhuman natural environment that are linked to histories of human oppression. Lansana's poems flesh out this history and help readers to understand why some communities may have negative associations with nonhuman nature and those who claim an environmentalist identity that excludes others. Discussing the tendency on the part of some African Americans to dismiss "environmental" concerns, Shamara Shantu Riley writes in her essay "Ecology Is a Sistah's Issue Too: The Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism," "The resistance by many United States Blacks to the environmental movement may partly originate from a hope of revenge. Because of our acute oppression(s), many Blacks conclude that if the world comes to an end because of willful negligence, at least there is the satisfaction that one's oppressors will also die" (413).

"[H]arriet's" voice in the poems "earthwalkers" and "mountains" speculates on how Tubman may have mitigated the perilous ecological circumstances she and her fellow fugitives faced. The poem "earthwalkers" first provides vivid testimony to these trials, which include humans pursuing the speaker and firing gunshots "[be]hind de dark hill," the "devil's fingers creepin [in] de valley," dog barks that "cut [Tubman's] soul," neither water nor safehouse, and only "mudrock" for a bed (20). The poem "mountains" begins with this testimony as well. Tubman leads a group of wet fugitives up a mountain in the middle of "muddy sky" and "muddy dirt" with the moon behind "saggin onry clouds," yet to cope with this difficult mission Tubman relies on a deep religiosity that was a constant part of her life. The poem concludes with the italicized plea, "*dont stay far away o god / hurry ta ma side*" (21). Unlike the African–Native American religiosity depicted in the Walker poetry, Lansana's poems rely strictly on Black biblical iconography as can be seen in Tubman's hope that the mountain they climb with be their "zion / dat holy rock stuck strong / in [God's] green gloryfields" (21). In Lansana's poems, this religiosity would see Tubman and her followers through bleak moments in their liberatory travels: their theology would provide the kind of positive motivation their physical world could not. Lansana's collective biography of Harriet Tubman gives a testament that movement, rather than stasis, can be a catalyst for literature about wilderness. By inhabiting the stark physical circumstances involved in this movement, Lansana also illuminates the psychological elements of survivalism that were so crucial in applying the ecological skills necessary to reach "free" land.

George: Scientist for "God's Earth"

George Washington Carver, an agricultural scientist and inventor, introduced the vernacular ecological knowledge of African Americans like York and Tubman into the world of mainstream science. Like Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver is a mainstay of children's and young-adult literature. Unlike those of Tubman and York, Carver's accomplishments are sometimes put within an ecological context in trade publications such as Jennifer Roger's *George Washington Carver: Nature's Trailblazer* and documentaries such as "George Washington Carver Tech" (part of the History Channel's series *Modern Marvels*). Roger's book is part of the "Earth Keepers" series, which profiles important ecological contributors such as Henry David Thoreau, Jane Goodall, Rachel Carson, Jacques Cousteau, and John Muir. However, Marilyn Nelson's *Carver: A Life in Poems* provides a picture of Carver unlike these other texts. Through a collective biography, in the same vein as Lansana's poetry, Nelson depicts a scientist who is able to infuse his science with cultural and spiritual meaning. In these poems, Carver appears to have a human-centered or "anthropocentric" outlook that is tempered by his sheer wonder at the nonhuman elements of nature and an ethical commitment to the entire Earth because he considers it God's creation.

Even though Carver had the shortest experience of enslavement of the three historical figures in this study, he nevertheless was significantly impacted by the violence of slavery. Nelson gives her imaginative treatment of his early life in "Out of *Slave's Ransom*," depicting this incident: an enslaved infant, born about 1864, he and his mother Mary are kidnapped from their owner Moses Carver. John

Bentley, a man hired to find the two slaves, is able to find only the baby wrapped in "a bundle of wet rags, convulsive with fever and shook by the whooping cough" (9). Perhaps because of his early bout with whooping cough and because he was a "puny" baby (9), Carver was a physically small and frail adult. His biological mother had already been sold, and he would never see her again.[9] Although he demonstrated signs of intellectual talent early, his intellectual growth was tainted by life in post-slavery America. "The Perceiving Self" relays a time in 1879 when Carver sees a lynching. "Friends in the Klan" dramatizes an incident in which Carver receives a cautionary letter from a White "friend." In being a bridge between vernacular African American culture and university approaches to science during this difficult time, he chose not to leave his African American heritage behind; instead, he made it an integral part of his scientific outlook. Marilyn Nelson's collection *Carver, A Life in Poems* helps us to see how he merged a fierce commitment to scientific inquiry with his cultural foundations.

"Arachis Hypogaea" begins with the specific cultural import of Carver's favorite scientific subject, the peanut, and illustrates Carver's mix of science and culture. Although the peanut is indigenous to many parts of the world, it holds a special significance in African and African American cultures, playing a large part in culinary traditions. The first verse of the poem describes a romantic legend that the peanut "may have been / smuggled to North America by slaves who hid seeds of survival in their hair." The peanut becomes a symbol of African survival during slavery: "[T]ended by moonlight and exhaustion, [a slave's peanut] seed might grow to be [their] children's manna in the wilderness." Verse two pays homage to the peanut's scientific specificity, describing the plant's, flower's and pistillate's appearance. The final verse merges further scientific description with Carver's use of the peanut, explaining, "From the laboratory of a slave emerged / a varied diet for the poor, / stock foods, ink, paints, cosmetics, medicines... / Promise and purpose, the Ancestors' dream" (78). At a time when it was assumed that Africa was a "tabula rasa" and people of African descent were seen as intellectually inferior, Nelson's Carver builds his scientific work on a strong foundation of pride in his African ancestors and African American culture. "Arachis Hypogaea" celebrates his integration of these elements of his life.

A question written by Carver, which Nelson quotes at the beginning of "Arachis Hypogaea"—"Great Creator, why did you make the peanut?"—indicates what is perhaps the most controversial aspect of Carver's work: a method that might be best described as "scientific spiritualism." George Kremer writes:

> *Young George had gotten a good dose of regular Bible reading during his stay with Mariah Watkins, but his religious fervor seemed to stem more from a deep, personal mysticism, an almost pantheistic sense of identifying God with nature and communicating with Him through the forces of His creation…He never separated the worlds of science and religion; he saw them as mutually acceptable and compatible tools for arriving at truth. (6)*

The apparent co-existence of biblical and "pantheistic" theology in Carver's spiritual outlook and scientific method hints at the religious syncretism (i.e., integration of Christian religious doctrine and iconography with traditional African religious worship styles and concepts) so common in African diaspora cultures rather than the "personal mysticism" that Kremer suggests. Indeed, "[t]he transformation of the word science as a distinct rationality valued above magic is uniquely European. It is not common to most non-Western societies, where magic and science and religion can easily co-exist. The empirical, scientific realm of understanding and inquiry is not readily separable from a more abstract, religious realm" (Selin, v–vi). Thus, Carver's scientific spiritualism is yet another layer of African-descended culture in his life. One of the benefits of ancestral connections can be access to repositories of ideas that provide alternatives to dominant paradigms. Toni Morrison elaborates on this interplay between the "more abstract, religious realm" and critical thinking in African American culture. She writes:

> *I could blend the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world. We are very practical people, very down-to-earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things. But to blend those two worlds together at the same time was enhancing, not limiting. And some of those things were discredited knowledge that Black people had: discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was discredited. And also because the press toward upward social mobility would mean to get as far away from that kind of knowledge as possible. That kind of knowledge has a very strong place in my work. (Morrison, 329–30)*

Knowledge that accommodates both the "real world" and the "supernatural" "has a very strong place" in Nelson's depiction of Carver as well. Throughout the collection Nelson depicts Carver as enthralled with inquiring scientifically on "God's Earth," and she renders artistically Carver's effort to encourage others to adopt this cosmology. In "Professor Carver's Bible Class," Carver convinces a student to supplant the "master narrative" of a paternalistic, vengeful God with one that invites people to be ecologically aware and alert. The poem's final line incorporates Carver's own words (in italics): "Your Creator, he said, is itching to contact you!" (75). During a Carver-led Bible study class that would meet for thirty years, he introduces the idea that "all of nature…is a vast broadcasting system" for God's voice.

Carver's goal of unifying science and religion also encouraged a love of nature and critical thinking. In the "Last Talk with Jim Hardwick," Carver holds the idea that the environment is such a great conserver that it is only natural that it conserves human souls. Using Carver's voice, Nelson writes:

Nothing is wasted
or permanently lost
in Nature. Things
change their form,
but they do not cease
to exist. After
I leave this world
I do not believe I am through.
God would be a bigger fool
than even a man
if He did not conserve
the human soul,
which seems to be
the most important thing
He has yet done in the universe. (95)

The idea of spiritual conservation also resonates in "The Wild Garden," which extends the idea to the plant world. Nelson writes, "If all crops perished, the race could survive / on a balanced diet of wild vegetables. / The homeliest, lowest, / torn out by the roots, poisoned; / the 'inferior,' the 'weeds,' / They grow despite our will to kill them…/ We refuse to thank them, / but they keep coming back / with the Creator's handwritten invitation" (70–71). Part of Carver's scientific spiritualism included the idea that God was ecologically efficient and with time and careful study human beings could discover the "reason" for all of God's creations. In Carver's estimation, scientific curiosity could allay the ungodliness of waste.

Contemporary religious fundamentalism is often characterized as a barrier to scientific inquiry, and Carver faced serious resistance to his religiosity during his time as well. "Eureka" describes an incident in which Carver is castigated for his admission that inspiration played a role in his motivation. Nelson makes a reference to a *New York Times* editorial that "ridicule[d]" him "[b]ecause REAL scientists / do not ascribe their successes / to *inspiration*" (85). After an "Associated Press story about Carver's peanut-oil massages as a treatment for polio brings throngs of polio victims to Carver's door" (89), Carver's combination of spirituality and science is put to a demanding test. "The Penol Cures" not only relays the successful treatment of one young polio victim but also shows the limitations of Carver's discovery, saying, "There were many successes, / but many failures as well" (89). Nelson alludes to the perceptions of Carver's methods by the mainstream scientific community in the poem's final verse:

The results of Carver's Penol experiments
were unsatisfactory and irreproducible,
the cause of those cures being
unquantifiable
and wholly unscientific. (89)

Carver, A Life in Poems explores aspects of his scientific spiritualism; at the same time, it acknowledges moments when the intended result was elusive. Madhu Dubey, in her book *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism*, traces the late-20th-century African American literary and critical tradition of describing the ancestor as someone who is able to maintain connections to African "conjuring" practices and "expos[e] the limitations of modern rationality and reinstat[e] suprarational ways of knowing suppressed by the Enlightenment legacy" (167). Nelson's poetry does not glorify this aspect of Carver's life or overlook the limitations of this "suprarational" epistemology; instead, she posits that within the context of Carver's scientific outlook, these instances of "unquantifiable" benefits were to be expected as God's purpose and "logic" was sometimes outside the reach of human understanding. Despite negative feedback from some scientists, Carver would remain committed to his scientific spiritualist method until his death.

While "The Penol Cures" illustrates the possible limitations of Carver's scientific spiritualist method, it also demonstrates Carver's firm commitment to helping the public. In his 1956 address to the third annual Christian Liberal Arts Festival at Simpson College, entitled "The World Significance of the Carver Story," diplomat and Nobel Peace Prize–winner Ralph Bunche remarked:

> *In a world in which so many areas, so many populations, fit the description "under-developed"; in which the bare essentials of a decent standard of living are unknown to so very many; in which hunger and misery are still the virtual way of life for literally hundreds of millions; in which the demand for a better life by long suffering masses grows daily more insistent, in such a world, I vow, the Carver Story, the story of science and scientist dedicated wholeheartedly to the betterment of man, has truly magnificent meaning; it is indeed epochal. (7)*

Although his comments are now more than fifty years old, Bunche delineates a world much like the present one, where ecological crisis threatens numerous populations on the planet. Carver's commitment to the poor was unshakeable; he did everything in his power to ensure that his scientific discoveries would help downtrodden farmers. The "suffering of poor Southern farmers…in what he called 'the lowlands of sorrow' greatly troubled him. Carver envisioned the mysteries of the universe in order to improve the quality of life for everyone, particularly the poor…He believed that nothing existed without purpose. The job of the scientist was to discover the purpose and publicize its possible benefits for mankind" (Kremer, 102). Despite invitations to teach or head much better-equipped institutions at a higher salary, Carver remained dedicated to his teaching at Tuskegee Institute, a Historically Black University in Alabama. The poem "House Ways and Means" demonstrates that his advocacy even brought him to the U.S. House of Representatives to present "in support of a protective tariff on peanuts" (77). Carver gracefully avoided responding to a racist comment from Republican Congressman John Tilson, who asked if Carver wanted watermelon to go with his peanuts. "From an Alabama Farmer" exemplifies the gratitude from beneficiaries of Carver's dedication "to the betterment of man," the poetic voice here not only eager to thank Carver but also excited about learning the science behind his success. Nelson brings to life the voice of a farmer with untutored writing skills, saying:

Dere Dr. Carver, I bin following
the things I herd you say last planting time . . .
I'm riting to you today, Sir, jes to tell
you at I furtulize: 800 pounds
to the acur las March. Come harves, well
it were a bompercrop. How did you found
out you coud use swamp mock? I presheate
your answer Dr. Carver by mail soon.
What maid my cotton grow? It do fele grate
to see the swet off your brow com to bloom.
I want to now what maid my miricle.
Your humbel servint, (name illegible) (39)

Although not identified as a poem "found" from Carver's archives, it reads as if it were an actual letter written to Carver that documents the appreciation of those whom Carver served. In addition, the farmer's description of the results of Carver's recommendations as a "miracle" reflects a communal appreciation of Carver's scientific spiritualist method. A notorious anti-materialist who also felt that individualism supported egotistical behavior out of sync with righteousness, Carver had a personal appearance that belied his importance; his well-worn clothing prompted some to assume he was destitute and homeless. His appearance was in keeping with his ethical commitment to shunning waste and materialism.

It is routine to discuss Carver's scientific achievements as the clearest evidence of his ecological legacy. However, in addition to those advancements, Carver's scientific method, advocacy for the poor, and ecological ethics also coincide with the contemporary mantra of eco-friendly lifestyles: reduce, reuse, and recycle. His "human-centered" efforts demonstrate the ways in which improving human life can indeed improve the health of other segments of nature.

Conclusion

The success of all environmentalists' efforts finally hinges not on "some highly developed technology or some arcane new science" but on "a state of mind": on attitudes, feelings, images, narratives.

—Lawrence Buell, Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond

The body of African American writing about slaves and slavery from the sixties to the nineties has served to mark and mobilize the transition from a previous generation's shame that many black Americans testified to feeling about their slave heritage to the Black Power pride they gained when they recognized the humanity and dignity of their enslaved ancestors…The narratives of slavery participate in an intellectual moment when American social groups have

> *undertaken a concerted effort to reorganize their separate and imbricate pasts, [and] to develop a heightened sensitivity to the individual strands of a multicultural tapestry.*
>
> —Asraf Rushdy, Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form

Neo-slave poetry in the 21st century extends the work of the neo-slave narrative by challenging the dualism of anthropocentrism and biocentrism, thus supplying "attitudes, feelings, [and] images" that Buell feels are so necessary for ecological progress. Leonard Scigaj, in *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets*, posits that "ecopoets present nature in their poems as a separate and equal other in dialogues meant to include the referential world and offer exemplary models of biocentric perception and behavior" (11). Frank X Walker, Quraysh Lansana, and Marilyn Nelson offer instead what might be considered an "exemplary anthropocentric" ecopoetry that demonstrates the benefit of seeing ecology from the standpoint of marginalized human beings. Richard Peterson's observations of ecological philosophy in the Central African forest region offer yet another way to understand the philosophical core of this poetry. He writes:

> *Instead of focusing on the either/or debate between anthropocentrism and biocentrism, lifecenteredness focuses on the bondedness of all forms of life. Rather than analyzing the place and standing of different human and nonhuman life-forms on the basis of their comparative rights, African lifecenteredness focuses on life itself, in a holistic rather than analytic fashion. It is not a matter of seeing what is most important, or of deciding if one thing is more important than another, but of believing and acting on the basis that all of life is important; even more, that all life is sacred. (172)*

Honoring that those who were dehumanized by the institution of slavery have something to contribute to our ecological understanding extends the concept of lifecenteredness to people once thought to bridge "animal" and "human" worlds. The poetry in this study exemplifies the important "human" work still left to be done in encouraging ecological awareness and action; it gives readers a fresh set of "attitudes, feelings, [and] images" that intervene in national narratives that have left African Americans out of U.S. ecological history and left people with a dualism insufficient to speak to the interconnectedness of life.

Analyzing these texts within the framework of U.S. culture does not circumscribe their importance to the national sphere. Clearly, if ecology teaches us anything, it is that our lives are interrelated. Our present ecological condition is best appreciated as transnational and multicultural; understanding the role African Americans have played in one region of the ecological past underscores that African Americans must be a part of the planet's ecological present and future. As George Handley writes in *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas: Family Portraits in Black and White*, "Genealogy, though traditionally understood to reach back through time, becomes a means of unveiling the latent heritage of the present" (14). Literature is one way to employ both the best of genealogy and artistry to infuse multicultural images into our awareness of the ecological past. While York's, Harriet's, and George's

experiences are certainly individual, they also spotlight ecological traditions and attitudes within African American culture. At the same time, their lives call for comparison and contrast with those who survived the Transatlantic slave trade throughout the world and those who have seemingly unrelated histories.

For African Americans, acknowledging these historical figures' contributions, especially through the poetic statements about them, can help undo oppressive narratives that render people of African descent ecologically null and void. As noted by Bell Hooks, "Collective black self-recovery takes place when [African Americans] begin to renew our relationship to the earth, when we remember the way of our ancestors. When the earth is sacred to us, our bodies can also be sacred to us" (182). However, African American ancestral "ways" have considerable implications for indirect beneficiaries of their legacies too. Simply put, expanding our pantheon of ecological ancestors promises to help us think critically and increase our efforts to enact ecological justice. David Suzuki points out in *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature* that participation in ecological knowledge-making was crucial to the world's past, saying, "The knowledge of every band of human beings, acquired and accumulated through generations of observation, experience and conjecture, was a priceless legacy for survival" (11). With these ancestors acknowledged and integrated thoroughly into ecological history and imagination, their legacies stand poised to enrich a global dialogue about an ecologically sound present and future.

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Notes

[1] Founder of TransAfrica, Robinson details his decision to "quit America" in his latest book entitled *Quitting America: The Departure of a Black Man from His Native Land*.

[2] Haki R. Madhubuti explains that his book *Claiming Earth: Race, Rage, Rape, Redemption; Blacks Seeking a Culture of Enlightened Empowerment* "is about questioning [African American] noninvolvement in the environmentalist movement" (ii). Like the conservationists, he too is concerned with progress that would improve life on Earth. Yet his scope (e.g., "white supremacy and power, education and self-concepts, dependency and powerlessness") goes far beyond the wildlife- and wilderness-oriented concerns of conservationists. In *Claiming Earth* Madhubuti does not evoke an identifiable ancestry as do Roush and Stroud. The task of "claiming Earth" prompts him to address issues outside the agenda of U.S. conservation and environmentalism's ancestry. Perhaps part of Madhubuti's uneasiness in writing a "nature book" is the very absence of ancestors who close the gap between environmentalism and other movements that aim to reshape human society.

[3] Editor of *When Brer Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature*, Jonathan Brennan notes, "There has clearly been a vast array of African–Native American identities and communities" that call for a "regional approach" to the subject; however, "[a]fter the start of the European colonization of Africa and the Americas, contacts between Africans and Native Americans increased considerably" (3–17).

[4] This break from the cloud of racism would be short lived. Although the final years of his life are a mystery, many scholars have concluded that he remained under the ownership of Clark until his death. However, this did not stop him from forging bonds with those around him. He would fight to be with his wife, a slave whom he met in Louisville, throughout his enslavement, particularly when Clark moved to St. Louis; the issue would finally compel Clark to hire out York.

[5] Tubman has been a mainstay of children's and young-adult literature. Acclaimed African American author Ann Petry takes up the subject of Tubman in a 1955 novel that details a tender moment in which Tubman relies on her ecological knowledge to cope with stress. Petry describes Tubman's connection with the natural world as a motivating factor in her completion of the difficult task of hand-sewing a quilt in celebration of her marriage to her first husband, John Tubman. The comforting recollections of "Jerusalem flower," "motherwort," "water lily," "leaves," and "pine trees" help her to pay homage to one of the few tender and humanizing relationships a slave could have. Petry explains, "as the quilt pattern developed, she thought it was as beautiful as the wild flowers that grew in the woods and along the edge of the roads" (79–80). This excerpt also attests to the enslaveds' ability to see their own humanity and forge a connection with nature outside the destructive lens of slavery. Petry even comments on the ecological skill of Tubman's father, saying, "[Harriet] knew moments of pride when the overseer consulted Ben, her father, about the weather. Ben could tell if it was going to rain, when the first frost would come, tell whether there was going to be a long stretch of clear sunny days. Everyone on the plantation admired this skill of Ben's. Even the master, Edward Brodas" (22). Catherine Clinton suggests that Tubman's life story has been "confined to the storybook world" outside "serious historical examinations" (xi). At the same time, Tubman's solid presence in children's and young-adult literature exposes younger generations to this American champion and has cultivated an older audience for the scholarly studies that have emerged at the beginning of the 21st century.

[6] These historiographies explain why Tubman had the ecological confidence to go on repeated journeys into slaveholding America. It is clear she relied on a web of African American and European American collaborators and utilized ecological knowledge garnered during her early adulthood. Tubman began taking care of children and performing other domestic duties when she was only a child. The horrific abuse she faced in these situations caused her to develop a preference for work outside the "big house." "Frequently Harriet worked for her father, who was a timber inspector, and superintended the cutting and hauling of great quantities of timber for the Baltimore ship-yards" (Humez, 179). These opportunities for father-daughter knowledge transmission emboldened Tubman, who was quite proud of her physical prowess, whereas domestic labor left her subject to shame, admonition, and painful punishments. "[S]he learned to prefer if not enjoy physical exertion. In the wide-open spaces of the woods and fields, she came into her own. She developed awesome stamina" (Clinton, 20). In addition to her father's instruction, Tubman collected ecological knowledge from an outside experience that included a broader community of men. Larson writes:

> [T]he disabled Tubman went to work on a timber gang, exhibiting great skill laboring in the logging camps and in the fields. There she was exposed to the secret communication networks that were the province of black watermen and other free and enslaved blacks...As one of the few women working in the forests on a timber gang...Tubman became part of an exclusively male world. Here in the forests, beyond the watchful eye of white masters, the male slaves had access to the [free] black watermen...[and] black mariners...These black men were part of a larger world,

> a world beyond the plantation, beyond the woods, that reached out to towns and cities...They knew the safe places, they knew the sympathetic whites, and, more important, they knew the danger. They created a veiled and secret world parallel to the white masters' world. (65)

The "secret world" of free and enslaved Black men "[spread] notions of liberty and freedom, relay[ed] the details of revolution in Haiti, shar[ed] news of abolition and colonization efforts and other political issues, and pass[ed] messages between members of families separated from one another" (66). While this network provided information from as far away as Haiti, it would also equip Tubman with local and regional information she could use in her own subsequent liberation journeys.

[7] Tubman was certainly an extraordinary woman, and she has a predecessor whose life bears comparison here. Jenny Sharpe admits in *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archeology of Black Women's Lives* that "[t]he story of Nanny is the story of contending forms of knowledge: written versus oral histories, colonial versus national cultures, institutional versus popular ways of knowing" (2); however, what can be said is that in the minds of many she was a woman of African ancestry who was crucial to resistance against slavery in a nation outside the USA: Jamaica. "Nanny is a figure of resistance, whose significance as a rebel woman is bound up with Jamaican national independence. It is an indication of her symbolic value to national self-identity that she is the most celebrated woman from the era of slavery in Jamaica" (Sharpe, xvi). Taken together, Tubman and Nanny represent two arenas for ecological knowledge at work in the African diaspora: Tubman employing ecological knowledge for the task of movement, Nanny utilizing ecological knowledge for the task of stasis, both amid hostile forces working toward their demise. With her "bush chemistry," medicinal, culinary, and psychological skill, Nanny would use her own brand of "science" to lead "a group of runaway slaves in Jamaica known as the windward maroons" (xii). Maintaining the borders of her community, Nanny established such a presence in Jamaica that the British signed treaties with maroons. Harriet's legend grew from her ability to move both herself and others across varying terrain. As Sharpe points out "a language for naming the power slave women might have exercised" (xxv) sometimes eludes the contemporary reader. Despite the differences between the two women and the terrains they negotiated, Nanny and Harriet Tubman shared a power with a common name: the power to apply ecological knowledge to the liberation of their people.

[8] John Campbell's "'My Constant Companion': Slaves and Their Dogs in the Antebellum South" describes a "world teeming with dogs" which fulfilled the needs of both masters and slaves. He writes:

> Having these animals benefited slaves in three broad ways. With dogs, they were better able: to challenge and partially overcome the ever-present dehumanizing nature and consequences of slavery; to protect themselves from white people and other dangerous creatures; and to augment their meager subsistence allowance, thereby improving the material conditions of their lives. (56)

At the same time Campbell goes on to suggest that dogs "also helped offset the sharp loneliness and social deracination" that came with the constant familial and communal upheaval experienced from the practice of selling the enslaved.

[9] "Bedside Reading" illustrates the love George Carver had for his mother in his gesture of keeping his mother's bill of sale in a Bible (Nelson, 41).

The Transformation of George Washington Carver's Environmental Vision, 1896–1918

Mark D. Hersey

Easily the most significant and farsighted African American environmental thinker of his time, George Washington Carver was a prophet of sustainable development for poor agricultural communities. His significance as an environmental thinker obscured by his fame as the Peanut Man, he has been overlooked by historians of Progressive Era conservation, who tend to focus on the nation's forests and wildernesses rather than on agriculture. But Carver saw clearly the links between land use and poverty in the rural South and sought to rectify, to some extent, the problems of both impoverished Black farmers and the denuded agroecosystems of the region. While Carver's religious faith, intuitive affinity for the natural world, and idiosyncratic experience contributed to his nuanced, distinctive, and farseeing environmental vision, it was his concern for the South's Black farmers that served as the catalyst in fostering his unique conservation ethic, an ethic that became increasingly pronounced over the course of his two first decades at Tuskegee Institute.[1]

Indeed, when Carver arrived at Tuskegee Institute in the autumn of 1896, his approach to scientific agriculture differed little from that of his contemporary agronomists. Carver's agricultural and environmental visions (and the two are inextricably intertwined) evolved over time. It was only as he came in contact with the Black farming communities surrounding Tuskegee that he discovered that the brand of scientific agriculture in which he had been trained at the Iowa Agricultural College (now Iowa State University) was of little use to the impoverished Black farmers he sought to help—at least until he had modified it to meet their needs.

The Black communities that most influenced Carver's thinking along such lines were those of Macon County, Alabama, in which Tuskegee was situated. It was in Macon County that Carver took his daily nature walks. It was there that he first loaded tools into a wagon and headed into the countryside to give agricultural demonstrations. It was primarily the county's Black farmers who came to his public lectures at the institute and visited with him at Tuskegee's agricultural experiment station. And it is no coincidence that most of his bulletins centered on the agricultural possibilities of the county. Thus, a right understanding of Carver's agricultural and environmental visions necessarily entails a glimpse into the life of the county's Black communities.

The easternmost of Alabama's Black Belt counties—so named for their pockets of dark, humus-rich soil rather than their predominantly African American populations—Macon County was cotton country. Opened to White settlement following the forced removal of its indigenous Creek inhabitants in 1837, the

county, with its Black Belt soil, had attracted ambitious planters who arrived with dreams of a landscape white with bolls of cotton and who brought with them large numbers of slaves whose forced labor would make this dream a reality. Predictably, these planters quickly gained economic, social, and political control of the county. The Civil War, of course, cost them their slave wealth, but in reasonably short order they had re-established their control over the affairs of the county. Since they controlled the legal and economic institutions of the region, their control extended (albeit to a considerably lesser extent than it had prior to the Civil War) over the lives of the county's Black citizens.

Thus, when Carver first stepped down from a train in Macon County, where African Americans made up the overwhelming majority of its population, most Black farmers—close to 95 percent in 1900—were tenants, nearly all of whom cultivated land belonging to White landlords. These tenant farmers lived in cabins with their families on parceled-out plots of land. The cabins themselves were grouped into roughly fifty small farming communities, which were connected to each other by roads winding along the county's ridges—a nod to the many streams that regularly flooded—and by footpaths first navigated by slaves spurning pass laws prior to the Civil War.[2]

Despite the founding of the all-Black Tuskegee Institute in the county in 1881, few educational opportunities existed for Macon County's Black tenant farmers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Consequently, illiteracy rates were high. Legal protection was wholly on the side of their White landlords, and all the political momentum in the state indicated that they could expect only a further contraction of their rights. Carver's arrival in 1896, in fact, coincided with the passage of Jim Crow laws throughout the South. In Alabama, these were capped by a 1901 constitutional convention that bolstered segregation and disfranchised virtually all of the state's Black population. Following the ratification of the new constitution, only sixty-five Black voters remained in Macon County; more than two thousand had voted during Reconstruction.[3]

With the enactment of Jim Crow legislation, segregation gained legal traction, but in the day-to-day lives of the county's rural communities an informal, convoluted, and constantly evolving racial etiquette proved more significant. African Americans, for example, couldn't dance with, eat with, or marry Whites. Once children were old enough to recognize racial distinctions, playing with peers of the other race was proscribed. Blacks were expected to address their White counterparts as "Mister," "Miss," or "Missus," but were not extended the same courtesy in return. Macon County, however, was more "liberal" than some in its racial policies, as African Americans could sometimes drink with Whites, could shake hands and touch them without causing resentment, could sit in public parks, and, on occasion, could worship with Whites.[4]

An informal segregation of sorts existed geographically as well. Whites tended to live and congregate in the larger towns like Tuskegee and Notasulga, and were more likely to be found along the rutted, sandy-clay roads that connected those towns with one another and with Montgomery to the west and Atlanta to the east. African Americans tended to live in more isolated farming communities off the main thoroughfares and away from the larger towns. In part, this physical separation of

the races provided the Black hamlets with a sense of security. One tenant farmer in the hamlet of New Rising Star noted that in "this settlement there ain't no white folks. You won't find a white family between here and Red Gap—that's up the road six or seven miles—so we don't have no trouble."[5] Whatever benefits this geographical separation conferred on communities like New Rising Star, White political, economic, and social control was evident everywhere, not least of all in the fact that most African Americans worked land belonging to Whites.

When the frustrations of a Black tenant farmer mounted with a landlord, the tenant farmer would move, usually to a neighboring community within the county. As in most of the Cotton Belt, tenant turnover was high, but rarely would a tenant leave the county altogether. As sociologist Charles S. Johnson observed, moving was the "one outstanding means of asserting freedom" at the tenants' disposal.[6] Few other means of expressing their disapproval were available to them—at least prior to World War I. One Macon County tenant reasoned, "You know when you get where you can't behave yourself you better move. You got to be loyal, 'cause this is a white man's country." Another put it more succinctly: "You can't do nothing with white folks agin [against] you."[7]

Though Macon County lay in the Black Belt, not all the soil in it was Black Belt soil; indeed, the soils varied widely, determining to some degree the settlement patterns. The plantation communities with the heaviest populations were found on the better soils; few lived in areas with the poorest soils; and African Americans were most likely to own land in areas where a living could be scraped out of relatively poor soil. At the turn of the century only 157—or roughly 5 percent—of the county's Black farming households worked land that they owned, and the majority of these did so on the thin soils of Macon County's uplands. The popular pejorative, "hillside darkeys," reflected the topography of the county's northern section, where erosion along its rolling hills exacerbated the condition of the marginal soils. Indeed, when George Bridgeforth, who worked under Carver in the agricultural school at Tuskegee, toured the county, he found "the colored people doing better on the thin uplands than on the bottomlands." Near Notasulga, in the northern part of the county, for instance, he found "a thrifty settlement of colored, that owns several hundred acres of land." Although there were pockets of Black homeowners elsewhere in the county, virtually no African Americans owned land in the plantation belt that stretched across its center and included the Black Belt soils. There, Bridgeforth found that the "people as a rule work on shares or pay a very high rent." Not surprisingly, there seemed "to be no friendly relation between the landlord and the laborer."[8]

Vulnerable to fraud, perpetually in debt, and politically powerless, the county's Black tenants had little incentive to labor especially diligently. As they did not own the land and were not tied to it, they had little inducement to take good care of it. Whites, in turn, seeing what they were conditioned to expect, saw Black laziness and negligence. The logic of racial animosity became circular and self-perpetuating. Black tenants "are careless," W. E. B. DuBois explained in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "because they have not found that it pays to be careful; they are improvident because the improvident ones of their acquaintance get on about as well as the provident." But most of all, DuBois continued, "they cannot see why

they should take unusual pains to make the white man's land better. [...] On the other hand," he concluded, connecting the problems of racism and soil erosion, "the white land-owner...shows his Northern visitor the scarred and wretched land; the ruined mansions, the worn-out soil and mortgaged acres, and says, This is Negro freedom!"[9]

This was the world out of which Macon County's Black farmers sought to scratch a living, "their plows singing beneath the sandy loam," to borrow a phrase from Black novelist George Wylie Henderson, a native of the county.[10] In many regards, of course, it was a very similar world to that in which African American farmers toiled throughout the South's plantation regions, though the particular details varied, to be sure. It was a far cry, however, from the world Carver had known in Iowa.

Both the landscape itself and the farmers working it looked quite different from what Carver had been accustomed to in the Midwest. It was, as he later remembered, a world of "devastated forests, ruined estates, and a thoroughly discouraged people, many just eking out a miserable sort of existence from the furrowed and guttered hillsides and neglected valleys called farms."[11] What's more, the climate of the region differed markedly from what he had known in the Midwest. Writing a friend during his first spring at Tuskegee, he noted that "the weather is simply superb, and as for flowers I never saw anything like it."[12] Three months later, however, his enthusiasm had waned considerably. "The weather [has been] extremely hot," he complained in June, well before the suffocating heat and humidity of his first Alabama summer truly settled in.[13] While Carver was no stranger to severe storms, he had never lived anywhere that saw as many heavy rains. These rains worsened the condition of the exhausted soil, which when opened to the wind and rain—as it was virtually all year under the prevalent system of cotton culture—eroded "thousands of times faster" than it could be replaced by natural processes.[14] The result was a scarred and denuded landscape, marked by rills and gullies, that was an affront to Carver's appreciation of all things beautiful. "Where the land is rolling (and most of it is) it washes badly," Carver lamented, "leaving great ditches, gutters, and bald places"—an unsightly image, to be sure.[15]

Alabama was as different socially from what Carver had known as it was ecologically. Though Carver was no stranger to racism, he had just received a warm sendoff from his White classmates and professors in Ames. Few African Americans in Alabama had been befriended by Whites at all, let alone in the way Carver had been by a succession of parental figures, advisers, and peers. Those friendships, along with his advanced degree, offered sufficient evidence to confirm for him the wisdom of Booker T. Washington's philosophy of self-help and interracial cooperation, but they had left him unprepared to encounter the more virulent racism Blacks faced in the plantation districts of the Deep South. Nevertheless, Carver was optimistic that he could remake this strange world he encountered, at once restoring the vitality of its soils and helping its Black farmers gain their economic independence.

Carver approached this task with considerable energy and commitment, even after his initial optimism had waned. He undertook it, however, not as a farsighted advocate of what has been dubbed "sustainable agriculture," but as the only

African American with an advanced degree in agricultural science. Predictably, his strategies initially reflected the conventional trends of his training. To be sure, Carver had some idiosyncrasies that might have set him apart. For one, he had a deep and abiding religious appreciation for the natural world that enabled him to see God's hand and beauty where others did not.

Carver also had the good fortune of having been the pupil of Louis Hermann Pammel, a now obscure botanist who introduced Carver to the nascent science of ecology. Carver consistently emphasized the "organic unity" of the world and sought to impress on Black tenants the necessity of understanding the "mutual relationship between the animal, mineral, and vegetable kingdoms, and how utterly impossible it is for one to exist in a highly organized state without the other." In fact, he sought to equip farmers first and foremost with this understanding. The "highest attainments in agriculture," he insisted, could "be reached only when" farmers recognized that their "plants were real, living things, and that sunshine, air, food, and drink, were as necessary for their lives as for that of the animal." Indeed, Carver stressed ecological relationships to a greater extent than virtually any of his fellow Progressive conservationists.[16]

Even so, Carver's agricultural methods and views were, in the main, pretty conventional when he began his career at Tuskegee. Seaman A. Knapp, the founder of the United States Department of Agriculture's county agent system, captured the conventional agricultural wisdom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in his "Ten Commandments" of scientific agriculture. In short, Knapp advocated the following: deep cultivation; the use of the best seed available; appropriate spacing in rows; intensive tillage during the growing period; the use of legumes, barnyard manure, farm refuse, and commercial fertilizers; crop rotation; the use of the most up-to-date technology (which he described as "more horse power and better implements"); the raising of livestock; the self-sufficiency of the farm (i.e., raising enough food for the farm family and livestock); and the keeping of good records.[17]

To a large degree, Carver espoused these commandments. He consistently advocated cultivating the soil to a depth of eight to nine inches in preparation for planting, though if it had "been plowed shallow for a number of years," he recommended that the farmer "not plow the nine inches at once, but just two inches deeper every time it is broken until the nine-inch depth is reached."[18] He enjoined farmers to be selective in their seed—to hand sort it if need be. The appropriate spacing of rows attracted little attention from him, at least until the advent of the boll weevil, but there is no evidence to suggest he was anything other than orthodox here. Likewise, he recommended shallow cultivation of the soil during the growing season to keep the weeds down and to act as a dust mulch (not more than two-and-a-half inches, as cotton's roots spread laterally, often four feet or more, and could easily be cut during cultivation). He recommended crop rotation, including winter cover crops, though the last was difficult given cotton's early planting and relatively late harvest. And he sought to persuade farmers to increase the quantity and quality of their livestock.

But as Carver encountered the impoverished Black communities of Macon County in his daily nature walks, public lectures, and weekend extension

demonstrations, he came to revise some of Knapp's commandments. For one, keeping good records was not an option for many Black farmers given the illiteracy rate of nearly 50 percent among Alabama's Black communities at the turn of the century.[19] For that matter, even literate African Americans had little choice but to accept the records of their White creditors. Failing to do so involved risking eviction, harassment, and racial violence. "When the book says so and so you better pay it," one Macon County tenant explained, "or they will say, 'So, I'm a liar, eh?' You better take to the bushes too if you dispute him, for he will string you up for that."[20] Thus, the political and social realities of the Cotton Belt rendered the last of Knapp's commandments immaterial, and Carver, despite supporting a campaign to stamp out illiteracy in Alabama, devoted virtually no attention to it.[21] His alteration of three other Knapp commandments—the use of the most modern farm implements, the self-sufficiency of the farm, and the use of legumes, barnyard manure, farm refuse, and commercial fertilizers—merit more explanation.

Initially, Carver embraced Knapp's commandment to utilize only the best farm equipment. Almost immediately after his arrival in Tuskegee, he asked for—and received—a two-horse plow to use on the institute's experiment-station fields. (Unfortunately, along with the plow came some ill will since many of his fellow teachers considered the request extravagant.) Carver likewise used a top-notch harrow (to break up the large clods thrust up by the plow), a "four-toothed cultivator," and "a diamond scooter [plow]" to till the soil while the plants were growing.[22]

By the middle of the nineteen-aughts, however, Carver had begun to turn his back on the application of modern farm implements as they were simply beyond the reach of most Black farmers. Endorsements of technological solutions disappeared from his publications, even as they grew more prominent in the bulletins of other agricultural experiment stations. Knapp, for instance, was in agreement with the main currents of Progressive agronomy when he consistently enjoined farmers to "use more modern machinery, better horses, more mules, [and] better implements."[23] Of course, Carver never denied the obvious truth, as he put it in 1905, that "labor saving machinery can be used to advantage," but "desiring to bring it [his work] more closely in touch with the one-horse farmer," he "made it [his] practice to do things...under conditions similar to those of the farmer." [24]

Carver's decision was predicated in part on the comparatively poor funding of Tuskegee's experiment station relative to its White counterpart at Auburn. His friendship with James Wilson, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and Carver's former professor at the Iowa Agricultural College, offset this to some extent, but even Wilson's support (and Booker T. Washington's connection with northern philanthropists) could not make up for the funding decisions rendered by the Alabama legislature in Montgomery.[25] In short, the institute's station was forced to make do with very little. Consequently, by 1905 Carver could justly contend that the "Tuskegee station has...[kept] in mind the poor tenant farmer with a one-horse equipment; so therefore, every operation performed has been within his reach."[26]

Thus, by the end of his first decade in Tuskegee, Carver had come to a decision to spurn technological solutions. There was no need to buy an expensive manure spreader, insisted one of his assistants in 1902, as it "only pays where at least a ton

of manure is produced a day." Instead, a farmer using only his wagon and "two or three willing boys" would find that "a load of manure soon finds itself spread upon the places needed."[27] Carver's recognition that scientific agriculture could be carried on in the absence of up-to-date machinery—and would indeed need to be, given the resources of "the poor tenant farmers with a one-horse equipment"—marked a significant divergence from the main currents of agricultural science.[28]

Carver also modified Knapp's commandment to make the farm self-sufficient. Of course, he agreed with the principle; his entire campaign, in fact, was conducted with the hope of undermining the plantation system and facilitating the rise of a self-sufficient Black yeomanry. However, in contrast to wheat and corn, the staple crops of the Midwest, cotton is not edible. What's more, tenant farmers had little control over what they planted—that decision rested with their landlord. Consequently, Carver had to be more creative than most of his peers in order to find ways to enable Black farmers to become self-sufficient in terms of subsistence. At times, he appealed directly to the landlords, arguing that permitting tenants to grow their own food would increase their efficiency. "A sick, worried, rest-broken person cannot do his best," Carver reasoned. "From a purely economic point of view it [was] worth giving attention to" the matter of encouraging tenants to cultivate large gardens, raise livestock, and diversify the standard salt pork and cornbread diet on which most subsisted and which contributed to diseases like pellagra that afflicted large numbers within the region's Black communities.[29]

When such appeals failed, as they almost invariably did, Carver was left with a much more complex problem, which he approached in several ways. To begin with, he encouraged Black farmers to grow as much of their own subsistence as possible given their peculiar circumstances. So long as they took empty wagons to town and returned with them full, Carver argued in 1902, echoing a common theme of Progressive Era agricultural reformers, tenant farmers would remain "the very embodiment of pessimism, and imagine that all sorts of cliques, clans, and plans [were] being originated to militate against them."[30] By that year, however—a year, not coincidentally, in which he was very nearly lynched in neighboring Montgomery County—Carver was becoming increasingly aware that "cliques, clans, and plans" were, in fact, organized against African Americans.

Consequently, Carver increasingly turned his research at the station to relatively minor southern crops—sweet potatoes, cowpeas, and peanuts—that could not only contribute to the regeneration of southern soils but could be both consumed and marketed. Thus he sought to develop alternative uses for these crops that might broaden their appeal as cash or cover crops (and perhaps induce landlords to permit their tenants to plant them in addition to cotton), and he offered recipes for their preparation as food in his bulletins. In time, his efforts to find alternative uses for southern crops would make him a household name. The recipes he provided for those crops, however, proved at least as integral a part of his campaign in the short term.

In 1903, Carver published a bulletin on cowpeas, which he insisted were "absolutely indispensable in a wise crop rotation, and in the rational feeding of both man and beast."[31] The bulletin included twenty-five recipes for dishes that could be made from the vegetable. It was the first of many of his bulletins to include recipes,

and it pointed to a new direction in his campaign. From 1903 on, housewives were one of Carver's principal target audiences, and most of his publications were aimed as much at them as at their husbands in the field. After all, he maintained, it "is just as important for the housewife to know how to use...farm products wholesomely and economically as it is to produce them."[32]

Carver's antipathy for waste was as evident in his instructions for food preparation as it was in his advice to farmers. In "Three Delicious Meals Every Day for the Farmer," a bulletin directed toward "the thoughtful housewife," Carver observed, "As a rule we are wasteful; we do not know how to save." Continuing, he claimed that "[i]gnorance in the kitchen is one of the worst curses that ever afflicted humanity, and is directly or indirectly responsible for more deaths than all the armies combined."[33] Ever the Progressive, he not only lamented the fact that a poor selection of food contributed to "the loathsome and dreaded disease known as Pellagra," but complained that "bad combinations of food" left people "unnourished" and "unduly stimulated; and as a result often [led] to strong drink, bad morals, and bad manners."[34] His moralizing aside, Carver thought it absurd that southern farmers were among "the most poorly fed of all classes of individuals" despite the fact that "choice vegetables of some kind can be had every day in the year" from gardens in the South.[35]

Not all of Carver's recipes would necessarily win the endorsement of nutritionists today. He included a recipe in the bulletin, for instance, for "Bacon Puffs," which were "made from the very fat portion of the bacon...dipped into a thick pancake batter, and fried"—essentially bacon fritters.[36] Even so, his advice was, for the most part, sound and considerably healthier than the standard fare of most tenant farmers. It was his hope "that every housewife and all those in charge of the preparation of foods would see to it that some kind of green, leafy vegetable is served everyday." Carver was convinced that if they did, then the region's Black communities would enjoy "greater vitality, clearer thinking and," revealing once again his Progressive bent, "a greater determination to be a worthwhile somebody in life."[37] More to the point, the recipes he provided were for fruits and vegetables relatively accessible to poor farmers, either on their farms or in the surrounding woods. Indeed, his emphasis on the "organic unity" of the universe led to another of his approaches to the problem of self-sufficiency on Black farms—teaching farmers "to recognize and appreciate what Nature has so lavishly provided for us" in the form of neglected and overlooked foodstuffs.[38]

"Nature endows or blesses each state or section with an indigenous flora and fauna best suited to that particular soil and climatic conditions," Carver wrote in a 1907 bulletin. Macon County, he argued, had been blessed "in the quantity, variety and quality of its wild plums." In fact, "many hundred bushels" of them went to waste every year. The purpose of the bulletin, aptly titled "Saving the Wild Plum Crop," was "to set forth in a practical way a number of recipes by which every housewife may be successful in the saving of this splendid article of food."[39] Plums were just one such food source. In a leaflet titled "Some Choice Wild Vegetables That Make Fine Foods," Carver described both culinary and medicinal uses for the kinds of common weeds he encountered during his walks in Macon County.

"Nature has provided us," he insisted, "with an almost innumerable variety of wild vegetables, which serve not only as food, but as medicine."[40]

A 1918 article carried in the *Montgomery Advertiser* clarified his esteem for "so-called weeds." "Nature has been so lavish in its wealth of native food stuffs for both man and beast that we could not only live but thrive if all of our cultivated plants were destroyed," he asserted.[41] Believing that people saw "in things just about what [they were] looking for," he sought to convince the impoverished tenant farmers to stop seeing weeds and start seeing food.[42] Indeed, those who had learned to appreciate the Creator's munificence saw a diverse and healthy diet in the neglected plants disparaged as weeds. For those who had eyes to see, entire meals were there for the taking. "A good plate of dandelion greens...or...wild onions, seasoned and fried," Carver maintained, made "a dinner quite inexpensive but very appetizing" with the addition of "an egg or two" or a baked potato.[43] Likewise, those who believed that they couldn't afford to keep livestock failed to see the possibilities of grasses regarded generally as "noxious weeds," grasses that could help support that livestock.[44]

Both weeds and conventional garden fruits and vegetables needed to be preserved once they had been collected, and Carver provided instructions for "canning, pickling, drying, preserving, etc." them. "Every year it is painfully apparent," Carver noted in a 1912 experiment station circular, "that fully two-thirds of our fruits and vegetables go to waste." With "a little effort in the direction of canning, preserving and drying," he continued, fruits and vegetables harvested in the summer and fall could "be converted into nutritious and palatable dainties, sufficient to last throughout the winter and spring months."[45] The bulletin went on to offer instructions for preserving twenty-two fruits and vegetables, primarily by canning.

By World War I, however, Carver had discovered that "the high price of sugar as well as [glass] containers," put canning beyond the reach of most Black farmers, and made "it emphatic that we have some other method within reach of the humblest citizen."[46] Consequently, his emphasis shifted to drying fruits and vegetables, and he published bulletins explaining how it could be done and how to deal with the problems that attended it—such as keeping insects away. He took a mainstream message during World War I, then—that of food conservation—and amended it in such a way as to make it possible for those with meager means to embrace it, not necessarily for the nation's benefit, but for their own.

Although he appropriated a mainstream message, his solution differed markedly from those of his fellow agronomists—the more so as it was not merely a wartime expedient but was underlain by a significant philosophical difference. "Many of the old ways of saving food we must rediscover," Carver wrote in 1918. "This so-called reversion will spell progress." Acutely aware of how out of step with the zeitgeist he was—not only in his manner of preserving food but also in his reluctance to advocate technological solutions to poor farmers' problems—Carver added, "The word reversion may need, however, to be camouflaged [to accomplish its ends]."[47] In a very real sense, then, Carver was looking backward to the "high-minded husbandry" of the sort espoused by farmer-reformers in the mid-

nineteenth century.[48] Carver, of course wasn't entirely backward-looking. In fact, he was in the vanguard of his day's agricultural research as it regarded alternative uses for agricultural products. Even so, Carver's vision had clearly and decidedly drifted from that of mainstream agricultural science by the end of World War I.

Perhaps nowhere was this shift seen more plainly than in the way he tweaked Knapp's commandment to use legumes, barnyard manure, farm refuse, and commercial fertilizers. In contrast to most of his peers in agricultural science, Carver gradually de-emphasized the use of chemical fertilizers, adopting instead a stance that led him to admonish impoverished Black farmers to turn to organic fertilizers. This transition took time; he had not been taught to rely on organic fertilizers at the IAC, except under special circumstances. His horticulture professor, for instance, had instructed him to apply chemical fertilizers during a vineyard's first five years, but that after that, "nothing better than Barnyard Manure," supplemented with "veg. mould or humus," was needed to allow "the fruit to ripen perfectly."[49] There were other exceptions, but as a rule, Carver's training reflected late-nineteenth-century agronomy's veneration of chemical fertilizers, and his work at the IAC's experiment station as a graduate student had confirmed their benefits.

Given his training, the fact that funding for Alabama's experiment stations was tied to fertilizer sales, and that the oversight of the Tuskegee station came from the director of the Auburn station and the state's commissioner of agriculture, it is hardly surprising that Carver began experimenting with commercial fertilizers immediately after breaking ground for the station in 1897.[50] A fertilizer company from New York "very kindly donated to the school a large amount of fertilizers [roughly 1,000 pounds] to be used in an experiment," he informed the institute's president, Booker T. Washington, in May of that year.[51] Using the donated fertilizer, Carver began experiments on sweet potatoes and cotton.

Carver devoted two of his first three bulletins to the results of those experiments and included a close description of how and when to use fertilizers. The bulletin on cotton even described them as having "the same general appearance as common table salt," as if Carver suspected local tenant farmers used little fertilizer because it was unfamiliar to them. Neither bulletin advocated the use of organic fertilizers. On the contrary, Carver sang the praises of their chemical substitutes. "The nitrogen, potash or phosphoric acid they contain is just as valuable for plant food as the same substances in farmyard manure," he wrote. Indeed, the "chemical manures are much stronger than the farmyard manure" per volume and weight, and so, he implied, were at least as valuable.[52] In laying out his conclusions, Carver advocated the increased use of commercial fertilizers. Cotton would grow best if fertilized with a "complete" fertilizer, which is to say a fertilizer that blended nitrogen, potash, and phosphates. Sweet potatoes require little nitrogen, but "potash and phosphates are indispensable to the highest development of the potato," and Macon County's "average upland soils [would] be benefited by a light dressing of lime—say 200 pounds to the acre" for their cultivation.[53]

Charts titled "Yield of Plots Per Acre" supported his conclusions, demonstrating that the fertilizer worked quite well, but with the caveat that more wasn't always better; high fertilizer costs on some plots led to a net loss. Even so, the application of the fertilizer led to significant increases in both production and profitability.

The cotton produced on the unfertilized plots—plots with land quite similar to that worked by the county's tenants—netted a loss of $10.40 per acre; clearly the soil lacked the necessary nutrients to grow the region's staple crop profitably without a change of one sort or another.[54] For sweet potatoes, the plot with no fertilizer saw a profit, but of only $2 per acre, while the application of $36 worth of fertilizer "reckoned per acre" (the cost Carver presented as the most successful) led to a profit of $121. A fertilizer expenditure of $36 per acre, however, translated to a $720 outlay for a twenty-acre, "one-horse" farm—substantially more than any landlord would consider advancing a tenant.[55] Even the more modest use of fertilizer—say $6 or $7 per acre–could cost more money than a tenant was likely to make in a year. By the early twentieth century, Carver had grown increasingly aware of this quandary facing Black tenants and of the fact that the crying need of the region's eroded and exhausted soils was humus rather than additional nutrients. Consequently, he began to shift his attention to alternative methods of fertilization.

At first, Carver was confounded by the challenge of finding plausible alternatives. The most obvious possibility was barnyard manure, which he believed to be "of the greatest value, as it added the much needed humus (vegetable matter) and... [along] with the chemical, the physical condition of the soil is most important." Unfortunately, tenant farmers had few animals of their own. In a farmers' leaflet from this time, Carver cited the Auburn station in offering the amounts of fertilizer to be added to a cotton crop, but qualified it the following way: "In leaving out barnyard manure we do not fail to recognize, nor do we under-rate its value." However, since "in cotton planting almost none is used...it is not included. This will continue to be so," he lamented, "until the number of farm animals is greatly increased and more attention is given by the farmers to the proper saving of this, the most valuable of all fertilizers."[56]

Carver also advocated the planting of legumes for their nitrogen-fixing value. "The deficiency in nitrogen can be made up almost wholly," Carver noted, "by... keeping the legumes, or pod-bearing plants, growing upon the soil as much as possible." In particular, he advocated "the common cow pea," for its food value as much as its value as a soil builder.[57] Likewise, he advocated green manuring—raising a (generally) leguminous cover crop of one kind or another and plowing it under rather than harvesting it—and saw its benefits in the steadily improving soil of the Tuskegee agricultural experiment station. These possibilities, however, were sharply circumscribed by the dictates of the tenants' landlords.

In composting, however, Carver found a truly practicable alternative means of fertilization. Indeed, by 1902 compost manuring had emerged as Carver's solution to the physical and chemical deficiencies of the Cotton Belt's soils. That year Carver informed his colleagues at the annual convention of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations that he was not only testing conventional commercial fertilizers at Tuskegee but was working with "swamp muck, forest leaves, pine straw, etc.," all of which were readily available to even the poorest of the region's farmers.[58]

By 1904, he had set aside three acres of the experiment station for the exclusive use of organic fertilizers. To be sure, Carver continued experiments with chemical fertilizers at the station, never entirely rejecting them.[59] But while Carver

continued to conduct experiments with commercial fertilizers in subsequent years, they were almost always blended with swamp muck or some other compost.[60] In providing instructions to teachers for setting up a children's garden, for instance, he advocated the use of organic fertilizer, which, he added, "will be sufficient," though if the teacher desired, it "may be supplemented" with prescribed amounts of chemical fertilizers.[61] For Carver, however, they were always to be a supplement, never a crutch, and no farmer need rely on them.

In time, Carver came to believe that "many thousands of dollars are being spent every year here in the South for fertilizers that profit the user very little, while Nature's choicest fertilizer is going to waste."[62] For poor Black farmers, the fact that the South was "allowing to go to waste an almost unlimited supply of the very kind of fertilizer [its] soils are most deficient in," meant that fertilizer was theirs for the taking with labor as the only cost. A walk through the woods was a walk through a "natural fertilizer factory," which, in its decaying leaves, "trees, grasses, and debris of many kinds," produced "countless tons of the finest kind of manure, rich in potash, phosphates, nitrogen, and humus, all of which our soils are badly in need of."[63] Consequently, even if impoverished tenants lacked access to sufficient barnyard manure, their efforts in collecting and composting "leaves and muck" would be repaid "many times in the increased yield of crops...[despite] the almost unbelievably small amount of actual cash outlay required to do it."[64]

Although he embraced compost fertilizing as a practical expedient, Carver's understanding of the "organic unity" of the universe confirmed his conviction that chemical fertilizers offered decidedly limited benefits since their application implied that nature was in some way deficient, that it needed something it could not produce. Later in life, Carver would add other objections. "To our amazement," Carver wrote in 1936, "we are learning that a tomato may not be a tomato nutritionally speaking, but only a hull or shadow of the savory, nutritious, palatable vegetable it should be." Although it might look "in every way just like an ordinary tomato," he added in 1942, favorably citing the work of another scientist, it could have comparatively few of the nutritional "qualities of a well-grown unfertilized (artificially) tomato." By the end of his life, his concerns about the application of chemicals of all kinds to food crops had grown, and (anticipating the kind of argument Rachel Carson would make in *Silent Spring*) he pointed out that chemicals put on fields made their way into the body. Those "who eat watermelons know that if they are not exceedingly careful they remain sick as long as the watermelon season lasts, because of the improper use of nitrate of soda."[65]

It does not appear that the nutritional implications of over-reliance on commercial fertilizers or the potential harm posed by agricultural chemicals to human bodies were concerns during his first decades at Tuskegee, but by 1910 Carver only reluctantly endorsed the use of commercial fertilizer. Offering advice to a friend in 1909, Carver noted that "potash, phosphate and nitrogen in some commercial mixture should be used" if organic fertilizer could not be had, but that it would "not answer as well as barnyard manure."[66] As a favorite Carver pupil declared in a 1908 experiment station bulletin, "We believe conclusively, that if the majority of farmers...would put the money paid for commercial fertilizers into buying barnyard manure, growing leguminous...crops, [and] hauling forest leaves,

straw, etc. in quantities to their barns for livestock bedding, there would be a much larger crop and the land would be more benefited."[67] While he never denied the obvious truth that chemical fertilizers could be applied beneficially, he increasingly deferred to the recommendations made by the Auburn station on the matter, preferring, for his part, to enjoin farmers to "appreciate the immense amount of plantfood in many things that are now allowed to go to waste."[68]

Collecting enough leaves, muck, and other organic debris to effectively fertilize a farm, of course, required an enormous expenditure of labor. Consequently, Carver sought to persuade farmers to alter some of their seasonal habits. In November, he encouraged them to "let every spare moment be put in the woods raking up leaves or in the swamps piling up muck."[69] In December, he complained, "Most farmers have gathered their crops, and are doing what they call 'piddling' around, waiting for spring to come so they can begin farming. This is a great mistake." Farming was a year-round profession, not a succession of periods of idleness and labor. Thus, the relatively slow winter months were the "time to haul and spread upon the land and plow under large quantities of leaves and straw of all kinds that will rot quickly, or compost the same for applying later."[70] "Begin now," he added in February, shortly before cotton season began, "by hauling out leaves, rich earth from the woods, and muck from the rich swamps."[71] And after the cotton had been laid by in July, he insisted, farmers ought to devote "every spare moment [to] raking it up, hauling it out, permanently enriching their soil, greatly increasing their crops of all kinds, and reducing their bill for commercial fertilizers to the minimum."[72]

While Carver's commitment to organic fertilizers grew out of his concern for impoverished Black farmers, his endorsement of them (and only hesitant recommendation of the supplemental application of commercial ones) reflected a larger shift in his agricultural vision. In a letter to Booker T. Washington penned in January 1911, he noted that there were "hundreds of tons of the finest kind of manure, which consists of decayed leaves, dead animals, decayed night soils, animal manures that have washed from the hillsides, etc., etc." available on Tuskegee's campus. "It is a source of the keenest regret," he wrote, that the school was neglecting them and applying large quantities of commercial fertilizer on its farms instead. "We should look to the permanent building up of our soils," he continued. "We know that commercial fertilizers will stimulate and for a while produce good results...but by and by a collapse will come, as the soil will be reduced to practically clay and sand." "[The] crying need of nearly every foot of land we have in cultivation is vegetable matter (humus)," he added, "and every possible means at our command should be exercised to supply this end."[73]

A year later, the institute's council reported that Carver had suggested "that the expenses for the school could be reduced greatly by diminishing the amount of commercial fertilizer used." Carver had referred them to "his recent report that he raised two bales of cotton on [one-and-a-half] acres of land...using a compost of leaves, muck and barnyard manure." (He had not recommended "that no commercial fertilizer at all be used," but only that the school stop relying on it so heavily.) The report is most notable, however, for Carver's request "that his name be not used in the matter."[74] The use of chemical fertilizers had become an integral part of conventional agricultural science by 1910; they were endorsed by

the agricultural colleges, state departments of agriculture, the USDA, and virtually every other agricultural authority in the nation. The significance of his request, then, lies in Carver's self-conscious rejection of a central tenet of mainstream agronomy. It needs be understood in light of the fact that suggesting agriculture be practiced with a decidedly limited application of chemical fertilizers entailed risking his reputation as a practical scientist in the eyes of his critics at the school.

Few of his peers, White or Black, were willing to join Carver in rejecting technological fixes for any reason. In *Twenty Five Years in the Black Belt* (1924), for instance, William J. Edwards, the founder of the all-Black Snow Hill Institute, pointed out that, whatever southern politicians might argue during their campaigns, the greatest threat to the region was not "Negro domination" but soil erosion. Hinting that racism lay at the root of the problem, Edwards insisted that "a radical change must be made in our mode of farming" and appealed to "merchants and bankers...[to] lend their aid and influence" to undermine the plantation system that kept African American farmers impoverished and discouraged the typical tenant from "prevent[ing] his farm from washing away." But his solution to the problem was markedly different from Carver's. For Edwards, the salvation of Black farmers lay not in amending scientific agriculture to make it practicable for them, but rather in embracing it as it was taught at the land-grant schools. Indeed, he insisted, African American farmers "must be taught...the modern methods of improved farming. [They] must have agricultural schools and must be encouraged to attend them."[75]

Today, Carver's suggestions might receive a slightly more enthusiastic response. His endorsement of what by the 1970s would be called "appropriate technology," his emphasis on the interdependence of the natural world within agro-ecosystems, and his partiality for organic fertilizers mark him as a forerunner of what has become known as "ecological agriculture." But he did not arrive at Tuskegee with a coherent agricultural vision of that sort. His green agricultural vision—the one that makes him a prophet of sustainable development for poor agricultural communities throughout the world—emerged in large measure as a result of his interaction with the impoverished Black communities he encountered throughout the South, but most particularly those of Macon County where he spent most of his time.

Had the Black tenants of the Cotton Belt been able to afford the newest and best farm implements and commercial fertilizers, had they had more control over the types and extents of the crops they planted, Carver might never have developed such a unique agricultural vision. It is likely that under such circumstances, his intent would have been to teach them about chemical inputs, up-to-date machinery, crop rotation, seed selection, and dust mulches. To a large degree, it was the poverty and vulnerability of Black tenants that pushed him to encourage them "to be students of Nature."[76] For as they learned to appreciate the interdependence of the natural world, they could decipher on their own the best techniques to conserve the soil and which tools best served their particular interests.

Carver, then, rightly merits the renewed attention of scholars, who have essentially ignored him since debunking his reputation as a "creative chemist" a quarter century ago. He forged a distinctive strand of agricultural science that has for too long been neglected. As environmental historians increasingly turn

their attention to the South, they may discover that if Carver didn't influence the environmental movement in the ways that John Muir or Gifford Pinchot or any number of others did, he anticipated more clearly some of the directions in which it would move, and his vision is no less relevant than those of his more famous contemporaries. But they will also discover it was a vision shaped to a considerable extent by the Sisyphean experience of ordinary Black farmers, their crops mortgaged, hoping to carve a living from a denuded landscape white with bolls of cotton.

NOTES

[1] Perhaps surprisingly, scholars have found Carver to be of little interest. To date there has been only one academic biography written about him, and in a (generally positive) review of it, a Pulitzer Prize–winning historian concluded that Carver was "no longer part of our useable past." To that biography can be added a small handful of articles and an expertly edited collection of Carver's writings. Indeed, an article on Carver's campaign to improve the lives of impoverished Black farmers by this author was the first scholarly work focused principally on Carver published in almost two decades.

It is worth noting, however, that in recent years a number of writers (though not professional historians) have sought to portray Carver as a forerunner of the modern environmental movement. Their works, of course, have varied in quality, and have tended to draw heavily from sources dating to Carver's later years and have generally interpreted those sources as if they could be applied back over his entire career. Carver's environmental vision, however, was not so static, and indeed, it was not always as farsighted as these works sometimes imply.

See Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); David Donald, "An Ambitious Figure," *The New Republic* (October 28, 1981): 36; Gary Kremer, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); Mark D. Hersey, "Hints and Suggestions to Farmers: George Washington Carver and Rural Conservation in the South," *Environmental History* (April 2006): 239–268. For examples of Carver's more recent defenders, see John S. Ferrell, *Fruits of Creation: A Look at Global Sustainability through the Eyes of George Washington Carver* (Wynnewood, PA: Christian Society of the Green Cross, 1995) and Peter Duncan Burchard, *George Washington Carver: For His Time and Ours: Special History Study—Natural History Related to George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri* (National Park Service, 2005).

Note: For most of Carver's time at Tuskegee, the school was officially the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Since it is best known as Tuskegee Institute, I've shortened its title throughout.

[2] See Booker T. Washington, "The Rural Negro Community," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (March 1912): 85. The most full descriptions of the county and its communities can be found in Charles S. Johnson, Shadow of the Plantation (1934; repr., New Brunswick, CT: Transaction Publishers, 1996), a book-length sociological study of the county's communities.

[3] See Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 21. The 1901 constitution provided for a poll tax, literacy tests, and proof of either employment or $300 worth of taxable property. It also left a good bit of wiggle room for election officials to determine whether a would-be voter qualified. Booker T. Washington actually challenged the constitutionality of the new law. Ironically, a federal judge Teddy Roosevelt had appointed at Washington's recommendation rejected the challenge. It was appealed to the Supreme Court, which upheld the ruling.

[4] Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (Washington DC: American Council on Education, 1941), 277–78. When theaters opened in the 1920s, Blacks were allowed to go, which wasn't the case in every Alabama county.

[5] Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, 17.

[6] Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation*, 25.

[7] Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation*, 27.

[8] For an example of the application of the moniker "hillside darkeys" to Macon County, see "Gave Up Art Career for His Race," *Technical World Magazine* (May 1912), George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives. For Bridgeforth's comments, see George R. Bridgeforth, "Report of the Jesup Wagon, June 25–July 2/1906"; George R. Bridgeforth, "Report of the Jesup Wagon, July 2–9/1906"; and George R. Bridgeforth, "Report of the Jesup Wagon, July 30–Aug 6."

[9] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 128.

[10] George Wylie Henderson, *Ollie Miss* (1935; repr., Chatham, NJ: The Chatham Bookseller, 1973), 109.

[11] GWC, "A Gleam Upon the Distant Horizon," unpublished typescript (1941), Box 65, GWCP, Tuskegee University Archives (TUA).

[12] GWC to Mrs. L. H. Pammel, March 30, 1897, Box 14, Louis Hermann Pammel Papers, Iowa State University Archives, Ames, Iowa.

[13] "Agricultural Experiment Station Notes" (1897), B67 F2, GWCP, TUA.

[14] See Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 16.

[15] Yearly rainfall totals regularly surpassed fifty inches, and some years even exceeded seventy inches. In 1912, for instance, 74.81 inches of rain fell in Macon County. See GWC, "A Study of the Soils of Macon County, Alabama and their Adaptability to Certain Crops," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 25 (October 1913): 6. Carver later reported that this soil erosion cost the South an estimated $400M yearly. See GWC, "What Chemurgy Means to My People," *Farm Chemurgic Journal* (September 1937): 40.

[16] GWC, "The Need of Scientific Agriculture in the South," *Farmer's Leaflet From the Bureau of Nature Study for Schools and Hints and Suggestions for Farmers* 7 (April 1902).

[17] See Alfred Charles True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States, 1785–1923* (New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1969), 64.

[18] GWC, "Being Kind to the Soil," *The Negro Farmer* (January 31, 1914).

[19] See Edward L. Ayers, *Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 418–19.

[20] Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation*, 127–28.

[21] For Carver's support of literacy campaigns, see GWC, "A New and Prolific Variety of Cotton," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 26 (1915): 3.

[22] GWC, "Experiments with Sweet Potatoes," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 2 (May 1898): 3–5.

[23] See Seaman A. Knapp, "How to Make Farming Profitable," *The Southern Workman*, (n.d.), Extension Files, TUA.

[24] See GWC, "Cotton Growing on Sandy Soil," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 7 (September 1905): 11; GWC, "How to Build Up Worn Out Soils," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 6 (April 1905); and "Script for George Washington Carver Broadcast: U.S. Office of Education" (October 19, 1941), Box 66, GWCP, TUA.

[25] For a discussion of the funding of the Tuskegee experiment station, see Linda Ott Hines, "George W. Carver and the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station," *Agricultural History* 52 (January 1979): 71–83; McMurry, *George Washington Carver*, 73–77.

[26] GWC, "How to Build Up Worn Out Soils," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 6 (April 1905): 4.

[27] Clinton J. Calloway, "Barnyard Manure," *Farmers' Leaflet No. 15* (1902).

[28] When Henry A. Wallace, whom Carver had babysat in Ames, came to Tuskegee in 1936 as the U.S. secretary of agriculture, he celebrated the fact that the "use of machinery in farming [was] increasing every day. In the long run," he told the audience, "machines give us more goods and relieve us of drudgery." Indeed, he believed, as historian Charles S. Aiken has pointed out, "that mechanization was necessary to a viable future for the nation's agriculture and was part of a logical economic process," even if he wasn't entirely comfortable with some of its by-products, most notably the displacement of many farmers. By the time of Wallace's speech, however, Carver's campaign had long since come to a close. Suffice it to say, then, that in contrast to most scientific agriculturists of his day (and ours, for that matter), Carver did not believe that the solution to the problems facing impoverished farmers lay in the adoption of "more horse power and better implements." Henry A. Wallace, "Common Aims in Agriculture," *The Tuskegee Messenger* (October, November, December, 1936). The speech was given at Tuskegee on September 10, 1936; Charles S. Aiken, *The Cotton Plantation South Since the Civil War* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1998), 127.

[29] See GWC, "Three Delicious Meals Everyday for the Farmer," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 32 (1916): 5.

[30] GWC, "The Need of Scientific Agriculture in the South."

[31] GWC, "Cow Peas," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 5 (November 1903): 3.

[32] GWC, "Address by Dr. G. W. Carver at Voorhees Normal and Industrial School, Denmark, South Carolina" (February 19, 1919), 2, Box 65, GWCP, TUA.

[33] GWC, "Three Delicious Meals Every Day for the Farmer," *The Negro Farmer and Messenger* (February 10, 1917).

[34] GWC, "Three Delicious Meals Everyday for the Farmer," 3, 5.

[35] GWC, "Three Delicious Meals Everyday for the Farmer," 3–4.

[36] GWC, "The Fat of the Land—How the Colored Farmer Can Live on It Twenty-One Times Each Week," *The Negro Farmer* (July 31, 1915). This is a reprint of GWC, "Three Delicious Meals Everyday for the Farmer." To be sure, Carver's bacon puffs would be considerably healthier

fare for poorly nourished farmers burning countless calories at difficult farm work than for more sedentary twenty-first-century Americans. Nevertheless, few physicians would probably prescribe them today, even for the most active individuals.

[37] GWC, "Some Choice Wild Vegetables That Can Be Gathered Now," n.d., Box 64, GWCP, TUA.

[38] George Washington Carver, "Some Ornamental Plants of Macon County, Ala.," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 16 (October 1909): 5.

[39] GWC, "Saving the Wild Plum Crop," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 12 (June 1907): 3.

[40] GWC and Austin W. Curtis, "Some Choice Wild Vegetables That Make Fine Foods," *Special Leaflet No. 1, Revised*, February 1938. Portions of this were later reproduced in a bulletin issued in March 1942. With the nation at war, Carver seized the opportunity "to render a service much needed at the present time" and so issued a bulletin titled "Nature's Garden for Victory and Peace."

[41] GWC, "What This Section Holds for Science After the War," *The Montgomery Advertiser* (October 27, 1918). He also noted, "Many of our so called farm, garden and dooryard weeds are very hight [sic] in food properties."

[42] GWC to Mr. and Mrs. Milholland, February 28, 1905, GWCNM, Diamond, Missouri. Also in Kremer, *In His Own Words*, 152.

[43] GWC, "Some Choice Wild Vegetables That Can Be Gathered Now."

[44] GWC, "Using So-Called Weeds as Food for Men and Stock," *The Montgomery Advertiser* (October 27, 1918). Carver did, in fact, regularly collect, prepare, and eat such weeds. He encouraged his students to do the same. One recalled, however, that they "tasted terrible and if we didn't say they were good he got mad." Quoted in Peter Duncan Burchard, *George Washington Carver: For His Time and Ours: Special History Study—Natural History Related to George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri* (National Park Service, 2005), 137–38.

[45] GWC, "The Canning and Preserving of Fruits and Vegetables in the Home," Experiment Station Circular (1912), Box 63, GWCP, TUA.

[46] GWC, "How to Dry Vegetables and Fruits of the Tree and Vine," *The Montgomery Advertiser* (May 27, 1918).

[47] "Negro Health Week," *The Southern Workman* (April 1918): 169–170.

[48] For more on this sort of "high-minded husbandry," see Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*.

[49] GWC, "Notes on Various Subjects."

[50] The bill establishing the Alabama's first agricultural experiment station (at Auburn) provided for its funding by requiring all commercial fertilizers sold in the state to carry a guarantee tag and allocating one-third of the revenues from the sale of the tags to the station. See Norwood Allen Kerr, *A History of the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, 1883–1983* (Auburn, AL: Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, 1985), 8–9, 34

[51] Specifically, the company donated acid phosphate, muriate of potash, nitrate of soda, sulfate of potash, and lime. For that matter, another individual donated an additional 224 pounds of potash. GWC to Booker T. Washington, May 20, 1897, Box 4, GWCP, TUA.

[52] GWC, "Fertilizer Experiments on Cotton," 3–4, 13; GWC, "Experiments with Sweet Potatoes," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 2 (May 1898): 3–5.

[53] GWC, "Fertilizer Experiments on Cotton," 13; GWC, "Experiments with Sweet Potatoes," 15.

[54] GWC, "Fertilizer Experiments on Cotton," 8, 15.

[55] GWC, "Experiments with Sweet Potatoes," 13. The same figures are presented in Hersey, "Hints and Suggestions to Farmers," 266, fn 51.

[56] GWC, "The Improvement of Cotton," *Farmers' Leaflet No. 16* (Extension Division, Department of Agriculture), n.d., Box 63, GWCP, TUA. Carver frequently cited the fertilizer recommendations made by Auburn. See, for instance, GWC, "Cotton Growing for Rural Schools," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 20 (June 1911): 10.

[57] Calloway, "Barnyard Manure."

[58] GWC, "The Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute and Experiment Station," *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Convention of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations*, USDA, Department of Experiment Stations *Bulletin* 123 (1902).

[59] See, for example, GWC, "Increasing the Yield of Corn," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 15 (June 1909): 6; GWC, "Possibilities of the Sweet Potato in Macon County, Alabama," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 17 (March 1910): 9; GWC, "How to Grow the Peanut and 105 Ways of Preparing It for Human Consumption," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 31 (March 1916): 2; GWC, "Notice"; GWC, "One of the Most Interesting Farms in Alabama," Report submitted to Tuskegee Institute, July 31, 1915, B65 F2, GWCP, TUA.

[60] See, for example, GWC, "How to Build Up Worn Out Soils," 8–11 and "Question Box for Your Advancement," May 1924, B64 F8, GWCP, TUA in which Carver advocates a 10-3-3-4 mixture of organic fertilizer with phosphate, kainit, and nitrate of soda "in the compost."

[61] GWC, "Nature Study and Gardening for Rural Schools," 17.

[62] GWC, "What Shall We Do for Fertilizers Next Year," Experiment Station Circular, November 1916.

[63] GWC, "One of the Most Interesting Farms in Alabama."

[64] GWC, "What Shall We Do for Fertilizers Next Year"; GWC, "How to Build Up and Maintain the Virgin Fertility of Our Soil," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 42 (October 1936): 10.

[65] "Dr. Carver writes Soil Conservation Report," *The Tuskegee News*, September 17, 1936, in Burchard, *George Washington Carver: For His Time and Ours*, 158; GWC to Frank Camsall [Henry Ford's secretary], November 10, 1942, in Burchard, *George Washington Carver: For His Time and Ours*, 121–22.

[66] GWC to Dr. Milholland, December 13, 1909, GWCNM, Diamond, MO.

[67] Frank H. Cardoza, "Relation of Weather and Soil Conditions to the Fruit Industry of Southeastern Alabama," *Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 11 (January 1908): 6.

[68] GWC, "How to Grow the Peanut," 2; GWC, "Some Fertilizers That Are Now Going to Waste," *The Gospel Plea* (Edwards, MS: Southern Christian Institute Press, December 8, 1917).

[69] GWC, "What Shall We Do for Fertilizers Next Year?"

[70] GWC, "Some Fertilizers that Are Now Going to Waste."

[71] GWC, "Helps for the Hard Times."

[72] GWC, "One of the Most Interesting Farms in Alabama." This was a tall order as tenants had no real incentive to improve land that didn't belong to them, especially as their efforts could result in higher rents and they could be removed from the land at the whim of their landlords. For a more detailed assessment of the campaign's failure see Hersey, "Hints and Suggestions to Farmers" and Mark D. Hersey, "'My Work Is That of Conservation': The Environmental Vision of George Washington Carver," (PhD Dissertation, University of Kansas, 2006), 425–462.

[73] GWC to BTW, January 26, 1911, Box 8, GWCP, TUA.

[74] Council Report in the BTW Papers at the Library of Congress—Department of Research, Experiment Station, 1912.

[75] William J. Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970, orig. printed by the Cornhill Company, Boston, 1918), 86–93.

[76] GWC, "The Need for Scientific Agriculture."

The Holy Land Is All the Earth

Sometimes I hardly know what to say
In this High Tech Dark Age:
"...and one day a Sun will rise with healing in its wings"
And loving dew will sparkle on our bare flesh,
Innocent, naked...
Do you know the way from here to there dear friend?
Through the storm?
Are the rocks still screaming?
When I am silent, really quiet,
I hear voices...
The Holy Land is All the Earth
And all the Earth is holy
This Earth is our only home... Creation,
Yes, all the Earth is holy:
The water—holy,
The air—holy,
The creatures that crawl and the creatures that swim—holy,
The 2-legged and the winged—holy,
Vegetation and mineral nations—all holy.
None is stranger to me.
All is family to me.
Let us all touch with kind hands
Blessing all that lives.
All that laments.
RISE! Be robust and brave in the face of dawn.
YOU are the face of Dawn,
Face it!
Integrity of Water, Light and Love can sustain us now.
Touch with kind hands and voices now.
This is the Fire Next Time,
Now! At last, real power!
And the world begins on this breath.
Breathe...
Now is the time, now is the time,
Embracing in the silence of our after-weeping,
Resting on the breast
Of our Mother's Sacred Heart
Beating, beating, beating...

Louis Alemayehu, 2007

The Deep Roots of Our Land-Based Heritage: Cultural, Social, Political, and Environmental Implications

Owusu Bandele, PhD
Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center

Unquestionably, land and its utilization for agricultural purposes has had a significant effect on all of humanity. The development of civilization itself would not have occurred without the contribution of agriculture and technological improvements that made possible the leap from food gathering to food production. The relationship between land and people of African descent has been, and continues to be, profound. It is no coincidence that the development of civilization first began in Africa, since the early history of agriculture begins there. Like much of the history of African people, many of their agricultural contributions are not commonly known. This paper will provide an overview of agricultural contributions made by people of color and will also consider the cultural, social, political, and environmental ramifications of their past and present contributions to agriculture and landownership.

Cultural Implications

Agriculture is deeply ingrained in the culture of Africa's sons and daughters on the continent as well as in the diaspora. It is reflected in all forms of cultural expression. For example, the following two poems clearly point out the connections between agriculture and culture. Renowned poetess Margaret Walker tells us that:

Our grandmothers were strong;

They moved through fields sowing seeds;

They touched earth and grains grew;

They were full of sturdiness and singing

Renowned poet, publisher, and author Haki Madhubuti says that:

We were a forest people;

Land rooted, vegetable strong;

Feet fastened to soil with earth strengthened toes;

Determined fruit, anchored

Where music soared; where dancers danced

Where griots gave memory

Where smiles were not bought

The culture of agriculture and land is also prevalent in our music. Many songs written and/or performed by Africans and African Americans make direct or indirect reference to land and agriculture. These include:

- "Strange Fruit," performed by Billie Holiday
- "Forty Acres and a Mule," written and performed by Oscar Brown Jr.
- "The Bollweevil Song," written and performed by Brook Benton
- "Forest Flower," by jazz saxophonist Charles Lloyd
- "Cotton Eyed Joe," performed by Nina Simone
- "Search for the New Land," performed by jazz trumpeter Lee Morgan
- "Marketplace" and "Grazing in the Grass," by South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela
- "My Life Is a Tree," by clarinetist Alvin Batiste; lyrics by Edith Batiste

Many of the celebrations in Africa were based on the harvest period, a concept that is also present in the African American celebration of Kwanzaa. The word Kwanzaa itself refers to the first fruits of harvest. The influences of agriculture and land are also found in proverbs. This can be noted in the following proverbs of African origin:

- "Treat a guest as a guest for two days. On the third day, give him a hoe."
- "Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested."
- "Words are sweet, but they never take the place of food."
- "We will water the thorn for the sake of the rose."

Political Implications: Organizations and Land

Several major African American political movements in the United States had land and/or agriculture as major programmatic components. Paul Cuffee (1759–1817), who acquired wealth through the shipping industry, was an early proponent of a "back-to-Africa" movement. His ship carried thirty-eight African Americans to Sierra Leone in 1815 (Franklin and Moss 1994). Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which attracted millions of followers, making it one of the largest-ever organizations of African Americans (Garvey 1978). UNIA was based on racial pride, self-reliance and a land-based back-to-Africa movement. The Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975) advocated a separate land base for African Americans, either within the United States or elsewhere (Nation of Islam Web site). Their Web site reports that they established a 4,500 acre farm in Georgia that now consists of 1556 acres (Nation of Islam Web site). The Republic of New Afrika [sic], founded in 1968 by Dr. Imari Obadele, demanded the secession of five southern states: Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Georgia (Kimble 2004). They also demanded $400 billion as compensation for slavery, thus becoming one of the earliest twentieth-century organizations to advocate reparations.

Agricultural Contributions

It is no small wonder that agriculture and land are so intertwined with cultural expressions in light of the contributions of people of African descent to the development of agriculture. Africans were the first to cultivate both crops and livestock (Wendorf et al. 2001; Webster 2001). There is evidence that Africans had domesticated barley and lentils more than 18,000 years ago. Africa is also the origin of several other grains including an African rice *(Oryza glaberrima)*, finger millet *(Eleusine coracana)*, pearl millet *(Pennisetum glaucum)*, and sorghum *(Sorghum bicolor)*, as well as some lesser-known grains such as Tef *(Eragrostis tef)* and Fonio or Acha *(Digitaria iburua* and *Digitaria exilis)* (National Research Council 1996). Sesame is also indigenous to Africa (Wilson 1964). Several cultivated vegetable crops, including watermelon, okra, and cowpeas, are believed to have originated in Africa (Yamaguchi 1983).

African crops found their way to the Americas in several ways. In some instances, crops such as okra, rice, black-eyed peas (a type of cowpea), and tania (cocoyams) were brought on slave ships as a source of food for enslaved Africans (Holloway, Slavery in America Web site). With okra, there is also a widely held belief that enslaved Africans carried okra seeds in their braided hair as a future source of food. There is also significant evidence to suggest that there was an African presence in the Americas prior to Columbus or the slave trade, which opens possibilities of additional paths of crop introduction by Africans (Van Sertima 1976).

The contribution of Africans to agriculture continued with their arrival to the Americas. Several of the crops that were introduced—cowpeas, sesame, okra, and peanuts—had a powerful effect on the diet of African Americans as well as white Americans, especially Southerners (Wilson 1964). It should be noted that although peanuts are of New World origin, they were introduced to Africa by Europeans. They were widely cultivated in Africa and undoubtedly enslaved Africans popularized the peanut in North America by using them in soups and other recipes (Congo Cook Book Web site).

Africans have been credited with a host of other agricultural contributions. For instance, the ancient Egyptians are credited with developing the world's first irrigation system (Leju 2002). Evidence also supports the domestication of cattle by 15000 BC in the highlands of Kenya (Webster 2001). Africans were among the earliest people to discover and utilize plants for medicinal purposes, and the Ebers Papyrus—discovered in 1884 and dating back to about 1550 BC—is considered to be the oldest preserved medical document. It lists hundreds of medicinal drugs including anise, caraway garlic, thyme, and other herbs and spices (Rosengarten 1969). Imhotep, who lived around 2989 BC and was the designer of the step pyramid, was also the court physician under Pharoah Zoser (Newsome 2001). In fact, Imhotep is often considered to be the true father of medicine. Also in Africa, Bantu-speaking people used extracts from the plant *Silex capensis* for relief of pain (Finch 2001; Van Sertima 2001). These plants produce salicylic acid, which is the active ingredient in today's aspirin. Nigerians have used extracts from the rauwolfia plant for treatment of mental disorders. Rauwolfia yields the compound reserpine, which has modern uses as a tranquilizer. In ancient Mali, the clay

mineral kaolin was used to treat diarrhea (Finch 2001; Van Sertima 2001). Kaolin was the originally the main ingredient in Kaopectate.

Modern-day African farmers, like many of their counterparts throughout the world, often utilize complex systems of agriculture that enhance environmental quality. Many of the small holdings have diverse intercropping and multicropping systems that, when viewed in their totality, demonstrate more efficient use of land than monocultural systems that grow one crop. Although these small plantings are not suited for mechanized planting and harvesting, their diversified planting patterns and rotational systems reduce buildup of both diseases and insects, and thus include some aspects that are more sustainable than typical monocultural farming operations (Altieri and Liebman 1986). Historically, African farmers sometimes had complex cropping systems that included soil-building crops such as legumes (Coulter 1998). This technique of crop rotation and use of legumes is still advocated today for building soils, particularly with the increased interest in organic production.

The early agricultural contributions of African Americans have had profound economic ramifications. Indeed the wealth of corporate America was built upon the backs of enslaved Africans and African Americans, and the profits that their labor created. Wachovia Bank, Lehman Brothers, J. P. Morgan Chase, the parent company of Bank One, are among corporate giants who admit that these companies or their predecessors profited mightily from slave trading (Piette 2005).

It would be a great injustice to history to consider the labor of enslaved people as the only contribution that African Americans made to agricultural development and technology. Their descendants became distinguished scientists and inventors while overcoming obstacles that at the time seemed insurmountable. Table 1 lists some of the inventions made by African Americans that involved the production and/or processing of agricultural commodities, including those involved in lawn care, which is technically an agricultural discipline.

Table 1. African American Inventions with Agricultural Significance*

Inventor	Year of Patent	Invention
Henry Blair	1830s	corn planter and harvester
Norbert Rillieux	1846	sugar refiner
Alexander P. Ashbourne	1880	coconut oil refiner
Joseph Lee	1890s	kneading and bread-crumbing machines
George W. Murray	1890s	planters, cultivators, fertilizer distributors
Peter Smith	1891	potato digger
John T. White	1896	lemon squeezer
Joseph Smith	1897	lawn sprinkler
William H. Richardson	1899	cotton chopper
John A. Burr	1899	lawnmower
Leonard Julien	1966	sugarcane planter

*Compiled from the About: Inventors Web site except for Leonard Julien (Sluby 2004).

Several of the inventions helped to reduce the drudgery of field work, but it should be noted that many of the inventions of enslaved Africans and African Americans and their descendents did not earn them the recognition, credit, and economic benefits they deserved. For example, Leonard Julien's invention of the sugarcane planting machine has been called the first major innovation in the planting of sugarcane since the inception of the sugarcane industry (Sluby 2004). The machine revolutionized the planting of sugarcane and reduced the amount of backbreaking work required in planting by hand. However, Julien lacked the financial resources to take full advantage of his creativity. Others made slight modifications to his planter and were thereby able to reap the financial benefits of this invention (Personal interview, Kathe Hambrick Jackson, Founder, River Road African American Museum and Leonard Julien Jr.). According to his son, Leonard Julien Jr., racism was also involved, in that some farmers refused to purchase the machine from an African American. There is no telling how many inventions of Africans and African Americans, both enslaved and free, were made without patent or profit.

No discussion of agricultural contributions by African Americans would be complete without considering the contributions of a host of institutions and organizations committed to assisting farmers and landowners. These include the 1890 land-grant universities and Tuskegee University, early African American farmer organizations, and other community-based organizations.

The 1890 Land-Grant Universities and Tuskegee University

The 1890 land-grant universities and Tuskegee University have a rich history of contributing to the sustainability of African American farmers and other limited-resource small farmers and rural residents. Despite their gross under-funding as compared with the predominantly white 1862 land-grant universities, these universities have been at the forefront of initiatives to improve the quality of life of rural citizens. Their contribution was especially critical since the 1862 land-grant universities did not have a history of providing assistance to African American farmers. Indeed, the 1890 land-grant universities were established because of the segregated nature of the 1862 land-grant universities. In addition to providing technical assistance to farmers, the 1890 land-grant universities also provided critical training for the agricultural professionals who worked with the farmers.

The early history of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) provides rich and creative examples of technology transfer to farmers and rural residents by historically African American universities. The Jessup Wagon, designed by George Washington Carver and his students, was created in 1906 to take technology to the farmers (Tuskegee University Web site). Originally drawn by horse, it was later motorized and by the 1930s transported an agricultural agent, home demonstration agent, nurse, and architect (National Park Service Web site). In 1906, Thomas Campbell of Tuskegee University, who traveled with the Jessup Wagon, became the first extension agent employed by Cooperative Extension. His outreach efforts became a model for the USDA Extension Service (National Agricultural Library Web site).

Women played a significant role in early extension initiatives as part of the Negro Cooperative Extension Service. More than 100 such women served in the South in 1923. In 1920, these women reported that their clients completed 17,311 demonstrations involving home beautification with lawn and flower gardens. They also documented that African American women cultivated 20,494 vegetable gardens that year (Glave 2006)

The legacies of Dr. George Washington Carver (c. 1864–1943) and Dr. Booker T. Whatley (1915–2005) have both had lasting effects on agriculture in the South. Carver is noted for documenting hundreds of uses of peanuts, sweet potatoes, and soybeans (National Agricultural Library Web site). He produced more than 300 products from peanuts, including milk, cheese, coffee, plastics, soap, flour, cooking oil, and medicinal massaging oil. His sweet potato–based products included starch, livestock feed, dyes, vinegar, ink, and synthetic rubber, while soybean products included flours, coffee, cheeses, bisque for ice cream, and soup mixtures. Carver also saw these crops as alternatives to the continuous production of cotton and the depletion of soil health that resulted from this monocultural system. He advocated the use of cover crops and compost, both of which are major practices in organic production today. He also recognized the importance of organic matter in building healthy soils. Carver was also a proponent of soil- and water-quality testing, something that most agricultural county agents stress today. He was also an early advocate of the use of plants as sources of biofuels and had several conversations with Henry Ford regarding the potential use of soybeans as a biofuel.

Dr. Booker T. Whatley, affectionately called "the small farm guru" also advocated diversification of cropping by small-scale farmers. He encouraged them to abandon cotton and soybean production in favor of horticultural crops. Although his main consideration was economic sustainability, his ideas were also ecologically sustainable. Whatley recommended crop rotations and diversification of farming enterprises. These practices helped to build healthy soils while reducing insect and disease pressure. Whatley advocated planting greens, strawberries, blueberries, muscadine grapes, sweet potatoes, and southern peas among other crops (Whatley 1987). He also proposed raising honeybees and quail. His model called for a twenty-five-acre plan for growing the recommended crops. He advocated a "U Pick" system, and a "clientele fee" for the privilege of picking your own fresh produce. Shortly after his death, this quote appeared in an Alabama Farming Federation publication:

> *Almost 20 years ago, Whatley was writing about U-pick operations, community supported agriculture (CSA), drip irrigation, rabbit production, farmer-owned hunting preserves, kiwi vines, shiitake mushrooms, veneer-grade hardwood stands, on-the-farm bed and breakfasts, direct marketing, organic gardening and goat cheese production. What's even more astounding is that he was advocating many of these ideas in the 1960s and '70s. (Helms 2005)*

Although many of the land-grant scientists criticized his plan, farmers throughout the South, including many white small-scale farmers, adopted parts of it. Following Dr. Whatley's death, George DeVault, former editor of the New Farm Magazine, was quoted in a Montgomery newspaper as follows:

He was way ahead of his time. He worked with practical ideas that caught the attention of the nation at a critical time in our farming history. He was one of the heroes of 20th-century agriculture. (Montgomery Advertiser 2005)

Thus, both Carver and Whatley, two agricultural visionaries, each made lasting contributions to the sustainability of small-scale family farms.

In recent years, the 1890 land-grant universities and Tuskegee University have intensified collaborative efforts to pool their resources in ways to better serve the southern region. Community-based organizations and other rural stakeholders have been included in this collaboration. Dean Walter Hill of Tuskegee University has been the life force behind much of this collaboration, and his efforts exemplify the long tradition of service and commitment of the 1890 land-grant universities and Tuskegee University. Dr. Hill's vision sparked the creation of the Southern Food Systems Education Consortium (SOFSEC) in 1994, which was initially funded by the Kellogg Foundation. SOFSEC includes nine 1890 land-grant universities along with community-based organizations such as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. SOFSEC was created to address the issue of poverty in the Black Belt and to assist farmers, students, and rural residents through the implementation of regional projects (Food Systems Professional Education Web site). SOFSEC members recently completed a small-farmer marketing project funded by USDA/ Innovative Future Agricultural and Food Systems (IFAFS).

African American Farmer Organizations

In addition to the efforts of land-grant universities regarding the sustainability of African American farm operations, farmers often took the initiative through individual or cooperative action to improve their own lot. After the Civil War ended, freedmen from Sea Island, South Carolina, petitioned President Andrew Johnson for the forty acres of land that was promised and then rescinded (Hoffman 1956). Former slaves also made collaborative land purchases. In 1886, a Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union was formed in Houston County, Texas, and eventually merged with a rival group known as the National Colored Alliance (Holmes, Texas State Historical Society Web site). In 1889, a Colored Farmers' Alliance was formed in Georgia, spearheaded by Reverend J. A. Carter. During that year, 240 chapters were organized in Georgia. Membership has been estimated at 90,000 in Georgia in 1891 and 1.2 million nationally (Gilbert and Eli 2000).

The alliance was involved with several activities including establishment of purchasing cooperatives and schools and assistance with mortgage payments. In 1891, it called for a strike of cotton pickers throughout the South to demand higher wages (Holmes, Texas State Historical Society Web site). Fifteen strikers in Arkansas were killed. Problems with communication made it difficult to coordinate the strike, and in many areas the strike failed to materialize. The Colored Farmers' Alliance declined rapidly in the years that followed.

During the 1930s, the formation of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the Sharecroppers' Union came about to address injustices perpetrated by oppressive landowners (Gilbert and Eli 2000). The former was an integrated

organization made up of sharecroppers and tenant farmers, while the latter was an African American organization. Both organizations received assistance from the Communist Party, and, like the Colored Farmers' Alliance, they were met with economic and violent resistance from landowners and their henchmen as well as police. However, these courageous attempts on the part of African American farmers to organize to improve their conditions form an important part of their legacy of collective and cooperative action.

Community-Based Advocacy Organizations

Several other community-based organizations developed over time that addressed the plight of African American farmers and landowners. These included the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC), founded in 1967, and the Emergency Land Fund (ELF), founded in 1972 by political activist Robert Browne (Biondi 2005). The loss of Black-owned land has been a serious issue for decades. The loss of this resource has had serious ramifications on economics and the quality of life of communities and individuals. ELF was a pioneering organization that addressed the issues of Black land loss. The importance of ELF's mission was captured in a book by Robert Browne entitled *Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black Owned Land in the Rural South* (Browne 1973). ELF attributed the loss of Black-owned land to a combination of factors including tax sales, partition sales, adverse possession, discrimination by USDA, and intimidation by white hate groups. ELF provided farmers and landowners with technical and legal assistance and had offices in Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and South Carolina. Headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, with Joe Brooks as president, ELF included a team of dedicated attorneys who worked within the states to assist the farmers and landowners. They included Rose and Hank Sanders from Selma, Alabama, the late Michael Figures from Mobile, Alabama, and the late attorney Alvarez Ferrouillet Jr. from New Orleans, Louisiana. There were numerous cases throughout the South in which ELF prevented or reversed loss of farms and rural land due to tax sales, fraud, and other reasons. ELF also sparked the creation of the National Association of Landowners, a sister organization made up of farmers and other landowners to address local land-loss issues.

In 1985, because of drastic cutbacks in funding to ELF, FSC merged with ELF to create the FSC / Land Assistance Fund (LAF). Currently, there are more than seventy cooperative member groups in FSC/LAF that include over 20,000 families. The mission of FSC/LAF is threefold:

- To develop cooperatives and credit unions for farmers and other rural residents
- To address Black land-loss issues
- To develop and advocate for public policies that will benefit constituents (Federation of Southern Cooperatives Web site)

Program areas include agricultural and economic training, rural housing, and environmental justice issues. FSC/LAF has been active in addressing policy issues affecting small-scale and minority farmers on local, state, and national levels. Ralph Paige serves as Executive Director, while John Zippert is the Director of Program Operations. Edward "Jerry" Pennick, former Executive Director of the

Emergency Land Fund, now heads the Land Assistance Fund component.

Civil Rights and the Black Farmers' Lawsuit

The participation of African American farmers in struggles for justice should not be considered as separate from the civil rights movements of the 1960s and beyond, but should be viewed as a part of that struggle. For example, during the 1960s the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and other civil rights organizations worked in rural communities to organize farmers and other rural residents in voter registration drives and other civil rights initiatives. Civil rights workers often were housed and/or fed in homes of African American farmers. The little-known history of the Deacons for Defense and Justice, founded in 1964, is an inspirational story of how rural residents of Jonesboro, Louisiana, launched an armed self-defense organization to protect CORE civil rights workers, students, and others in the fight for social justice (Hill 2004). Undoubtedly, the organization included members whose families had roots in agriculture. A second Deacons for Defense chapter was established in Bogulusa, Louisiana, and the organization eventually spread to more than twenty other communities. The existence of the Deacons for Defense unquestionably reduced the number of civil rights workers, local demonstrators, and others who were killed or attacked by white hate groups. The Deacons for Defense belied many myths involving rural African American southern men who were often portrayed as docile, non-participatory, and lacking leadership in the civil rights struggle.

The current class-action lawsuit (Pigford vs. Glickman and later Pigford vs. Johanns) further exemplifies the collective commitment and strength of African American farmers. It took demonstrations and collective actions of these farmers to prod the U.S. Congress to repeal a two-year statute of limitations between complaint and filing action that precluded many farmers from filing legitimate claims against the United States Department of Agriculture. The complaints were filed against USDA Farmers Home Administration (now Farm Services Agency) for systematically discriminating against African Americans seeking agricultural loans from the very agency supposedly set up to assist limited-resource farmers. The great majority of complainants filed under Track A, which allowed for cash awards of $50,000 along with forgiveness of debt incurred resulting from the discriminatory action reported. As of April 2, 2007, 14,862 farmers whose applications were accepted for review (67 percent) received favorable Track A rulings while 7,407 (33%) were denied (Office of the Monitor Web site). Of course, many farmers had lost much more than the $50,000 provided by the settlement. Moreover, according to Congressman Artur Davis of Alabama, more than 90,000 claims were filed, but most were not accepted because they were not filed before the deadline (Davis 2006). Therefore, the overwhelming majority of farmers and their families who applied for the settlement got no relief. Legislation was introduced in 2005 to reconsider the status of the late applications. The 2008 Farm Bill set aside $100 million for some farmers who had petitioned to file late and had not had their cases heard. These late claimants had to have submitted a petition after the September 15, 1999, deadline but before October 12, 2000. Many African American farmers and farmer advocates believe that the settlement did not go far enough, did not adequately compensate farmers, and left too many cases

unresolved. However, Pigford vs. Glickman remains a testament of the spirit of resistance, will and collective action of African American farmers.

Land-Loss Trends

There have been heroic efforts on the part of the 1890 land-grant institutions as well as other organizations and individuals involved in saving Black-owned land and making African American family farms sustainable. In spite of these efforts, there has been a drastic decline in both the acreage owned and the number of farms operated by African Americans. There were, however, slight increases in numbers of African American farmers as well as increases in the numbers of women farmers between 1997 and 2002 according to census data (Table 2). Some critics have attributed the slight increase in African American farmers between 1997 and 2002 to changes in data collection rather than an actual increase in number. Regardless, the overall decrease in farms owned or operated by African Americans represents an alarming trend with serious repercussions for rural families and communities.

Table 2. Number of African American Farmers and Women Farmers: Principal Operators

Year	Total Farmers	African American Farmers	Women Farmers
1978	2,478,642	57,271	128,170
1997	2,215,896	26,785	209,784
2002	2,129,226	29,145	237,819

Source: Census of Agriculture Data

African American Farmers and Organic Production: A Regional Approach

Those small-scale African American farmers who explore and utilize new production and marketing alternatives will be in a better position to survive and prosper. Recent consumer demand for local and organic produce along with the growth of farmers' markets are trends that are worthy of consideration as farmers seek alternatives to more conventional production of agronomic crops. Organic production is one of the fastest-growing agricultural segments and organic foods have experienced a growth rate of nearly 20 percent since 1997. In the United States, sales of organic products in 2005 reached $14.6 billion, with organic foods accounting for $13.8 billion (Organic Trade Association 2006). Presently, though, the number of African American certified organic producers in many areas of the South continues to be quite small. Several states had no certified African American organic growers as of 2006. This is an ironic phenomenon in that many of the agricultural practices grounded in African production systems and continued by African American farmers are today essential components in organic production. It is also ironic that George Washington Carver advocated some of these same sustainable practices (e.g., crop rotation, diversification of crops, composting and use of manures). On the other hand, limited-resource African American farmers have not completely ignored some of the sustainable practices that are normally

used in organic production. Moreover, many African American farmers cannot afford many of the synthetic chemicals so prevalent in conventional agriculture and do, in fact, incorporate sustainable agriculture practices in their operations.

The reasons for the underrepresentation of African American farmers in certified organic production are varied. Many continue to grow cotton and soybeans although these agronomic crops are often unprofitable for small-scale producers. Other reasons include lack of accurate knowledge about organics, bias of agricultural professionals against organics, and lack of technical assistance and financial support in acquiring organic certification (Bandele 2006).

As mentioned previously, SOFSEC was established to foster collaboration among the 1890 land-grant universities and community-based organizations throughout the region. In 2001, SOFSEC secured funding for a small-farm marketing initiative from the USDA Initiative for Future Agricultural Food Systems (IFAFS). A component of that project involved an initiative to provide technical assistance and training to limited-resource farmers in making a transition to certified organic production. Owusu Bandele of the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center coordinated this organic initiative. A partnership was formed with Cynthia Hayes of Women in Rural Development in conducting organic certification training sessions in Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina. The intense three-day training sessions culminated with the completion of the organic certification applications. As a result of the project, forty-one farming families, including producers from Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and North Carolina, completed organic certification applications, and thirty-five received organic certification for farms in their respective states. The project paid for all costs incurred for training and certification. Thirty-two of these farms were African American–owned operations. The farmers have continued to network beyond the SOFSEC/IFAFS project and have formed the Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON). SAAFON members have established collaborative purchasing arrangements and ultimately hope to access additional markets through cooperative agreements. Through their actions, these farmers have taken a historic step in improving the economic and environmental sustainability of their farms while increasing the chance of preserving a vanishing yet important resource—our land.

Conclusion

The richness of our land-based heritage is evident. Africans and African Americans have contributed to sustainable agriculture in profound, yet too often unacknowledged, ways. But the continuation of that heritage and our linkage to the land is faced with ever-present challenges as both the number of African American farms and the acreage of these farms continue to decline. Much of that heritage has endured in spite of and not because of USDA and governmental policies that far too often favor mega-farming operations. Moreover, most young African Americans pursuing agricultural careers are choosing the professional rather than the production path. The sustainability of African American farmers must be coupled with environmental considerations as consumers will continue to demand healthy food produced in a way that is environmentally friendly. Organic

and sustainable production systems offer some hope because of environmental and economic advantages. Increased consumer demand for organic produce has already been noted. The recent problems with contamination of produce were exacerbated by concentration of vegetable production and processing from so few farms and processing plants. This should spark increased consumer demand for locally produced agricultural commodities. The worldwide public concern about global warming and other issues affecting the well-being of the environment will also impact agriculture and favor environmentally friendly production systems. If the African American farmer is to have a place in the future, it will take a high level of creativity and regional cooperation, not only from the farmers themselves but also from those who purport to serve and support them.

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Theoretical and Historical Perspectives on Agroecology and African American Farmers: Toward a Culturally Relevant Sustainable Agriculture

Kwasi Densu

Introduction

Contemporary and historical problems associated with African American rural[1] and farming communities have been well documented.[2] Land loss, environmental degradation and pollution, income inequities, rural flight, political disenfranchisement, hunger and malnutrition, the absence of adequate healthcare, the corporatization of U.S. agriculture, substandard systems of public education, etc., have been explored by academics, activists, government researchers and non-governmental organizations across the professional and ideological spectrum. Although the analysis, findings, and development strategies that have emerged have helped to inform our understanding of the issues, the quality of life of African American farming and rural communities continues to decline at an alarming rate.

For Peter Rossett the fundamental challenge associated with "standard" approaches to solving the social, economic, and technological problems of marginalized farming communities lies in what he describes as the crisis of "perceiving the issues along a *single axis*."[3] Invariably theoretical methods used to study the historical, developmental, and social problems of African American farming communities have been shaped by this trend. Political economy, as a field, has dominated much of the discussion. In its most progressive context it is concerned with the impact of the rapid transformation of agricultural production in the United States and the tendency for land, capital, and decision making to be concentrated in the hands of large-scale White farmers and transnational agricultural corporations. Citing the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the principal state vehicle through which agricultural monopolies and large farm owners maintain control over markets, capital, and agricultural research and development, those who view the problems of African American rural and farming communities through the prism of political economy envisage solutions that include redistribution of land and wealth and the infusion of material and human resources into rural areas using both liberal[4] and radical[5] development strategies.

According to Rossett, the central weakness of political economy lies in the fact that solutions that address only socioeconomic dimensions without altering technology and scale of production have not permitted us to understand the

problems fully and, by extension, have not permitted escape from the crisis.[6] In addition, a growing body of literature has developed to document and assess the impact of environmental racism[7] on rural African American communities. Historically speaking, the environmentalist paradigm, as it expresses itself through the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM), emerges as an outgrowth of both the civil rights movement and the "energy crisis" in the 1970's.[8] The EJM challenges the popular assumption that environmentalism is the purview of the White middle class; it highlights the links between race and class, and the disproportionate health and environmental risks faced by communities of color. Environmentalism as an approach, however, seems to marginally address production values and practices as they impact both physical health and economic stability. In other words, to what degree must the system of values that determine the consumption habits of a given population and its scale of production change to support environmental stability and human health and well-being? As Rossett argues, by only addressing immediate environmental concerns, this approach offers little hope of either reversing the rapid degradation of the resource base for future generations or resolving the current profit squeeze and debt trap in which minority, indigenous, and small-farmers are caught.[9] In addition, a growing body of ethnographic literature has surfaced to "rewrite" the agricultural and environmental history of African American farming and rural communities.[10]

During the early part of the 20th century, attempts were made to document the sociocultural development of African American rural communities. This effort was informed by the post-reconstructionist values of White intellectuals, planters, agricultural extension agents and government officials who characterized African American farmers as lazy, inefficient, and underdeveloped in an attempt to justify the continued existence and expansion of forced labor and plantation agriculture under the twin realities of the sharecropping system and legalized racial segregation. Ullrich Phillips, in his article *The Plantation as a Civilizing Factor*, argues that proper training and association with Whites, through plantation life, would prepare African Americans for life as "free" men.[11] The new ethnographic literature attempts to counter the traditional, White, Southern view of African American rural culture by suggesting that, historically, African Americans maintained and recreated an autonomous ecological and agricultural knowledge base often in opposition to the ideology and production patterns of plantation agriculture. One of the central weaknesses of the ethnographic approach, however, is that the culture of African American rural communities is studied in a "traditionalist" context (i.e., history as stagnant). Linkages are not often made among "tradition," existing cultural formations, and the emergence of "new" strategies to address current social, economic, and technological problems.

In contrast to the single-axis approach, Rossett argues for the creation of a more holistic alternative paradigm based upon the pillars of fair prices for farmers, land redistribution, agroecological technology, and a greater emphasis on local production and basic needs, including support for urban agriculture.[12] In many ways this "holistic" approach parallels the multiple strategies that have emerged within the contemporary sustainable-agriculture and food-sovereignty movements. What is lacking, however, is the cultural and historical basis for its expression within the

context of African American farming communities. The absence of a "cultural and historical base" is largely responsible for the formation of the popular notion that organic agriculture and the local food-systems movement (food sovereignty), like environmentalism, are both the purview of the White middle class and alien to the social fabric of African American communities. This assumption has, consciously and unconsciously, driven sustainable agricultural research and extension work directed toward African American farmers. The history of sustainable agricultural practices suggests, however, that viable organic and local food consumption systems are profoundly holistic and culturally specific. Without a cultural basis for sustainable agriculture among African American farmers and rural communities, the practice of organic agriculture and the creation of strong local food systems are not sustainable. This essay seeks to contribute to that effort.

Beyond American Democratic Agrarianism: Agroecology and the Africana Experience

Kimberly Smith, in her discussion *Black Agrarianism and the Foundations of Black Environmental Thought*, identifies the "cultural origins" of African American agrarianism and environmentalism within the context of the "broader tradition" of American democratic agrarianism.[13] This assumption, in many ways, reaffirms the common notion that the culture of African Americans is primarily an American phenomenon. The significance and retention of African culture, and by extension agricultural production and environmental knowledge systems, is often viewed as secondary to the "American" experience undergirded by the history of European agriculture. Traditionally this perspective has informed sustainable-agriculture and food-sovereignty movements within the American context. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Susan Hecht, in her discussion *The Evolution of Agroecological Thought*, suggests that the contemporary use of the term *agroecology* "dates from the 1970's, but the science and the practice of agroecology are as old as the origins of agriculture."[14] For Hecht, three interrelated historical processes have contributed to the assumption that sustainable agriculture is a contemporary phenomenon emerging out of the history of modern Europe:

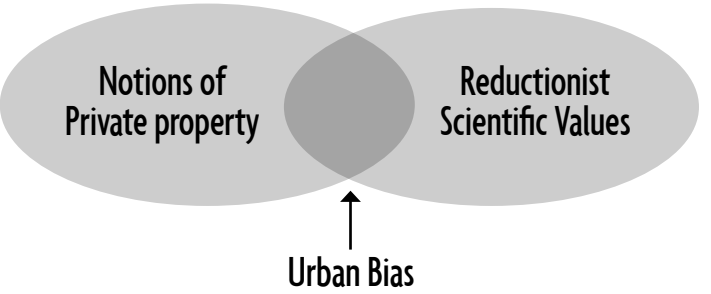
> *Three historical processes have done much to obscure and denigrate the agronomic knowledge that was developed by local peoples and non-western societies: (1) the destruction of the means of encoding, regulating and transmitting agricultural practices; (2) the dramatic transformation of many non-western indigenous societies and the production systems on which they were based as a result of demographic collapse, slaving and colonial and market processes; and (3) the rise of positivist science.* ***As a result there have been few opportunities for the insights developed in a more holistic agriculture to "filter up" into the formal scientific community.****** *This difficulty is further compounded by unrecognized biases of agronomic researchers related to social factors such as class, ethnicity and gender.*[15]

* Emphasis mine.

Using Hecht's framework, one may develop a better understanding of the cultural and historical development of African American farmers in the United States.

A core feature of American cultural thought and development philosophy is a dedication to the twin values of progress and unlimited economic growth. These two realities have given birth to what many call the *urban bias*. In simple terms this means that American society is committed to a vision of human development that assumes: (1) that the quality of human life in a given society can be measured by the degree to which the vast majority of its population is removed from agricultural production specifically and rural life in a general sense, and (2) that the quality of human life in a given community can be measured by the rate by which its "standard of living rises" (i.e., its per-capita rate of consumption of purchased goods and services).[16] The urban bias, as a philosophical concept, can be traced to the early history of modernity and capitalist agriculture. This point is critical because much of what we understand about the cultural development of African American farmers and rural communities emerges within this historical context.

Capitalist agricultural production, as an economic development philosophy, is a function of two interrelated realities. The first is the notion of private property. The second is a "reductionist scientific" approach to knowing and its impact upon conceptions of socioeconomic organization and agricultural production. Both are intimately connected, giving birth to the cultural assumption we call the "urban bias."



According to Vandana Shiva, notions of private property and its ability to undermine values associated with the "peasant-based" concept of the "commons" are important to consider.[17] The concept of "private property," in the context of this discussion, is defined as the view that land, water, biodiversity, and knowledge can be controlled, purchased, and sold by individuals and/or social classes in a given society. Privatization necessarily excludes others for the purpose of accumulating material wealth, political power, and prestige. Several social, economic, and technological practices emerge to support privatization: (1) the physical elimination of the commons; (2) private landownership; (3) an emphasis on export agricultural production to the exclusion of the localization of food production and food sovereignty; (4) the elimination of non-market-based social values such as the right to creative work, participatory decision-making processes and cooperative, and non-monetized means of labor exchange; and (5) the creation of the legal and coercive means to maintain a socioeconomic system to support the previous assumptions through the instrument of the state.

In Western Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, the process known as *enclosure* successfully created both the philosophical and legal justification for the appropriation of land by the few for the express purpose of creating "wealth" and "economic growth." A more accurate description of this process would be greed and hoarding. The commons, which once supported rural communities in England for instance, were removed from the control of smallholder farming communities and put into the hands of individuals who were members of the growing merchant class based in cities and/or members of the former landed aristocracy from Europe's feudal era. This process, according to Ellen Wood, was responsible for what she describes as the *agrarian roots of capitalism*. The philosophical basis for this process derived from the growing belief that the values associated with the commons *impeded* the development of economic, technological, and by extension human, growth and progress.

> *From the standpoint of improving landlords and capitalist farmers, land had to be liberated from any such obstruction to their productive and profitable use of property. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, there was growing pressure to extinguish customary rights that interfered with capitalist accumulation. This could mean various things: disputing communal rights to common lands by claiming exclusive private ownership; eliminating various use rights on private land; or challenging the customary tenures that gave many smallholders rights of possession without unambiguous legal title.*[18]

Supporting the enclosure process was the concept of *improvement*, the application of the scientific revolution to agricultural production practices.

> *The word "improve" itself, in its original meaning, did not mean just "make it better" in a general sense but literally meant to do something for monetary profit…[I]n the early modern period, productivity and profit were inextricably connected in the concept of improvement, and it nicely sums up the ideology of a rising agrarian capitalism.*[19]

The chief goal of the improvement process was to transform the basis of the commons from providing for the diverse food and material needs of local rural communities to the production of monocultures for consumption by the affluent. Positivist science emerges within this context. Its chief aim is to find the quickest way to extract and process resources consistent with the needs of market activity.

Out of this radical shift in how land is perceived and used emerges the period of the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution absorbs the labor of former farming communities into the growing urban areas to engage in the manufacturing of raw materials to export. As markets expand, consumption habits expand as well, creating the need for access to resources beyond national boundaries. African communities become a part of this process through the holocaust of enslavement and later colonization. Both human and material resources once devoted specifically toward food and material sovereignty at the local level were appropriated to meet the consumption needs of Western Europe, including its newly emerging colonies in the Western Hemisphere.

This process, however, was not uniform, globally speaking. The sociohistorical conditions under which it developed in the context of Western Europe were fundamentally different from social processes taking place in other parts of the world. This is not to suggest that conflict over wealth and land-tenure systems did not occur within precolonial African societies. What it does suggest, however, is that the rapid transformation from the conception of the commons to land privatization was historically "unique," so to speak, to Western Europe. According to Vandana Shiva, out of the enclosure movement emerged a core set of values that would define human development in the modern era:

1. Nature is uncreative, unproductive, and valueless until exploited as raw material for industry.
2. Cultures and knowledge systems that build on nature's creativity are also uncreative, unproductive, and valueless.
3. There is no knowledge, no economy, no culture, and no rights prior to the establishment of industrial civilization. They gain value only as raw material for industrial civilization.[20]

The gestation, so to speak, of African American rural communities begins when Africa was absorbed into the loop of the enclosure process during the 15th century following the expansion of the Portuguese and the Spanish.[21] Prior to that period, African people organized communities grounded upon common use of the land and its basic resources. Central to the social order were institutions created to meet the basic material needs of the community through the localization of production and the commitment to values associated with the concept of "right to access." Simply put, maintenance of the commons guaranteed the perpetuation of local-food sovereignty and general environmental stability. "Value" was not simply associated with the market and production efficiency. Determining if something has "value" was predicated upon the assumption that life itself was important. The forest, land, water systems, and thousands of living creatures had value independent of human consumption needs. In turn, natural limitations to the consumption and production habits of human communities were a central feature of most preindustrial African communities.

In the Tradition: Core Features of Indigenous African Agroecological Systems

Any attempt to develop an understanding of indigenous African agroecological knowledge must not ignore the inherent challenges that emerge when attempting to "generalize" about diverse, complex cultural systems. Africa is indeed a large continent with a dynamic history. Its ecological and social diversity has shaped the multiple ways in which African communities have attempted to organize their societies and provide for their material needs. Equally so, it is important to also consider that an enduring, underlying "cultural unity" exists among African peoples from time immemorial. This underlying unity impacts all aspects of African culture, particularly its approach to agricultural production. African societies, in many ways, share essential characteristics with other, non-western, indigenous cultures and, generally speaking, pre-industrial societies. This is important to consider

when studying the African diaspora, particularly in the Americas. For instance, there is much about the land ethic of indigenous Native American culture that parallels the *land ethic* of indigenous African culture. Despite all of this, however, it is possible to envision a general set of core social, technological, and environmental characteristics associated with indigenous African agroecological systems.

Five Core Features Characterizing Indigenous African Agroecological Systems

1. Indigenous African communities viewed the earth as a living, concrete, yet "spiritual" reality. On multiple levels this core assumption was integrated into the land ethic of the community. It is safe to say that indigenous African cultures were overwhelmingly rural societies as well. Consequently, African systems of thought were overwhelmingly "nature based" philosophical systems. Invariably, human beings are governed by the constraints and order associated with the earth itself.

> *In many African societies the Earth is a feminine, divine, nature principle, according to which society is organized. It is commonly seen as the abode of the ancestors, of which the living are merely custodians. The living have a moral responsibility to maintain the earth for unborn generations to come and this obviously has positive ecological implications. In Africa many peoples see a transcendental oneness of the earth with the human community. The human community is seen as having an organic and symbiotic relationship with the land, so much so that in various African languages the same word is used to refer to land, people, family and community.*[22]

The conflict between science and religion, as it expresses itself in Western Europe during the modern era, did not develop among indigenous communities in Africa prior to Africa's integration into the international, political economy on unequal terms in the late 15th century. According to indigenous knowledge systems, there exists no distinction between the sacred and the secular. In fact one can understand the sacred only through an ongoing engagement with the concrete, natural world. Ba-Kongo people possessed a very profound and extensive understanding of the earth and its resources.

> *In the eyes of the African people, especially those in touch with the teachings of the ancient African schools, the earth our planet, is futu dia n'kisi diakanga Kalunga mu diambu dia moyo–a satchet (parcel) of medicines tied up by Kalunga for life on earth. This futu or funda contains everything that life needs for its survival: Medicines, food, drink, et cetera. The futu of medicines consists of chemicals actually known and unknown by man, which substances exist for one purpose only: life on earth.* [23]

Futu as a concept is associated with understanding the earth as a container that holds something of great value. *Nkisi* is a term that is derived from the root word *kinsa*, a verb that means to take care of or "what takes care of life." Nkisi is synonymous with the term "medicine." The contents of the Futu are usually

associated with medicine. This includes foodstuffs, medicinal plants, trees, etc., grown and managed by farmers. In addition, precolonial, indigenous, African, agricultural production systems assume that there are inherent limitations to the amount of resources that human beings can use. The assumption that humans are *one of many* species that are dependent upon the natural world informed the view that people must limit and monitor their use and consumption of natural resources.

2. The *commons* defined indigenous African land-tenure systems. This simply assumes that provided one was responsible socially, the "use of land" was a right and not a class privilege, as in the case of Western systems of land tenure that are based upon private ownership.[24]

> *The primacy of agriculture in traditional economic life makes land* the most important *asset in these societies. It is therefore not surprising that it is highly valued with many rigid rules and rituals associated with it. As a rule land is vested in the descent groups and sometimes certain families. In centralized political systems what is not so vested is regarded as stool land and is entrusted to the king or chief who administers it on behalf of his people. The notion that land is* communal property *that should not be alienated is still generally mentioned…The traditional legal position is that the land is not actually owned by the present living members of the groups in whose name it stands. The living are only custodians who are expected to use it and then pass it on to the next generation.*[25]

3. Indigenous African agricultural systems were agroecological in their orientation. According to Stephen R. Gliessman, agroecology can be defined as

> *a whole systems approach to food, feed, and fiber production that balances environmental soundness, social equity, and economic viability among all sectors of the public, including international and intergenerational peoples. Inherent in this definition is the idea that sustainability* must be extended *not only globally* but indefinitely in time, and to all living organisms including humans. [26]

For thousands of years prior to the introduction of the concept of agroecology, indigenous African communities engaged in agricultural production within this context. Some of the major principles include intercropping—the planting of different crops in the same field during the same season.[27] The benefits of this technique are supported by contemporary sustainable-agriculture research. According to Paul Richards they include: (1) the minimization of soil erosion due to rainfall and sun and wind exposure; (2) natural management of pests and disease; (3) the maximization of available soil moisture and plant nutrients; (4) the natural suppression of weeds by using a permanent groundcover that mimics natural succession; (5) and the minimization of the risk of crop failure by mixing varieties and species with different nutritional requirements, maturation rates, and moisture requirements.[28]

Traditional agricultural systems have involved a remarkable diversity of systems of cultivation. These are used with long fallow periods (periods of no cultivation) to allow the vegetation to regenerate. Cultivation has also involved ash or compost fertilization systems. A wide range of soil and water conservation systems exist; stone lines, trash lines, furrows, pitting systems, mounds with green manure worked into the soil, stone terraces, mulching, and the protection of the Acaia albida (a tree that helps to fix nitrogen into the soil).[29]

African agricultural systems recycled house refuse, human and animal manure, ash from cooking, etc. All of the inputs used to maintain soil fertility were taken from the local area. Land left to *fallow* is an example of allowing lands formally cropped to "recycle" under natural circumstances mimicking the nutrient-recycling processes associated with natural forest succession.

4. Indigenous African communities prioritized local food security. Trading took place in local, bioregional markets similar to the contemporary "farmer's market."[30] Multiple varieties of local food crops that were adapted to local conditions were used. The localization of food production was primary. Localization assumes that the food that the community consumes comes directly from their local region or ecological zone. The varieties of food, for the most part, were indigenous cultivated and non-cultivated species. Species that were non-cultivated included those plants that were left to grow naturally in the surrounding forest systems.

African people know more about wild, edible plants than they farm. As such, Africans themselves only know the true diet of the African. One cannot evaluate it on the basis of what one sees in the market, or in a report written by a traveler. At the age of ten, traditionally, a young muntu (person) has practical knowledge of the most edible wild plants from the forest within his regional environment… The bush, the jungle, the forest, for any African individual, is the farm, and yet, the great majority of the crops from this naturally wild farm are not brought to market.[31]

The use of multiple varieties of cultivated and non-cultivated plants provided three important functions. The first is that it guaranteed a diet that was varied and nutritionally balanced. Second, it provided an added measure of security for farmers; cultivating many varieties of a particular species helped to ward off pest, fight against disease, and prepare for unforeseen environmental shifts such as drought. Third, it ensured the survival of the plant species through the maintenance of biodiversity, guarding against the over-exploitation of a particular plant to prevent its extinction.

5. Indigenous African systems of organizing work were flexible and used the non-monetized human labor and intellectual resources of the zone or locality, principally within the context of the extended family. This would include the basic right and obligation to work and access to the basic means of production. Work is generally labor intensive. Indigenous African systems of production use local, natural energy sources (hydro, solar, slopes, biomass, animal traction, etc.).

These energy systems were most often located within the bioregion. The Chagga of present-day Kenya and Tanzania, for instance, developed an elaborate, efficient multi-story farming system irrigated by the natural springs and falls whose source was the melting snowcaps of Mt. Kilimajoro.[32] The system is called Mifongo.

Implications: Toward a New Cultural Basis for an African American Sustainable Agriculture

Historically speaking, scholars have identified two trends within the tradition of African American social movements. In a popular sense, these two trends are defined as (1) the liberal tradition and (2) the autonomous,[33] or nationalist, tradition. Although these designations are useful for the purpose of analysis, they are in fact dynamic in their application as they are used to interpret the conditions and sociopolitical challenges of African Americans. African American Agrarianism, as a tradition, has been shaped by this dynamism. It finds its expression in multiple spaces under various socioeconomic conditions at different stages in the development history of African American farmers and rural communities. For the purpose of this discussion, however, it is useful to situate the African American agrarian tradition within the duality described by the traditional framework. The extent to which African American agrarianism is informed by the liberal or autonomous tradition is largely a function of two factors: (1) the level at which a given rural African American population retains precolonial African cultural formations within its social structure and the extent to which these cultural retentions inform sustainable-agriculture and community-development efforts, and (2) the degree to which a given rural African American community prioritizes cooperative forms of socioeconomic organization and/or common land-tenure values over private-property land-tenure values (in reality an extension of the first assumption).

The liberal tradition of African American agrarianism has its roots in values associated with the American agrarian tradition—more specifically, Jeffersonian Democracy.[34] Jeffersonian Democratic ideals, first and foremost, assume that a linkage exist between private property and "good" citizenship.

> *Democratic agrarianism constitutes an influential body of nineteenth century thought. Its chief claim is that the small family farm is the repository of the virtues necessary for republican government. Those virtues include self-sufficiency, industriousness, humility, and respect for law and order—all of which are supposed to be encouraged by owning a farm and cultivating it through one's own labor. Agrarians typically justify private property ownership by arguing that, although God gave the land in common to all mankind, an individual's right to ownership depends on his willingness to cultivate it (that is, to engage in agricultural labor of the European pattern). They further claim that political status ought to depend on ownership of land, because the virtues produced by agricultural labor and the independence afforded by land ownership are conducive to good citizenship. "Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example," Jefferson famously declared in* Notes on Virginia.[35]

It is this orientation to African American agrarianism that was embraced by Booker T. Washington and his vision of African American development in the rural South following Emancipation. This outlook was part of a broader trend toward embracing American democratic and industrial philosophy while at the same time critiquing its tendency to exclude communities from its benefits based upon race. The liberal tradition of African American agrarianism is the most popular form and can be found more often in the canon of African American sociopolitical thought. For this reason it is the primary lens through which sustainable-agricultural and food-sovereignty movements have constructed research agendas, outreach strategies, and development goals for African American farmers and rural communities. The autonomous vision of African American agrarianism, on the other hand, is documented to a lesser extent and has its roots in Africa and the period prior to Emancipation, particularly in areas where enslaved African laborers were overwhelmingly in the majority (e.g., South Carolina, Georgia Low Country). Because of the relative isolation of enslaved African populations, indigenous African cultural retentions informed resistance movements' pre- and post-Emancipation patterns of socioeconomic organization and patterns of agricultural production.[36] According to Akiko Ochiai, the popular assumption that American slavery was monolithic in its organization is incorrect. The reality was that there was differentiation within the plantation system. The task system, popular in the coastal Low Country of South Carolina and Georgia, unlike the gang system, assigned specific agricultural, industrial, and homesteading tasks to complete over the course of the day. Once these tasks were finished, African community members engaged in activities that would enrich and stabilize family and community life like independent farming, religious activity, social gatherings, family development, resistance to slavery, etc. This would encourage retention of indigenous African values that would emerge throughout the history of the area through World War II.

> *While large-scale staple-production enriched lowcountry white plantation owners, their absenteeism as well as the overwhelming black demographic majority ensconced local customs that ultimately increased slave autonomy within slavery, paving the way for the struggle for freedom.*
>
> *In the face of the growing entrenchment of slavery, lowcountry slaves gained a degree of control over their time and labor. They effectively manipulated the characteristics of their local slave system: slave drivers, the task system, the slaves' economy, and the stability of their large community. Despite their slavery, these factors ultimately enabled them to acquire what has been known as quasi-autonomy. This quasi-autonomy of lowcountry slaves reached its peak in the late antebellum era, greatly influencing their worldviews, including their expectations of freedom.*[37]

According to Kay Young Day, in her study of African Americans of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, these patterns of community development and resistance persisted throughout the evolution of the capitalist system, including the transition from

enslaved labor to wage labor, to industrialization and the associated dependence on tourism. These patterns included local-food sovereignty, communal living, subsistence agriculture, subsistence hunting and fishing, selective participation in cash-crop production to stabilize household needs only obtainable through the use of money, and, most importantly, communal ownership of land.

> *The primary economic asset that individuals inherit from their parents is land. Although land is no longer the means of livelihood today, rights to land are an important social and economic investment in family estate. The availability of land and the aid of kin are the means of establishing a household independent of rent and indebtedness to whites and their financial institutions. Land is not a commodity that is sold, but a right that is transferred to kin as needed.*[38]

Given that European settlers, demographically speaking, have for the most part shaped the environmental and socioeconomic history of the United States, it is a complex task to unearth African retentions in the area of agricultural knowledge production within the U.S. experience. Affirming Susan Hecht's position, this is further complicated by the processes through which enslaved African laborers were "socialized" to accept plantation agriculture and its associated land ethic We do know, however, through works like Judith Carney's *Black Rice* and Anne Bower's *African American Foodways*, that indigenous African agroecological knowledge had a profound impact on American agricultural production practices and culinary traditions.[39] It is also not far-fetched to consider that similar to other African diaspora communities where enslaved African laborers had a profound impact demographically—for instance, Brazil, Jamaica, Suriname, Guyana, Cuba, etc.—strong retentions of an indigenous African land ethic and agroecological knowledge base made an important contribution to the survival and development of post-Emancipation African American farming and rural communities. This essay, in many ways, is an attempt to argue for a commitment to the painstaking work necessary to rediscover these traditions within the U.S. context, given that many of the strategies associated with sustainable-agricultural extension work and food-sovereignty movements both mimic their core features and borrow heavily from the traditions of "other" indigenous people of color.

In conclusion, contemporary strategies associated with promoting sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty must recognize the inherent vitality of the autonomous tradition of African American agrarianism. It is there that many of the cultural gaps associated with contemporary research models and extension efforts can be filled to more effectively resolve the problems associated with African American farmers and rural communities.

End Notes

[1] Historically the concept *rural* has been defined based upon two demographic factors: (1) population size and (2) relative distance from urban centers. See *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change* by Flora, Flora, Spears, Swanson, Lapping and Weinberg (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992). To this we would add that *rural* communities are often associated with agriculture production as its principal industry. Within the context of this discussion, *rural* is being used to describe African American communities whose cultural life has historically been associated with smallholder farming and plantation agriculture, but since the Great Depression, the mechanization and industrialization of U.S. agriculture, and the mass migration of African Americans out of the rural South, remain in "rural communities" but are no longer tied to the cultural realities associated with an agriculture-based economy.

[2] See Leo Magee and Robert Boone's *The Black Rural Landowner—Endangered Species: Social Political, and Economic Implications* (Westsport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); James B. Stewart and Joyce E. Allen-Smith's *Blacks in Rural America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995); Clyde Woods *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 1998); C. Wimberly and Libby V. Morris's *Southern Black Belt: A National Perspective* (Lexington, KY: TVA Rural Studies University of Kentucky, 1997).

[3] Peter Rossett *Toward an Agroecological Alternative for the Peasantry* (article online) (Oakllanad, CA: Foood First 7 May 2002, accessed August 5, 2005) http://www.foodfirst.org/node/210

[4] See Joe Brooks *Land Tenure and Equitable Development: An African-American Perspective*, Who Owns America Conference, University of Wisconsin-Madison Land Tenure Center, June 8, 2001, and Spencer D. Wood and Jess Gilbert's *Returning African-American Farmers To The Land: Recent Trends and Policy Rationale* Review of Black Political Economy (Spring 2000).

[5] See Manning Marable's "The Land Question In Historical Perspective: The Economics of Poverty in the Black Belt South, 1865–1920" in *The Black Rural Landowner—Endangered Species: Social, Political and Economic Implications*, ed. Leo McGee and Robert Boone (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1979, 3–24; Harry Haywood's *Negro Liberation* (New York: International Publishers, 1948).

[6] Rossett, 1

[7] EJM historically addresses problems in both rural and urban African American communities, although in this study we are concerned principally with rural communities.

[8] Bullard *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000)

[9] Rossett, 1

[10] See Judith Carney's *Black Rice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 2001); Gail Patricia Myers "Sustainable Communities: Traditions, Knowledge, and Adaptations Among Black Farmers in Ohio," PhD Dissertation (Ohio State University, 2002); Diane Glave's "Fields and Gardens: An Environmental History of African-American Farmers in the Progressive South," PhD Dissertation (State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1998); Michelle S. Johnson's "JuJu Leaves in the Center of a Whirlwind: African-American Nature/Culture Mediation," PhD Dissertation (University of Michigan, 1994); Krobert Hall and Carol B. Stack's *Holding on to the Land and the Lord: Kinship, Ritual, Land Tenure and Social Policy in the Rural South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1982).

[11] Ulrich Phillips "The Plantation as a Civilizing Factor" *Sewanee Review* 12(3): 257–67.

[12] Rossett, 2.

[13] Kimberly Smith "Black Agrarianism and the Foundations of Black Environmental Thought" *Environmental Ethics* 26 (2004).

[14] Susanna B. Hecht "The Evolution of Agroecological Thought" in *Agroecology: The Science of Sustainable Agriculture* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 1.

[15] Ibid., 2.

[16] Richard Douthwaite, *The Growth Illusion* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 1999), 9.

[17] Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Massachusetts: South End Press collective, 1997), 6.

[18] Ellen Meskins Wood *The Origin of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 82.

[19] Wood, 80–81.

[20] Vandana Shiva "How Free Is India" *Resurgence Online*, www.gn.apc.org/resurgence/articles/shiva_jun97.htm (accessed August 5, 2005).

[21] The expansion of the Portuguese and Spanish as a result of the voyages of Christopher Columbus should be included in our understanding of the enclosure movements in Western Europe.

[22] Chukwunyere Kamalu, *Person, Divinity and Nature: A Modern View of the Person and Cosmos in African Thought* (London: Karnak House, 1998), 157.

[23] Kimbwadene Fu Kiau, *Self-Healing Power and Therapy: Old Teachings from Africa* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991), 111–112.

[24] Chukwunyere Kamalu, *Person, Divinity and Nature: A Modern View of the Person and Cosmos in African Thought* (London: Karnak House, 1998).

[25] G. K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1992).

[26] Stephen R. Gleiessman, "An Ecological Definition of Sustainable Agriculture" *Agro-ecology Online*, www.agroecology.org/index.htmlichards.

[27] Paul Richards, Indigenous Agricultural Revolution (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 63.

[28] Ibid, 1–72

[29] Kamalu, 166

[30] For most indigenous communities, trade in surplus agricultural products was limited to local markets expanding to environments that were often similar ecologically. Hence the term *bioregion*.

[31] Fukiau, 135

[32] See Mattias Tagseth's *Local Knowledge in Water Management: The Case of the Mifongo Irrigation Systems on the Slopes of Mt. Kilimanjoro,* Tanzania, NFU Conference 2001, Contested Rights and Beliefs: Power, Dominance and Resistance in Development.

[33] Roberto Flores argues that "some of the main characteristics of an *autonomous community* and/or organization include: interdependence, asset based, intersubjectivity, expansiveness, incubation, participatory democracy, and the notion of accompaniment as opposed to activist support. These characteristics are over lapping and affect each other. An autonomous organization could be defined as an interdependent grouping of individuals, households in the same neighborhood or organizations that collectively struggle to survive materially, culturally, spiritually, and psychologically." Peter McLaren, "Autonomy and Participatory Democracy," *International Journal of Educational Reform, Vol. 10, No. 2* (Spring 2001, accessed August 5, 2005) http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/auto/ijer.html.

[34] See Spencer Woods "Forty Acres of Freedom and the Last Plantation: The Jeffersonian Path to Citizenship in the Mississippi Delta, 1935–1938," PhD Dissertation (University of Wisconsin, 1998) and Kimberly Smith, "Black Agrarianism and the Foundations of Black Environmental Thought," *Environmental Ethics* 26 (2004): 267–286.

[35] Kimberly Smith, "Black Agrarianism and the Foundations of Black Environmental Thought," *Environmental Ethics* 26 (2004): 272.

[36] See Richard Price's *Maroon Societies: Rebel slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: John Hopkin's University Press, 1979), Judith Anne Carney's *Black Rice: The African Origin of Rice Cultivation in the America's* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), William S. Politzer's *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999).

[37] Akiko Ochiai, *Harvesting Freedom: African-American Agrarianism in Civil War Era South Carolina* (Conneticut: Greenwood Publishing, 2004), 25.

[38] Kay Young Day, "Kinship in a Changing Economy: A View From the Sea Islands," *Holding On to the Land and the Lord: Kinship, Ritual, Land Tenure and Social Policy in the Rural South*, edited by Robert Hall and Carol B. Stack (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 16.

[39] See Judith Carney's *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Anne L. Bower's *African-American Foodways* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

The Physical and Social Environment of African American Agricultural Communities of the New Deal Resettlement Administration

Tasha M. Hargrove and Robert Zabawa
Tuskegee University

Introduction

Twice since Emancipation the U.S. government has devised programs to strengthen the landowning capacities of Black farmers—once during Reconstruction, and again during the Great Depression. Although these efforts are viewed as deficient, there are significant remnants of these programs that influence Black landowning capacities today.

Of particular research interest are a set of communities proposed and established during the 1930s by the USDA Resettlement Administration and its successor agencies. The Resettlement Administration (RA) provided an opportunity for landless sharecroppers and tenants to own farmland and become independent farmers (a Jeffersonian ideal) and also to form independent agricultural communities with a strong infrastructure (a Booker T. Washington ideal). Reaching beyond "forty acres and a mule," the members of these communities would have not only land, but also farm and community infrastructure and opportunities for education.

In the end, the RA purchased approximately 1.9 million acres used for 140 to 150 agricultural resettlement projects throughout the United States. In the South, thirteen rural resettlement projects were designated for Black farmers alone. These communities encompassed 1,150 families on 92,000 acres. An additional 1,117 Black families resided in nineteen scattered projects on 70,000 to 80,000 acres of land. The thirteen all-Black communities were important because they provided an opportunity to own land and gain economic independence; individual action would be reinforced by community development. The fact that these communities exist or are remembered today emphasizes the small but important effort of the Resettlement Administration and its successor agencies.

Initial reports concerning these projects were positive, both in terms of farm productivity and community development. Gradually, support and guidance from USDA agencies declined. Eventually, Congress called into question many New Deal programs and sponsoring agencies, including the RA. In 1937, the Resettlement Administration was reorganized into the more limited Farm Security Administration (FSA), itself then subsumed into the Farmers' Home Administration (FmHA) in 1946. As the nation's attention turned increasingly

toward war, prejudicial and discriminatory practices began to permeate the very agency that had been empowered to provide agricultural support to the new Black communities and to newly established, Black, farmer-landowners.

Some communities established by the RA are today still visible, although they may be considered "at risk." These extant communities provide a field setting within which to investigate over seven decades of community cohesion maintained against a variety of institutional and economic threats. Other Black community-development projects undertaken by the RA have faded from view, having succumbed to land concentration, urbanization and suburbanization, economic failure, and a variety of other pressures.

It will be argued that the key to understanding the nature and future success (or failure) of the resettlement effort was the physical and social environment where this experiment of farm and community building took place. That is, in the Depression-era South, the physical environment was one of overworked and depleted soil. The social environment was based on a class/caste system of dominance, subjugation, and limited human-capital development. But the main condition that contributed to these environments was the land tenure system based on sharecropping and tenancy. Therefore, this paper will examine the long-term impacts of a program directed at land, class, and tenure for African American farmers in Macon County, Georgia. Data for this research were based on review of government documents from the National Archives in Washington DC, and the regional archives in Atlanta, GA; deed records from the Macon County Tax Assessor's Office in Montezuma, GA; and from over fifty interviews with participants, descendants of the participants, teachers, students, and people close to the Flint River Farms Resettlement Community.

An Old Problem

A review of agriculture in Depression-era Georgia reveals that one of the greatest struggles encountered by Blacks was for land. The acquisition and retention of land for Southern Blacks meant far more than economic viability. It meant independence, security, self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and the opportunity to control one's own destiny (Grant; Salamon; and Zabawa and Warren).

Prior to the Great Depression, the opportunity to own land in Georgia was limited for Blacks. During this time, the majority of Blacks earned their livelihood from the land; however, they were not landowners (Grant). Only 17 percent of Black farmers in Georgia were landowners in 1900. Thirty-five years later, this number had declined to 16 percent. The remaining 84 percent worked the land through the sharecropping and tenant farming system (USDA 1992–2002; USDC). The sharecropping system can best be described as a form of organized labor in which large, single-unit plantations were divided into smaller plots of land ranging from thirty to fifty acres each (Royce). As Royce explains further, the smaller plots of land "were leased on a yearly basis to individual families, who operated as the primary unit of production. Each family at the end of the season received as compensation a share of the crop, usually one-third to one-half; sharecroppers were responsible for feeding and clothing themselves, while the landlord supplied all the farming provisions" (181).

In most instances, the sharecropping system resulted in the exploitation of land and labor and left in its wake depleted soils (see Figures 1 and 2). Sharecroppers were forced to work in an environment where they faced insurmountable difficulties—"defective seed, poor livestock, lack of experience, outdated equipment and methods, and poor land" (Grant, 147). Rural poverty, illiteracy, and undernourishment were rampant during this period. Simms summarizes this historical era in Macon County, GA:

> *The degree of material progress in Macon County, and the limitations brought about by the depression, made Macon County in the 'thirties seem more aligned with Reconstruction days than the present era'. The prevailing philosophy had not undergone much alteration. Materially speaking, outdoor privies, wood stoves, well-drawn water, kerosene lamps, and dirt roads were some of the less romantic inconveniences that many Macon Countians of the 1930's shared with their 19th century predecessors. (3)*

Acquiring land in Georgia was difficult, and there were many reasons why Blacks in Georgia did not own more of the land they worked. According to Grant:

> *In the beginning, few had capital to buy, and many factors worked to ensure that they did not accumulate the necessary money later. White supremacy, low cotton prices, and high interest rates kept the agricultural ladder from working. White farmers often refused to sell land to blacks, because it was more profitable to have it sharecropped; then they could rob the tenant of the fruits of their labor. (146)*

Figure 1: Land erosion in Greene County, Georgia

Figure 2: Tenant houses near Montezuma, Georgia

By the 1930s, farming in an era of depressed prices on poor soil for large landowners was profitable only if the owning class was able to take advantage of a pool of poor, uneducated, landless labor through a production system based on shares and tenancy. Accordingly, if significant changes to this system were to be effected, then there would have to be changes in tenure, in the physical environment of land and farm, and in the social environment, including advances in human capital and education.

Resettlement and Landownership in Georgia

In an effort to elevate sharecroppers and tenant farmers to landowner status and to alleviate poverty in rural areas, the United States government, under Franklin D. Roosevelt, initiated one of the most innovative, experimental land reform programs in U.S. history. Only twice before, once during Reconstruction and again during the New Deal, had the U.S. government devised and implemented programs aimed at strengthening the landowning capacities of Black farmers. Roosevelt's programs were implemented under the Resettlement Administration in the United States Department of Agriculture and its successor, the Farm Security Administration, and were part of the New Deal Programs (Salamon). These programs aimed at "transforming a depressed class of agricultural tenants and laborers into viable communities of small farmers and entrepreneurs" (Salamon, 145). Raper, in his assessment of the New Deal program, observed: "[T]he New Deal with its cotton restriction program, its relief expenditures, and its loan services, has temporarily revitalized the Black Belt, and has rejuvenated the decaying plantation economy" (6).

Nationally, the Resettlement Administration purchased approximately 1,865,000 acres of land in almost 200 locales across the country and established a series of supervised farming and industrial communities (Holley; Salamon). Thirteen of these resettlement communities were designated for Black farmers in the South. These all-Black communities encompassed 1,150 families on 92,000 acres of land (Salamon). One of the thirteen all-Black communities established by the New Deal Resettlement Administration was Flint River Farms in Montezuma, Georgia.

The evolution of the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project began in Fort Valley, Georgia In 1935 A.T. Wilson, Chairman of the Local Resettlement Communities and Representative of the Fort Valley Normal and Industrial School, wrote a letter to the Division of Rural Resettlement in Washington DC, requesting that a 6,000-acre project be located in rural Georgia (Wilson). Harry Brown, Director of the Agricultural Extension Service, supported this request and believed that Fort Valley, which was located in Peach County, Georgia, represented the ideal setting for this type of project. In a letter to R. L. Vansant, director of the Rural Resettlement of Georgia in Athens, dated March 17, 1936, Mr. Brown outlined several advantages for locating the project in Peach County:

> *The first of these advantages and a very important one, is the fact that there is an excellent Negro school at Fort Valley which is doing high class work both from an academic and vocational agriculture point of view… [From the] Agricultural Extension Service point of view there is a distinct advantage in this location represented by the fact that we have a good Negro county agent who has had a long period of satisfactory service in this section. We also have a Negro home demonstration agent carrying on a good program in that county.*

In June 1936, the plan for Fort Valley Farms was authorized and approved. The plans for the project included 150 farms averaging 50 acres each, a community center, and agricultural, home economics, and health activities (Packard).

The Fort Valley Farms Project never came to fruition, though. Due to unfavorable sentiments in the community and local opposition from white citizens, the project was cancelled. The opposition came in the form of petitions circulated throughout Peach County to reject the project. Only a few citizens opposed the resettlement project and they protested by petitioning local and national officials including Congressman B. T. Castello and Resettlement Administration head R. G. Tugwell.

In November 1936, approval was given for the Fort Valley Farms Project to be moved to the town of Montezuma in adjacent Macon County. The project at Flint River Farms was needed to establish a landowning class of Black farmers. By 1935, only 11 percent of the Black farmers in Macon County farmed on land they owned (and only 8 percent were full owners), while the vast majority (89 percent) were sharecroppers, tenants or managers.

Before the project plans were finalized in Macon County, there was once again opposition. The concerns were expressed by a few but highly vocal citizens

through letters and petitions. As expressed in a petition to President Roosevelt dated March 17, 1937, and reported in the March 18th edition of the *Macon County Citizen-Montezuma Georgian*, their stated concerns were that: (1) land values would depreciate; (2) the government would purchase very little locally; (3) land would be taken off the tax roles; (4) the segregation of 100 Negro families would be abnormal and contrary to anything known in the South for years, (5) Negroes whose applications were turned down would be dissatisfied and feel they had been discriminated against; (6) if the project was successful, then Negroes working on surrounding farms would be dissatisfied with wages from private landowners; and (7) if the project was unsuccessful, then it would be a waste of government money and 100 Negro families would be demoralized (*Macon County Citizen-Montezuma Georgian*, March 18, 1937).

Although there were approximately 450 citizens that signed the petitions, many were influenced and tricked into signing. At the same time, *The Citizen-Georgian*, reported that the Montezuma City Council and the Montezuma Kiwanis Club both unanimously endorsed the proposed resettlement project (Montezuma Council; Kiwanians). Despite local opposition, however, on May 8, 1937, the name of Fort Valley Farms was changed to Flint River Farms (Hudgens), and the project was officially moved to Macon County, Georgia (see Figures 3 and 4 and Timeline in Table 1).

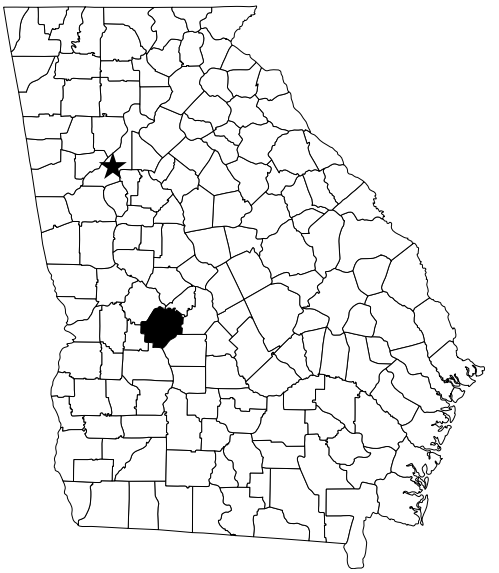


Figure 3: Macon County in Georgia
★ = State Capital, Atlanta

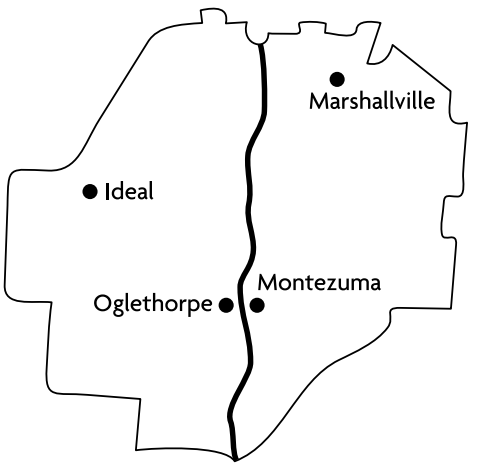


Figure 4: Macon County, Georgia
County Seat, Montezuma

Table 1: Timeline of Flint River Farms: 1935 – 1938

1935	August 8: Request for a resettlement project to be located mainly in Macon County, Georgia, and partially in Houston and Peach Counties is initiated by Mr. A. T. Wilson, Chairman of the local Resettlement Communities. November 15: Mr. Henry A. Hunt, Principal of the Fort Valley Normal and Industrial School requests that Peach, Houston, and Macon Counties be considered as possible locations for a resettlement project.
1936	Agricultural, social, and economic plans for the Fort Valley Farms Project are completed. March 17: The results of a preliminary study on the feasibility of planning a Negro project in Peach County are accepted. April 21: The Fort Valley Farms Project (RR-GA-27) is approved. June 23: The final budget is approved. June 29: Several citizens in Peach County state their opposition to the Fort Valley Farms Project in Peach County. R. W. Hudgens, Regional Resettlement Administration Director, informs R. G. Tugwell, Administrator of the Resettlement Administration, that he is investigating the possibility of canceling the Fort Valley Farms Project due to local opposition. November 7: Fort Valley Farms is moved to Macon County, Georgia, and a search for suitable land to purchase in Macon County is begun.
1937	Local citizens protest the location of an agricultural resettlement project in Macon County, Georgia. March 17: Several local groups and landowners, including the Montezuma Kiwanis Club, landowners Lynn McKenzie and Alvin McKenzie, and the Montezuma City Council, endorse the relocation of the Fort Valley Farms Project to Macon County. Options for land in Macon County are accepted. The following landowners agree to sell their land in support of the resettlement project: A. T. McKenzie, J. L. Harrison, Ed McKenzie, J. B. Easterlin, M. E. Chastin, E. F. Jones, Janie Fisher, Caesar McKenzie, J. L. Harrison, C. F. Dover, and A. T. Watson. The cost to purchase this land is $215,472.33. May 8: Fort Valley Farms is officially renamed Flint River Farms.
1938	October 1: Flint River Farms starts with seventy-seven families.

The Physical Environment of Flint River Farms: Land and Farms

Flint River Farms was started in 1937 when the federal government purchased several large plantations comprising 10,879 acres on eleven different tracts. The land was then subdivided into 107 farm units averaging ninety-three acres per unit. Two units (numbers 17 and 18) were combined, which resulted in 106 units available for participants (see Figure 5).

Prior to the inception of Flint River Farms, there were seventy-seven families living on the land primarily as sharecroppers and day laborers. In 1937, all of these families were accepted as participants in the project (see Table 2). An additional twenty-nine families were also accepted from other plantations. In 1941, there were 106 families participating in the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project (USDA 1941). For those 106 families, Flint River Farms offered hope and an opportunity to become independent landowners (see Table 3). This concept of landownership was far different from their sharecropping past, when they spent long hours in the fields with little economic return. As a USDA report (1941) stated:

> *Very few [of the participants] had an opportunity to raise a garden, poultry, or an orchard. Most of their food had to be bought with their low cash earnings, which often resulted in malnutrition and poor diets. A bare shelter was all the housing they could expect, and sanitary facilities were few. Medical care was something they could seldom afford and the death rate was high.*

The families were initially required to sign lease-purchase agreements. After a five-year trial period, the families would be given the option to purchase the land. If they were successful at the end of the trial period, the participants would be offered forty-year mortgages at 3 percent interest (Salamon). In 1943 and 1944, the first group of settlers acquired deeds for their farming units.

Each unit consisted of a new four- to five-room house, a barn, two mules, an outhouse, a chicken coop, and a smokehouse (see Figures 6 and 7). Use of electricity was made possible by Rural Electrification Administration lines. Bored wells, sanitary privies, and fencing were provided for each unit (FSA 1939a; Grahl). Of further historical significance, while the majority of the buildings on the project were constructed of wood, two were metal, constructed entirely of special rust-resistant steel with the exception of the doors and floors (Flint River Farms to get additional rooms).

The Human Capital Requirement of Flint River Farms

Owning land and acquiring the physical requirements for farming, though necessary, were not sufficient to produce a successful Black farming community. Education, both at the farm and community levels, was also required to advance beyond the dependency of sharecropping and tenancy to the independence of ownership and self-sufficiency.

Initially, the 106 families participating in the project needed assistance in farm planning and management (see Figures 8 and 9). According to a report from the Farm Security Administration, the settlers

> *needed guidance in planning their farm program–advice on how to avoid the risks of a single cash crop, by diversification and by producing at home as much of their needs as possible; how to conserve the fertility of their soil and reclaim what they could of the eroded acreage. In other words, to get a new start toward self support, these families needed not only money but also instruction in better farming practices. (FSA 1941)*

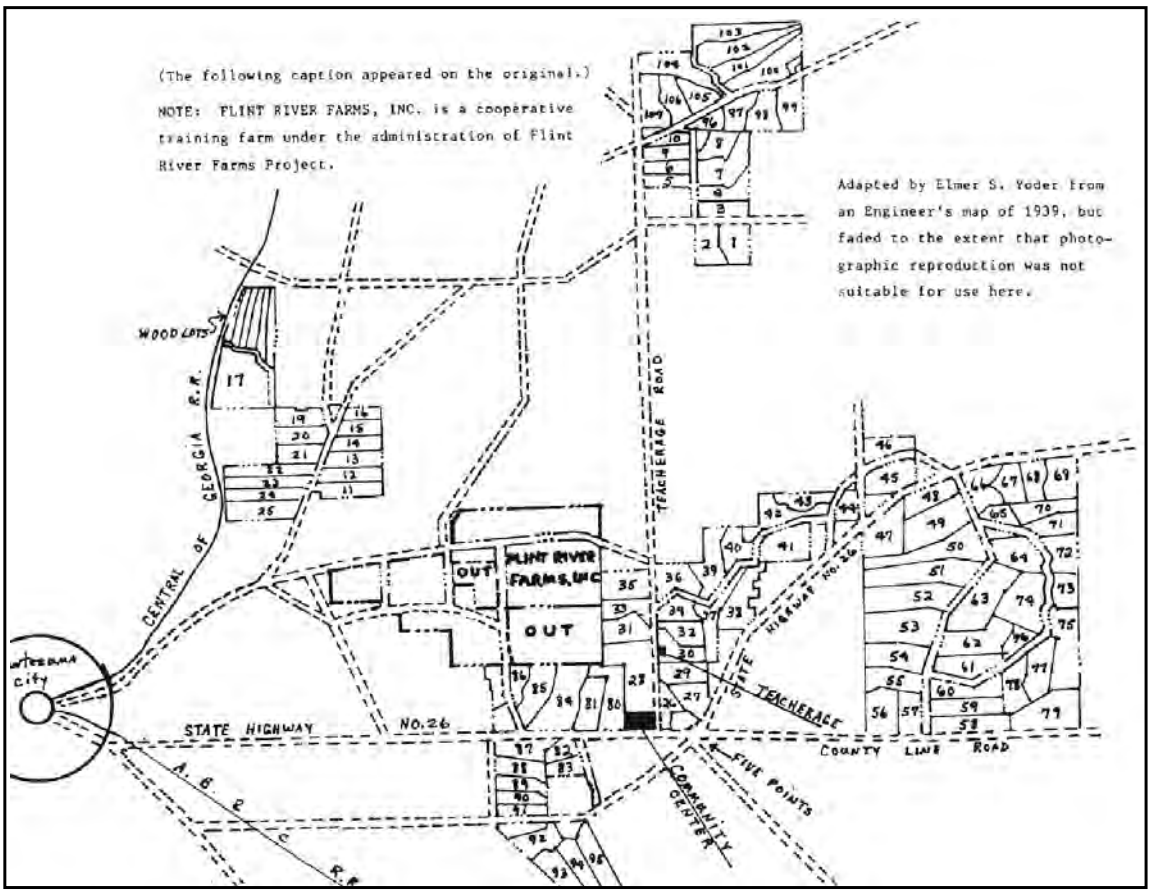


Figure 5: Flint River Farms in Macon County, Georgia (Source: Yoder)

Figure 6: Old and new house at Flint River Farms

Figure 7: New house, barn, and garden at Flint River Farms

Figure 8: Farm supervisor directing harvesting of oats using binder

Figure 9: Home economics and management class for adults

An additional important feature of the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project was the "training farm" for young married couples. This training farm became known as Flint River Farms, Incorporated, and was designed to provide hands-on farm training and better opportunities for these young people. Flint River Farms, Incorporated, was operated as a large-scale farm. It consisted of 1,800 acres of land (USDA 1941). Forty families were selected to live in three residence centers:

> *One of the centers provided for twelve families, the others for fourteen each. A tract of three acres was set aside as the homestead for each family and on each tract there was a five-room house, a smokehouse, a well, sanitary privy, combination barn, chicken house, chicken yard, and a fenced garden.*

Flint River Farms, Incorporated, was designed in a manner in which the forty families could work together while maximizing labor and equipment in an economic manner. In addition, "each family would receive the highest prevailing cash wage and, in addition, would get more than twice as many days work per year as is now provided on similar plantations and would be provided a homestead unit much better than anything to be found in this part of Georgia" (FSA 1939b). As the son of one of the original Flint River farmers stated:

> *It was actually good because you had a chance to get you a home and some land. It was extra good. The people that didn't have no land, set them up with a home, set them up with everything to farm with. They were farming with mules then, they didn't set them up with tractors. They set them up with mule, set them up with the feed, and everything to start off with. They put feed in the barn for them, mules, cows, and hogs to give them a start you see. That was extra good.*

Table 2: List of the initial seventy-seven farmers participating in the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project in 1939

Adams, Bud	Freeman, Fred	Martin, Henry	Solomon, Irene
Atkinson, W. D.	Harris, Allen	Martin, Jimmy	Strong, Cleve
Brock, Odice	Harrison, Zeddie	Martin, Milton	Strong, J.W.
Brown, Abner B.	Harvey, Ezekiel	Martin, Willie	Sutton, Jessie
Burnam, Burnie	Harvey, Jerry	Mitchell, Big Boy	Thomas, John
Burnam, Fred	Harvey, Louis	McCants, Issac	Tooks, General
Burnam, Ibb	Haugabook, Joe	McKenzie, Booker T.	Turner, Tommy
Burnam, Josephus	Haugabook, Louis	McKenzie, Edmund	Turner, Willis
Butler, Horace	Haugabook, Oscar	McKenzie, Deise	Walden, Henry
Butler, Joe	Higgins, Leroy	McKenzie, Lawrence	West, Leones
Chastain, Willie	Jefferson, Grady	Oliver, Cleveland	West, Liones
Cody, Isiah	Joiner, L.B.	Rice, Robert	Williams, I.O.
Collier, Andrew	Joiner, Simon	Robinson, Frank	Woolfork, Jim
Collier, Walter	Jones, Beecher	Rodgers, Lawrence	Woolfork, Will
Collins, Ed	Kigler, Jack	Sanders, Ezekiel	Wynn, Archie
Daniels, Ed	Lane, Leroy	Shelly, Charlie	Wynn, Joe. E
Engram, Candis	Law, Booth	Shoat, Aaron	Young, John T.
Engram, John	Lee, Abb	Smith, Harrison	
Engram, Oscar	Loftly, Boisey	Smith, Henry	
Felder, Simon	Lowe, Fanny	Smith, Lonnie	

Source: FSA 1939a

Table 3: Project families that acquired deeds in 1943 and 1944

Unit No.	Name	Net Acres
1	Butler, Pat & Beatrice	84
2	Shelly, T.J. & Girttrue	61
3	Atkinson, W.D. & Mary	89
4	Collier, Andrew & Doll	88
5	Smith, Henry & Essie	75
10	Rodgers, Lawrence & Louise	54
11	Rice, Robert & Mary	53
12	Martin, Jimmie & Mary	63
13	Brock, Odice & Ruby	60
14	Martin, Milton B. & Laura	61
15	Martin, Willie	59
17	Colzie, John & Willie	258
19	Rice, Joe & Gladys	64
20	Robinson, D.B. & Susie	59
21	Woolfork, Lonzo & Rena	54
22	Haugabook, Joe & Arlena Sr.	63
23	Wynn, Archie & Cora	74
24	Haugabook, Oscar & Delia	68
25	Higgins, Leroy & Abbie	92
26	Engram, John & Mary	68
28	Lofty, Senior, Boisy & Leola	157
29	Engram, Oscar & Elizabeth	59
30	Daniels, Ed & Leaner	79
31	Burnam, Ibb	93
32	Harvey, Louis & Ada	87
34	Harvey, Ezekiel & Josephine	79
35	Mathis, Fred & Jannie	116
36	Harvey, Jerry & Mamie	96
37	Oliver, Cleveland & Almeda	105
38	Ashburn, Howard A. & Alberta	103
39	Clark, Lena	114
40	Brown, A.B. & Maggie	106
41	Vinson, Will & Adeline	94
42	McKenzie, Deise & Annie	105
43	Watkins, Mary	70
44	Young, John T. & Bertha	78
45	McKenzie, John S. & Alice Mae	136
46	Adams, Bud & Clara Lee	81
47	Turner, Ben & Birdie Mae	108

Unit No.	Name	Net Acres
49	McClendon, Manuel & Christene	113
51	Cochran, Gus & Eloise	122
52	Vinson, Richard & Beatrice	125
54	Tate, O.P. & Hester	94
55	Hougabook, Louis & Hattie	72
56	Jefferson, Grady & Birdie Mae	107
57	Miller, Will & Rosa	82
59	Burnam, Fred L. & Hattie	67
62	Ball, David and Mary Lee	80
63	Barner, John & Corilia	75
64	Chastain, Willie & Pearl	85
67	Felton, Florida & Hoise	84
68	Lee, Abb & Mary	156
69	Lowe, Fanny	207
70	Whitehead, Cleveland & Pennie	178
72	Joiner, L.B. & Mabel	106
73	Hobbs, Isaiah & Geneva	146
75	Lane, Leroy & Margaret	166
77	Forehand, Tim & Minnie	116
78	Whitaker, Andrew & Nancy	135
80	West, Liones & Katie	91
81	McKenzie, Edmund & Luella	152
82	McKenzie, Booker T. & Alma	70
84	Daniels, Jack & Cora	112
85	Davis, Dock & Georgia	76
86	Engram, Roosevelt & Alberta	91
87	Felder, Simon & Lessie	120
88	Cody, Carry Lee	85
89	Hall, Larry & Ellauise	76
90	Denson, Robert & Addie	81
91	Collier, Walter & Elberta	102
92	Tooks, Gerald & Henrietta	135
93	Freeman, Fred & Elizabeth	96
94	Ladd, Doss & Beulah	112
95	Duncan, Johnnie & Louise	88
99	Shoat, Aaron & Bessie	102
107	McKenzie, Lawrence & Elnora	82

Source: Hargrove, T. & Zabawa, R. (2004). [An analysis of Flint River Farms Land Ownership Data, 1943–2003]. Unpublished raw data.

The Social Environment of Flint River Farms: School and Community

Education was provided to the participants in the project through the Flint River Farms Community Center (see Figure 10). The community center opened in 1938 and consisted of a six-room school building, principal's home, combination barn, vocational agriculture shop, and a health building (FSA 1941).

At the heart of the Flint River Farms Community Center was the Flint River Farms School (see Figure 11). The Flint River Farms School extended the education for Black youth from first to eleventh grades (Fowler). In describing the new school at Flint River Farms, the Farm Security Administration indicated

> *[The] Flint River School was better than any the county had known for Negroes before and had set new standards. It [had] vocational training equipment and a good home economics department. Along with their other studies, the boys and girls [were] taught proper farming methods, stock feeding, poultry care, etc. [see Figure 12]. The girls learned canning, gardening, and cooking [see Figure 13]. A teacher of vocational agriculture and a home economics teacher were obtained from the State and they had organized evening classes for adults. The county furnished additional teachers, and a house already on the project was repaired for their living quarters. Extension Service people [were] called on from time to time for technical advice; they also attended evening classes and gave talks on special subjects. (FSA 1941)*

The Flint River Farms School also served as a training center for young Black teachers from Fort Valley State College. The young college students completed their hands-on practical training at Flint River Farms School under the direct supervision of project teachers. The college students would live at homes near the school and experience the realities of farm life through the Flint River Farms School (Greene).

In 1938, the Flint River Community Center opened its doors with five teachers and 315 students (Macon County Board of Education). The teachers included Odessa Engram, Florence Gray, Anne Greene, Minnie Head, and Pauline Johnson. Over the next twenty years, over sixty instructors would follow in their footsteps (see Table 4). These instructors taught a variety of courses including arithmetic, reading, social studies, science, library, industrial arts, music, physical education, geography, handwriting, grammar and usage, oral expression, history, English, home economics, vocational agriculture, and biology (Macon County Board of Education). As the grandson of an original Flint River farmer noted about the new school:

> *It was a nice set up. It was almost like a college campus, the way it was set up. You know you had everything offered to you at that location. We had hot lunches, a hot meal. We had a dining room that they cooked all the meals in. We had a medical room. We had a separate auditorium.*

Figure 10: Flint River Farms Community Center

Figure 11: Flint River Farms School

Figure 12: Hog-feeding experiment at Flint River Farms School

Figure 13: Home economics class at Flint River Farms School

Table 4: Teachers at the Flint River Farms School: 1938–1958

Teacher's Name	Years Taught
Amos, Williams	1954–1956
Appling, Susie Felder	1951–1957
Bankston, Nealy	1943–1944
Beauford, Evelyn Hollis	1949–1957
Bernard, Obuletta	1945–1946
Bowman, Ola	1946–1947
Burns, Ernestine V.	1939–1945
Butler, Ethel	1947–1948
Cook, Bernice Bertell	1945–1947
Davis, Clara	1954–1956
Davis, Fronnie Mae	1954–1955
Davis, Lura Frances	1951–1957
Dent, Endiana	1953–1956
Ellison, C. L.	1939–1942
Engram, Mary	1948–1951
Engram, Odessa	1938–1939
Felton, Mercedes	1956–1958
Gates, Betty	1944–1945
Gideon, Mattie	1948–1949
Goss, Henrietta	1945–1946
Gray, Florence	1938–1948
Greene, Jessie West	1939–1948
Hankerson, Idalene	1955–1957
Hankerson, Mollye	1956–1958
Harmon, Rosa	1956–1958
Haugabook, Rebertha	1956–1958
Haugabook, Victoria	1948–1955
Head, Minnie	1938–1940
Hollis Jr., Webb	1951–1954
Holmes, Alberta	1945–1946
Hughey, Harold	1956–1958
Jackson, Lee Frances	1946–1947
Johnson, Ann	1939–1941
Johnson, Emma	1941–1942
Johnson, Pauline	1938–1948
Ladd Sr., Henry James	1946–1958
Ladd, Pauline	1946–1958
Lamar, Vashti	1947–1949
Landis, Maude	1948–1949
Leapheart, Gwendolyn	1942–1943
Lee, Frances	1946–1947
Lester, Rose Johnson	1952–1957
Lewis, Esther	1950–1951
Lowman, Gladys	1945–1946
Madison, Savannah	1943–1944
Mathis, Lessie West	1954–1958
McGlockton, Rosa	1946–1947
McNeal, Hermione Sherard	1944–1945
Mitchell, Effie Engram	1955–1958
Moone, Novella Butler	1948–1958
Morton, Mettie	1949–1950
Newsome, Ella	1956–1958
Oliver, Ozie Prather	1952–1953
Powell, Isadora Brooks	1950–1951
Rakestraw, Arye Elizabeth	1947–1948
Saunders, Eloise	1944–1946
Saunders, J. W.	1942–1944
Stroud, Anne Greene	1938–1941
Sykes, Julie Stallings	1955–1957
Webb, Ella Mae	1950–1951
West, Annie Kate	1951–1958
Weston, Edward	1956–1957
Williams, Eleanor Mae Engram	1949–1958
Williams, Elizabeth Jones	1951–1956
Wilson, Barbara Louise	1950–1952

Source: Macon County Board of Education
Compiled by: Theresa Hankerson

The Legacy of Resettlement and Flint River Farms Today

The Flint River Farms Resettlement Project gained national attention and was viewed as one of the successful Black resettlement communities. Grant captured the essence of the Flint River Farms program in his summation of this particular project. He indicated that the participants in the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project

> *prospered under federal guidance at first and almost quadrupled their average net worth the first year. They developed good kitchen gardens, preserved and canned food, diversified their crops, and developed cooperative marketing, a health center, and a school under the management of Cozy L. Ellison, later chairman of the Agricultural Division of Fort Valley State College. According to historian Michael S. Holmes, the Flint River project proved that blacks' former positions as tenants and croppers were not the result of some innate inferiority, but the product of the state's economy and certain definite attitudes about their color. (349–50)*

The Farming Legacy

In 1943 and 1944, the first group of settlers acquired deeds for their farming units. Thirty years later, nineteen families were still in possession of this land. Sixty years later, in 2003, sixteen of the original participants or their descendants still owned the original farmland. Of the original 10,879 acres of land, Blacks owned 3,186 acres in 2003 (Hargrove and Zabawa). While the decline in Black-owned land is significant, it is well below the national and state levels that are in the ninety-percent range.

What is more significant is that the settlers of Flint River Farms were landless sharecroppers and tenants. The question is: *what would have happened to them without the resettlement project?* A review of the impact of farm policy is illustrative. Starting with the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 (AAA), several successive farm bills have had a dramatic impact on landless farmers. For example, in the decade surrounding the AAA, 1930 to 1940, with its acreage-set-aside provision, the number of sharecroppers and tenants in Macon County, Georgia, declined by 48 percent. In the decade surrounding the 1956 Farm Bill, 1954–1964, with its Soil Bank provision, the number of sharecroppers and tenants declined by 84 percent. Finally, in the decade surrounding the 1965 Farm Bill, 1964–1974, with its cropland adjustment provisions, the number of sharecroppers and tenants declined by 97 percent (data from USDC).

Undoubtedly, multiple factors contributed to the decline of the landless farmer. What is not in question is that, without the opportunity to own land provided by the Resettlement Administration, the settlers of Flint River Farms were in line to remain landless.

The Community Legacy

The benefits derived from the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project were not restricted exclusively to landownership. This particular project could be classified as a successful demonstration of community building for a group of people who had previously been limited to the lowest rung of the social and economic ladder of society. It transcended economic relief and broke through the social norms that were present during that time in Georgia's history. Indeed, the impact of having a community school was significant for both farmers and non-farmers alike. For example, in addition to the academic training, Flint River Farms students actively participated in extracurricular activities. In 1952, the Flint River Farms girls' basketball team won the Georgia Class "C" State championship (Flint River Farms School wins). The championship team consisted of Mattie Ladd, Thelma Brown, Evelyn Mathis, Ann Thornton, Gladys Brown, and Edith Engram. This team was coached by Mr. Webb Hollis (Flint River Farms School). Many residents would argue that any decline in the community had as much to do with the closing of the school at Flint River Farms due to school consolidation as with the decline in agriculture in general.

The spirit of Flint River Farms continues today. Many of the original houses have been kept up, modernized, and renovated for a new generation of family members. Cleveland and Pennie Whitehead were original settlers on Unit 70. A generation later, the local newspaper (Woolfork) recorded when their children erected a marker on the site that reads:

HOME SITE OF

CLEVELAND AND PENNIE

WHITEHEAD

PURCHASED 1939. PART OF

FLINT RIVER FARM PROJECT.

178 ACRES

In an effort to preserve the history of the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project, the Flint River Farms School Preservation Society, Inc. was formed during the summer of 2004. The founding board members included Bob Melvin, Cleveland Whitehead, Curtis McDonald, Ricky Waters, Sharon McDonald, Willie Loftly, and Willie Odums. By 2004, the local history museum in Montezuma had a display on Flint River Farms (McKenzie). The society acquired a three-acre lot from the school board at the site of the original Flint River Farms School, and in March 2005 a historical marker was erected at the site (see Figure 14). This marker reads:

The Flint River Farms Resettlement Project was established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Resettlement Administration in 1937. The Project was one of many similar community resettlement projects organized throughout the South during the New Deal, allowing African-American farmers to purchase land and learn

successful farming practices. A community center opened in 1938 which included school buildings and a vocational agriculture shop. Young people received first- through eleventh-grade education while adults studied vocational agriculture and home economics. In 2003, sixteen of the original 106 families still owned land purchased through the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project. Erected by the Georgia Historical Society, the Flint River Farms School Preservation Society, Inc., New Hope Baptist Church, Shade Arnold Baptist Church, and Zion Hill Baptist Church.

Finally, Flint River Farms participates in a consortium of other resettlement communities created for African Americans, supported by the USDA SARE Sustainable Community Grants Program, to discuss the past, share ideas, and plan for the future (see Figure 15).

The Flint River Farms Resettlement Project was created out of the need to break away from a past environment based on exploitation—of people, community, and land. By providing an opportunity for landownership, for education, and for community building, the project allowed a new future to take hold. And with the help of the community, local churches, and local businesses, we can now recognize and acknowledge the achievements of local residents who stepped out on their faith to pursue a dream of independence and self-sufficiency by participating in the Flint River Farms Resettlement Project.

Figure 14: Unveiling of the Flint River Farms historic site marker, March 2005

Figure 15: Representatives from seven resettlement communities throughout the South meet at the Flint River Farms Community Site, August 2006

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Photography Credits

Figure 1:
Dorthea Lange. "Erosion. Greene County, Georgia." July 1937. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-017927-C.

Figure 2:
Marion Post Wolcott. "Row of tenant houses on plantation near Montezuma, Georgia." May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-051732-D.

Figure 6:
Marion Post Wolcott. "Old house and new one, with cotton coming up in foreground. Flint River Farms, Georgia." May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-051632-D.

Figure 7:
Marion Post Wolcott. "Tim Forehand's wife Minnie scratching Irish potatoes out of their garden patch. Flint River Farms, Georgia." May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-051831-D.

Figure 8:
Marion Post Wolcott. "Harvesting Lonnie Smith's oats with Will Miller's binder. Farm supervisor A. M. Fields is directing the work. Flint River Farms, Georgia." May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-051829-D.

Figure 9:
Marion Post Wolcott. "Untitled" [Home economics and management class for adults under supervisor Evelyn M. Driver. Everything they make, including the hand looms, utilizes materials of local origin such as bamboo, cane, cornshucks, flour and meal and feed sacks, etc. Flint River Farms, Georgia.] May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF33-030379-M3.

Figure 10:
Pauline Ladd. "Flint River Farms Community Center." Private Collection.

Figure 11:
Marion Post Wolcott. "School building, with oats planed in foreground until landscaping can be done. Flint River Farms, Georgia." May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-051647-D.

Figure 12:
Marion Post Wolcott. "Experiment by high school boys showing difference between two ways of feeding hogs. Flint River Farms, Georgia." Spring 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF33-030374-M2.

Figure 13:
Marion Post Wolcott. “Lucille West, at pressure cooker, and Nancy Engram canning vegetables and fruits in home economics class at Flint River Farms, Georgia.” May 1939. Library of Congress call number: LC-USF34-051624-D.

Figure 14:
Tasha M. Hargrove. “Unveiling of Historic Marker at Flint River Farms, Georgia.” March 2005. Tuskegee University, AL.

Figure 15:
“Gathering of Six Resettlement Communities at Flint River Farms Community Park.” July 2006. Tuskegee University, AL.

Mrs. Block Beautiful: African American Women and the Birth of the Urban Conservation Movement Chicago, IL, 1917–1954

Sylvia Hood Washington

A number of histories have already been written about the migration of African Americans to Chicago during the Great Migration periods that have elucidated the formation and maintenance of ghettos where racial segregation was strictly enforced for more than half of the twentieth century. As Allan Spears pointed out in his seminal work, *Black Chicago, The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890–1920*, "The most striking feature of the Negro housing...was not the existence of slum conditions, but the difficulty of escaping the slum."[1] The use of legal and extralegal measures such as restrictive covenants, zoning, bombing, and race riots resulted in the formation of a tightly bound and extremely dense Black Belt, which, although only three miles in length, contained almost 85 percent of the African American population of 110,000 in 1920.[2] Thirty years later the Chicago census figures according to historian Arnold R. Hirsch "revealed not a city undergoing desegregation but one in the process of redefining racial borders after a period of racial stability. Black isolation was, in fact, increasing even as the Black Belt grew."[3]

Migrating, as well as native, African Americans were continuously packed into the Black Belt, but little has been written to date about the environmental consequences of racial segregation in Chicago. A direct consequence of this segregation elucidated in my monograph, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865–1954*, was a high rate of mortality and morbidity among both adults and children from environmental diseases like typhoid and tuberculosis.[4] Tuberculosis was directly connected to the environmental conditions of marginalized housing, especially kitchenette apartments. The lack of fresh air and light in these dwellings produced an optimal breeding ground for the tuberculosis pathogen, which thrives in darkness and stagnant air. These housing conditions, along with an overrun of rats and the fire-prone and dilapidated state of the structures, were an environmental nightmare for African Americans forced to stay in these spaces. The death rate for adult African Americans ranged from four to six times that of adult whites between 1900 and 1950, even though they represented only 4 to 6 percent of the total population during this time period.

Mrs. Block Beautiful was the official name given to the married African American woman who had won the pageant contest in the Chicago Urban League's

annual Block Beautiful competition. The Block Beautiful contest was the ultimate manifestation of the first urban conservation movement in the United States created by the National Urban League to address the environmental plight and dilemmas faced by racially segregated urban African American communities. This national urban conservation movement was strongly influenced by and modeled after the Chicago Urban League's community conservation efforts. Mrs. Block Beautiful symbolized the critical role that women played in a movement whose primary objective was to optimize or at least mitigate the horrific and morbid living conditions that the majority of African Americans, and especially Southern migrants, were forced to endure once they came to Chicago. These women and their efforts were typical examples of Negro clubwomen in the urban Midwest as described by senior historian Darlene Clark Hine in her noted work, *Hine Sight, Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History*. According to Hine, although these clubwomen did not possess the financial resources of Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, or Julius Rosenwald, "their giving of time and effort and commitment to racial uplift work...and their endless struggle to create living space for the segregated, often illiterate, unskilled, and impoverished Black Americans were as valuable as were the two-room Rosenwald schools...the libraries funded by Carnegie and the Rockefeller supported Black medical schools."[5]

The environmental conditions that African Americans endured during this period and which the women of the Block Beautiful sought to address were lucidly described in Richard Wright's *Twelve Million Black Voices*. Wright, a Chicago migrant himself, laments:[6]

> *We remain to live in the clinging soot just beyond the factory areas, behind the railroad tracks, near the river banks, under the viaducts, by the steel and iron mills, on the edges of the coal and lumber yards. We live in crowded, barn-like rooms, in old rotting buildings where once dwelt rich native whites of a century ago. Because we are black...because the outdoor boisterousness of the plantation still clings to us...white people say that we are destructive and therefore do not want us in their neighborhoods.*

The intent of this essay is to elucidate the vital role that African American women played in Chicago in launching the first national urban conservation movement in the United States as a means of surviving and optimizing the dismal environment they were forced to contend with in the "land of hope." Their efforts were a direct response to the compromised ecological, and oftentimes deadly, public-health conditions in Northern African American communities that would exist for over half of a century. These were horrible conditions that had arisen as a direct result of the legal segregation of African Americans from the white social body through racial covenants and racial zoning in the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

African American women from all disciplines and social strata (teachers, laborers, social workers, health-care professionals, homemakers, and clubwomen) in Chicago were a critical force in this movement. It was primarily through their

efforts of successfully organizing and managing the grassroots neighborhood conservation councils that made the movement a reality in Chicago. Their hard work led also to the movement's becoming national in scope and one of the crowning jewels of the National Urban League. Their labors of trying to maintain or redevelop environmentally salient African American communities continued until African Americans in Chicago gained access to healthier neighborhoods after the legal dismantling of racial segregation policies that eventually followed the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Their story in many ways was an excellent manifestation of the African American clubwomen's motto, "lift as we climb"; except in this case they realized that they couldn't "lift" or "climb" themselves completely out of the environmentally oppressive and racially restricted ghettos of Chicago. One Chicago Urban League Block Beautiful movement press release of the period summarized the reasons why the movement was formed:[7]

> *[In] one of Chicago's typical transitional neighborhoods…several white families getting tired of garbage heaps in alleys, roaches, alley rats and the like [sell] their homes to Negro families. The new Negro property owners, realizing that the evils of restrictive covenants prevented them from just wearing out a neighborhood and moving into another, decided they would better their neighborhood where they were. [...] [T]hey began to clean up their own alleys and sweep their own streets.*

The concept of a Mrs. Block Beautiful contest was initially posed to Miss Alva B. Maxey, director of the Chicago Urban League's Community Organization Department by her supervisor, Frazer T. Lane, in the summer of 1954. Lane informed Maxey that[8]

> *[a] group of judges will be appointed to evaluate the most beautiful who will reign as queen at the final meeting when prizes are awarded to the best block effort. [...] Among the qualifications are that she be a married woman.*

The idea of a Mrs. Block Beautiful had arisen, according to Lane, as a means of counteracting the waning interest of the African American communities in participating in the Block Beautiful contest in 1954. This was the same year that the Supreme Court's *Brown v. the Board* decision struck down the ideology of "separate but equal" societies. This decision may have led many African Americans in the city as well as across the country to believe that a "new day" had come and that they would soon be able to escape their racially induced, deadly ghettos. The lapse in interest in the Block Beautiful contest may also have been related to the fact that this was the year that the Urban League disbanded because of an internal and external turmoil revolving around its controversial executive director, Sidney R. Williams, who, along with the league's director, Earl B. Dickerson, was perceived as being "too radical." Both Dickerson and Williams were critical forces in creating and maintaining the momentum of the league's Block Beautiful movement.

According to Lane it was critical that the beauty queen, Mrs. Block Beautiful, be married. While no reason has been specifically identified in the historical record why Lane imposed this requirement, one can safely assume from the records that

it was tied to the fact the success of the Block Beautiful contest and the larger block movement from its inception was due primarily to the efforts of married African American women. They became the movement's primary grassroots activists, organizers, and leaders. Darlene Clark Hine also points out in *Hine Sight* that during this period "the larger society viewed black women as whores and prostitutes."[9] The desire to have a *married* community queen may also have been influenced by a need to promote a respectable image of African American women in light of the contemporary prevalence of negative and debased images of them. The effort to promote a positive image of African American women was consistent with the "initial orientation and objectives of early black women's clubs," which included "creating a positive image of their sexuality."[10]

The idea of a Mrs. Block Beautiful was not a random concept but one based on the success of other beauty contests that were being conducted in the city during the same period. According to Lane's memo, the nine-year contest, which was originally co-sponsored by the Chicago League and the Chicago Defender, needed a "gimmick" to keep it going. The idea of a queen for the contest came from his observations of local businesses in the area that had successfully employed beauty contests to increase sales among their clients.[11]

The annual Block Beautiful contest began in 1945 as part of the Chicago Urban League's Five Year Civic Improvement Plan and was part of its Block Beautiful movement. The primary objective of the Five Year Plan was to "help Negroes help themselves."[12] In the league's mind, this effort was critical for the African American community because of the large influx of migrants who were poor and illiterate and because of whom "[t]he problems of housing, sanitation, and right living [were], for the most part, kept in the background, either through ignorance or the lack of interest."[13] Chicago's African American communities became even more taxed (physically) by the exponential increase in their population as a direct consequence of labor demands sparked by World War II war industries. With restrictive covenants still in place and serious acts and threats of white mob violence to maintain them, African Americans were densely crowded into the deadly and decaying neighborhoods of Chicago's Black Belt, which became known for its notorious kitchenette apartments immortalized by Lorraine Hansberry's seminal play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. Richard Wright described the impact of kitchenettes of this era on the African American community in the following way:[14]

> *The kitchenette, with its filth and foul air, with its one toilet for thirty or more tenants, kills our black babies so fast that in many cities twice as many of them die as white babies.*
>
> *The kitchenette is the seed bed for scarlet fever, dysentery, typhoid, tuberculosis, gonorrhea, syphilis, pneumonia and malnutrition.*
>
> *The kitchenette scatters death so widely among us that our death rate exceeds our birth rate, and if it were not for the trains and autos bringing us daily into the city from the plantations, we black folks who dwell in northern cities would die out entirely over the course of a few years.*

The first block movement was initiated by the National Urban League's affiliate in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's Hill District between 1915 and 1920. The formation of the block movement was consistent with the three-pronged objective of the Urban League: help migrating African Americans with employment, housing, and assimilation or adjustment.[15] The movement was based upon the formation of block clubs that were "designed to be a bulwark of strength for communities to urbanize people in a better way of life."[16] The first block club in Chicago, formed by the Chicago Urban League staff member Frayser T. Lane, was the South Side Block Club.[17] The league's first secretaries were responsible for organizing and supporting the early neighborhood-improvement clubs.[18]

Within the first year of its formation, the Chicago Urban League recognized that poor housing was a critical problem for migrating Blacks and the rapidly expanding Black population. As early as 1917, the league began utilizing African American women to do their "block work," which entailed their going into the homes of newly arriving migrants and giving them advice "about health, cleanliness, deportment in public places, care of children, overcrowding and efficiency."[19]

Between 1920 and 1924 the Urban League's Civic Department was dissolved. It was reformed in 1925–1926 as the Department of Civic Betterment to continue to address the perpetual issue of unsanitary housing and the concomitant environmental and health troubles associated with this problem.[20] Considered by the league to be its "outstanding achievement during the period," the department was formed as a standing committee of the league. Its first director and chairperson were women: Maude A. Lawrence and Mrs. Frank Brown.[21] This revised civic department was advised by an interracial civic committee containing eighteen members. All but two were women and they all were representatives of the most prominent and politically influential social agencies, women's clubs, and civic organizations in Chicago: the West Side Women's Club; the North Side Community Center; the Neighborhood Improvement and Protective Association; the Chicago Federation of Colored Women's Clubs; United Charities, the Social Hygiene Council; the Lower North Community Council; the Association of Commerce; the Community Center Council; the Elizabeth McCormick Memorial Fund; the Chicago Woman's Club; the Chicago Commons; the Northwestern University Settlement; and the Chicago Council of Social Agencies.[22] The first-year efforts of the newly revised department concentrated on civic activities in the areas of thrift, health, recreation, neighborhood clubs, speakers' bureau, and participation in a housing conference that had been called by Mary McDowell.[23]

The league's block work persisted but never really flourished on a sustained basis until the mid 1940s when it was revived in its most successful form in Chicago by two women: Mrs. Maude Lawrence on the South Side and Mrs. Rachel Ridley on the West Side under the executive secretaryship of Mr. A. L. Foster."[24] The Block Beautiful contest became the centerpiece of the new Block Beautiful movement and it would thrive for almost ten years under the leadership of the league's executive director, Sidney R. Williams in cooperation with the league's

various Community Organization Department directors: Miss Lillian Proctor, Alva B. Maxey and Mrs. Rachel Ridley.[25]

Sowing the Seeds of a Beautiful Movement

The success of the Block Beautiful movement of the 1940s and 1950s was undoubtedly tied to the Chicago Urban League's revived efforts for a block movement during the Depression. Although the Chicago Urban League was concerned from its inception about the living conditions and environment of African Americans, a consistent organized effort was not solidified into a functioning program until the Depression era. The effectiveness of the Depression-era movement was due in large part to "a million dollars in Government funds through the Work Progress Administration, National Youth Administration and AEP" that was poured into African American communities. Beginning in the mid-thirties, the league began to receive institutional support in the form of workers from the Work Progress Administration and National Youth Administration. With the support of the government, the league's Civic Improvement Department was able to file "more organized complaints from residents in regard to zoning violations, vice and crime."[26]

On the South Side of Chicago during the Depression, the league was involved with several government-sponsored, community-improvement projects that were led on a day-to-day basis by women: Dr. Ruth Howard, director of the National Youth Administration (NYA)-153 Health Project, and Mrs. Naola Smith, director of the Better Conduct Program of the National Youth Administration (NYA) B-153 project. All of the National Youth Administration projects were sponsored by the Chicago Urban League's Civic Improvement Department, and its director, A. L. Foster, acted as the general supervisor of the National Youth Administration -153 project. The objectives of the National Youth Administration B-153 and B-307 projects were to supervise "health and better conduct activities for youth whose families were on relief."[27] Although the historical record does not identify the percentages of women supporting or participating in the NYA projects, contemporary photographs of these organizations for that period in Chicago show only African American women and girls.

The league's "Work Progress Administration Project #2526," also referred to as the "Community Improvement Project #2526," was initiated in 1936 and was designed to develop "new community standards and ideals through Recreation and Education programs." The project had 140 workers at the beginning of 1938 with "at least thirty of them devoting their time to organizing and instructing adults in the community north of 43rd street."[28] The program started to decline that same year when the league received "a decrease in the allotment of Work Progress Administration funds."[29]

The importance of Work Progress Administration funding in advancing community conservation was reflected in the 1938 Civic Improvement Department report, which clearly stated that "[t]hrough the activities of the Work Progress Administration workers on project #2526, 40 neighborhood improvement clubs were organized and functioned to some extent. With the loss of these workers, many

of these groups ceased to function."[30] By 1938 the league would proudly claim that they had "organized the City-Wide Association of Neighborhood Improvement Clubs and through it many creditable things were accomplished."[31] Unfortunately this success would last only "about six months...due to poor leadership [that] became inactive."[32]

It was also during the Depression era that the league first received help for its nascent block movement from white or predominantly white women's organizations and clubs in the city. The league obtained support from the Chicago Women's Club Celia Wooley Committee for a small "Better Block Contest" that selected the block that had planted the most grass. "In this effort, 100 pounds of grass seed [was] donated by the Celia Wooley Committee...and distributed free to those who felt they were unable to buy seed."[33] The Committee also "distributed certificates...to those taking interest in improving their premises."[34]

The Urban League during this era still did not have a sufficient number of paid staff members to organize and implement a citywide block movement and as a result relied heavily on volunteers, especially female volunteers. Most of the league's efforts and activities directed at developing and maintaining the block movement during this period were therefore geared toward the perceived interests of women since they constituted the majority of volunteers who supported the organization. The league sponsored its first "Flower Show and Neighborhood Fair" during the Depression, two of its objectives being to show attendees "how to make flowers, gardens and grass and how to solve some of the problems which are conducive to the creation of slums."[35] This fair also featured a "Queen of Honor" and had "moving pictures of beautiful spots on the South Side, and beautifully decorated booths set up by commercial florists, lumber companies, hardware stores, wall paper and rug cleaning establishments."[36] The league also formally created two volunteer women's groups because of the value of women's volunteer contributions to its overall efforts: the Woman's Division and the Junior Woman's Auxiliary of the Chicago Urban League. The Constitution of the latter group of women, who were between the ages of eighteen and thirty, specifically stated that its purpose was "to help promote and advance the work of the Chicago Urban League and the Woman's Division in whatever way possible."[37]

Irene McCoy Gaines

To bolster support and participation in its conservation efforts, the league used many forms of communication and enlisted prominent African American women in the city to promote its community conservation program during this era. In 1938 the vice president of the Chicago Urban League, Earl Dickerson, participated in a radio interview called "What the Urban League Means to Chicago" that was conducted by one of the most prominent African American club women and activists at that time, Irene McCoy Gaines. Gaines introduced herself on the radio as a "representative of the general public, and particularly of the women who are so vitally interested in the social, economic, and civic status of the citizens."[38] Her introduction was a humble understatement of both her social and political position in Chicago, especially in the African American community.

Born in Ocala, Florida, on October 25, 1892, Gaines, like many of her African American peers in Chicago, was a Southern migrant. She was the second child of Charles Vivien and Mamie Ellis McCoy, and the niece of "George Washington Ellis [who] had served with the U.S. delegation to the West African Nation of Liberia between 1902 and 1910."[39] Irene McCoy Gaines was also a Fisk University graduate and a social worker who had been trained by the University of Chicago. She was a mother and the wife of the prominent lawyer, real-estate man, and civic leader Harris Barrett Gaines, who had served two terms in the Illinois legislature beginning in 1928. By 1938 Irene McCoy Gaines had served as the director of the Girls Work Division War Camp Community Service between 1917 and 1918 and was an active member of the Chicago Urban League during the same period. She had been a recruiter for the Women's Trade Union League and in 1920 served as the industrial secretary for the first "Negro" branch of the Young Woman's Christian Association in Chicago, and by the late 1920s she had become a member of the Woman's City Club of Chicago as well as a life member of the Chicago Art Institute. From 1924 to 1935 Gaines was the president of the Illinois Federation of Republican Colored Women's Club. One of her crowning achievements was her presidential appointment to the Housing Commission under Hoover in 1930.[40]

Gaines at the time of the 1938 radio interview was the president of the Northern District Association of Colored Women and wielded a tremendous amount of influence on African American women who were in a position to be productive volunteers for the Chicago Urban League. The 1938 annual report of the Northern District Association of Colored Women supported Gaines's articulated concern on housing conditions for African Americans in the radio interview. The organization's housing committee for that year reported that

> *Federated club women have been greatly alarmed over the acute housing condition in Chicago, particularly in the so-called 'black belts' where are found the most blighted and deteriorated areas. We therefore addressed ourselves to the study of these conditions in several of our committees and joined other civic organizations by letters and telegrams in a demand upon the Mayor of this city for the appointment of a Negro to the Housing Board. It was with great disappointment that we read of his recent appointment of white men to the two vacancies on the housing authority.*[41]

The Chicago and Northern District Association of Colored Women's Health and Hygiene committee's 1938 report was clearly oriented toward environmental concerns in the Black Belt and mirrored the concerns of the league's Civic Improvement Department. Their report urged "[t]hat for the welfare of the community, we must keep up our neighborhood in housing. Keep a constant check on garbage removal and general health conditions. Read literature on better homes; listen to radio broadcasts on prevention of disease and methods of disinfecting and disposing of refuse."[42]

Dickerson's radio interview responses were clearly aimed at encouraging the continued support of women in Chicago, especially clubwomen. He began his

interview by acknowledging that the Chicago Urban League felt "indebted to the organized women of Chicago because it was largely through their efforts that the Urban League was started." Dickerson expounded upon this point by stating that two of the league's founders, Joanna Snowden and Ruth Standish Baldwin, were provided by the Federated Women's Club.[43]

Obtaining the support of Snowden gave an enormous legitimacy to the league's efforts, given her social standing and position in the African American community. Joanna Snowden (also known as Joanna Cecilia Hudlum and Joanna Snowden Porter), respectfully referred to as the "Daughter of Fire Angel," was highly valued and recognized in the city among African American elites. Joanna Snowden was also from one of the most prominent native African American families in Chicago, referred to as "Old Settlers," and was a past president and historian of the "Old Settlers Club" at the time of the radio broadcast. Her parents, Joseph Henry and Anne Elizabeth Lewis Hudlum, lived in the "first house built for colored people and owned by them in 1857."[44] Joanna was born in Chicago on February 14, 1864, and married Joseph Ross Snowden on June 2, 1884. The couple had one child, Joseph Edward, who was born two years after the marriage on November 19, 1886. Highly educated Mrs. Snowden attended Chicago's Bryant and Stratton Business College, the School of Civics and Philanthropy, and the University of Chicago after graduating from Englewood High School in Chicago.[45]

Snowden is best known for creating and leading the Northwestern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (comprising twenty-four states at that time) as president. She was also the organizer for the National Association of Colored Women and had been a Deputy Recorder for the Cook County Recorders Office from 1924 to 1927.[46] One of the most active clubwomen in the region, Joanna was also one of the founders and had been the secretary and director for the Home for the Aged and Infirm Colored People from 1898 to 1908, as well as having held the position of treasurer for the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Colored Girls.[47] The endorsement of Snowden meant that clubwomen across the city would not only take the league's drive seriously, but they would also become active in making conservation efforts a reality for the entire community, especially when most of the work would have to fall upon the shoulders of women volunteers.

Nurturers of a Beautifying Movement

Based upon the failures and success of its Depression-era block movement, the league launched its most successful block movement between 1945 and 1954. Rachel R. Ridley and Maude Lawrence were the two women who renewed the movement, and they became the movement's bedrock along with other female leaders like Lillian Proctor and Alva B. Maxey. Ridley and her group of female volunteers and leaders on Chicago's West Side became key driving forces in the movement. Ridley was the director of the league's West Side Women's Division and the creative and organizing force for block clubs in this section of Chicago. These West Side league women aggressively and successfully recruited women block-club leaders who would eventually represent more than half of the block clubs in Chicago for most of the last ten years of the Block Beautiful movement.

Mrs. Rachel R. Ridley

Rachel R. Ridley was unquestionably one of the persons in the Urban League most critically responsible for the success of the Block Beautiful movement. At the time of her death in 1986, Rachel R. Ridley, a former deputy director of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations under Mayor Jane Byrne, was considered a legend in Chicago and "a pioneer in women's rights...human rights [who] always worked at getting people to work together."[48] Ridley was born on April 10, 1911, in Hannibal, Missouri. She spent most of her life on Chicago's West Side where she lived from 1918 until the time of her death in 1986. A 1929 graduate of Chicago's McKinley high school, she attended several colleges in the city before graduating from Roosevelt University in 1946 with a B.A. degree in sociology. Rachel was both a mother and wife during her activism. She was married to Taft Ridley and had one daughter, Louisa. Prior to her graduation from Roosevelt, she worked during the Depression as a teacher in a Federal Adult Education Project from 1932 to 1934 and then went to work with the Chicago Urban League in 1937 where she "sponsored NYA programs recruiting, organizing and supervising youth groups in the West Side area."[49] Between 1938 and 1939, Ridley was promoted to a staff position at the league and began to sponsor WPA recreational programs for adults and youths on the West Side. When the federal funding was discontinued for the Urban League in 1942, Rachel "was appointed director of the West Side activities by the Urban League, supervising a staff of two professionals and four volunteers."[50] As the director of the West Side Urban League for ten years, Ridley was responsible for "initiating block clubs as a vehicle for urbanizing newcomers."[51] She would also spend her time while director organizing the Midwest Community Council, whose original emphasis was on ensuring law and order in the community. When Ridley left the league in 1952 after a decade of service, they honored her with a farewell tea held in the Woodrow Wilson Room at the International Relations Center. The tea was organized and orchestrated primarily by twenty-seven of her female league colleagues and friends. The program booklet for the farewell tea summed up the gratitude that they felt for Ridley's contributions to the organization:[52]

> *We, of the Chicago Urban League are fortunate to have had the opportunity to fellowship with our good friend "Rachel" through the years. Through her wisdom and tireless energy she has enriched our progress and created goodwill for the League.*

Within two years of her departure, the Block Beautiful contest and movement would begin to falter.

Miss Lillian Proctor

Very little is known about the other key African American women block movement founders and supporters like Alva B. Maxey and Maude Lawrence because there are few or no historical records of their lives and work. There is, however, a historical record of one of the shortest-term community organization directors in the Urban League, Miss Lillian Proctor. Proctor also played an active, albeit abbreviated, role in the Block Beautiful movement. Like Irene McCoy Gaines

and Rachel R. Ridley, Lillian Proctor was also a Southern migrant born around the turn of the twentieth century. Proctor, like Gaines, was a Fisk University graduate and came from a prominent African American family. Lillian's father was the prominent Reverend and Dr. Henry Proctor of Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Proctor was the first African American pastor of the First Congregational Church, and his church played a key role in creating the first African American bank, first African American library, and first African American insurance company in the city of Atlanta. When she graduated from Fisk University, Proctor won a National Urban League scholarship based on the league's national examination and studied social work at the University of Chicago, where she completed her MA with a thesis titled *A Case Study of Thirty Superior Colored Children in Washington, DC* in 1929.[53] After she completed her studies at the University of Chicago she became the first African American social worker at the United Charities of Chicago. In 1929 Proctor married the prominent civic leader and physician, Dr. Arthur D. Falls, who would eventually serve as the chairman of the Chicago Interracial Commission of the Chicago Urban League. Twenty years later, Lillian Proctor, still using her maiden name, would serve as the league's Community Organization Department director. Although she would serve in the position for no more than a year, her social stature gave credibility to the league's movement as few others' could at that time.[54] During her career Proctor would also serve as the district supervisor of Cook County's Bureau of Public Welfare.[55]

Miss Alva B. Maxey

One of the three primary goals of the Community Organization Department in 1950 under the leadership of Miss Alva B. Maxey was "to begin developing a volunteer program."[56] Maxey would state in the 1950 report for the Community Organization Department that they "faced a need for volunteers beyond the traditional needs characteristic of private social work agencies. We are understaffed because we simply do not have sufficient personnel to carry on the work."[57] After Miss Maxey took over the position as director from Miss Lillian Proctor, the first group of volunteers went to work. "With some briefing on a questionnaire, these volunteers went out in the field to make a survey of our block clubs in the Snowdenville, DuSable, and Abbottsford areas. The women had fun—they were happy. These women [continued] as the spark plugs of the department's volunteer program."[58] The female volunteers under Maxey were "experienced in club and organization work...[and were] in good part responsible for a number of our new block clubs."[59] Maxey served as the director of the Community Organization Department for over five years and worked hard to keep the Block Beautiful movement afloat despite the decreasing community interest in the program after 1954.

The Fruits of Civic Labor: The Block Beautiful Movement

In the beginning the Block Beautiful contest was co-sponsored by both the Urban League and the Chicago Defender, and participation from other agencies and businesses regardless of race was strongly encouraged. The league made clear in all of its literature that "[s]oliciting the support of other agencies is in keeping with the Chicago Urban League and with the policy of the Five-Year Plan in particular."[60]

The Block Beautiful movement, like the preceding movements, was created to motivate African American communities to actively participate in transforming the physical and environmental conditions of their neighborhoods to make them both cleaner and safer. League literature during this period also emphasized that the movement developed from a "desire for better health conditions, cleaner politics, parks and playgrounds, more schools efficiently equipped with space for all pupils and strict law enforcement."[61]

One of the primary environmental concerns of the movement was the threat of fire in the slums. On January 26, 1947, the *Chicago Bee* would feature the article "West Side Slums Fire Claims Four." The article made it clear that community groups were actively conducting investigations and seeking prosecutions "over the appalling conditions in over-crowded neighborhoods [which] permitted the death of 11 persons in murderously destructive fires during the past two weeks." Among the motivations for the article were the fire-related deaths of four children between the ages of three and fourteen who had been living in "a west side tenement attic apartment which fire inspectors had reported as 'insufferable and dangerous'."[62]

The threat of fire from slum conditions, however, wasn't the only environmental concern of the community during this period. Rat control was at the top of list for community activists, citizens, and the city government. In 1947 "Thousands of southsiders joined the city wide war on rats [under] Mayor Kennelley's 'Rat Extermination Week.'" The campaign that year to get rid of the "disease carrying rats" had been motivated by the attack of fifteen babies who had "been bitten and maimed by rats during the year."[63] Almost one-third of the featured speakers for Mayor Kennelley's "rat campaign" were prominent African American women: Irene McCoy Gaines, Mrs. Loraine R. Richardson Greene, and Mrs. Mildred Casey. These women were chosen along with prominent male civic leaders like the Chicago Urban League administrator, Frayser Lane, and city aldermen Archibald Carey and William Harvey.

Mrs. Loraine R. Richardson Green was the highly accomplished wife of Wendell Elbert Green, LLB, prominent African American attorney, former assistant public defender (1929–30), appointed Civil Service commissioner (1935–1942), elected municipal judge (1942–1950), and graduate of the University of Chicago. Loraine R. Richardson Green and her husband were also Southern migrants from Topeka and Kansas City, Kansas.[64] Loraine Green, like her husband, was highly educated and had received her PhB, MA, and PhD in Sociology from the University of Chicago. She was awarded a research assistantship for the University's Institute of Social Research after graduation and eventually became a member of the institute.[65] Dr. Loraine Green was also highly respected among clubwomen and was a member of the Board of Directors of the Urban League, Girl Reserves, YWCA, Woman's City Club, Chicago's Board of Health, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, and past president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority from 1919 to 1923.[66]

The movement also had an objective of combating negative racial stereotyping and demonstrating the worthiness of social equality for African Americans by creating cleaner and safer communities. In 1950 the league would

blatantly state in its literature that the success of the block movement would help with "our journey along the road towards full participation and unrestricted participation in the American way of life."[67] This objective was manifested by the league's motto, "We Fight Blight." In a 1951 league press release and promotion flier titled "A Sight Worth Seeing," the league was specific about its concerns and complaints about African American neighborhoods in Chicago. It would complain that[68]

> *In much of Chicago's Negro community, the casual visitor is appalled at the many evidences of filth and squalor, the carelessly littered streets and alleys, the buildings unsightly and forlorn from abuse, and neglected repairs, and the grounds from grass and flowers have since vanished. This we all know about to our shame.*

Five neighborhood councils, totaling nineteen block units, were involved at the start of the renewed block movement by the Chicago Urban League and the Chicago Defender in 1940. They were the Snowdenville, Dusable, Abbottsford, Bethune Progressive, and the West Side Community Improvement Councils. The Chicago Urban League expected all of its field workers involved in the block movement to "familiarize [themselves] with the data description of [their] territory." They were also required to conduct thorough surveys of the neighborhoods solicited for participation in the project and expected to "know [the] neighborhood as well as or better than any resident of it."[69] Block clubs and neighborhood councils, once formed, were strongly encouraged by the league to have at least six standing committees in place to ensure the neighborhood's physical and social integrity. The majority of the committees were environmental in scope and consisted of the "Youth Activities, Zoning, Health and Sanitation, Foods and Nutrition, Streets and Alleys and Garbage Collection" committees.[70]

Once block or neighborhood clubs were formed, they created their own ads and fliers promoting participation in the Block Beautiful contest. A flier produced by the Langley Avenue Neighborhood Improvement Club boldly announced that "Judgment Day Has Come!" and promised its neighbors that they could win a prize in the Urban League contest if they would all "Cut grass, Wash windows, clean [the] street in front of your premises [and] tidy up your alley."[71] This club, like many others that were formed in the movement, conducted block parties that offered participants "fun, music, prizes and noted speakers" as a means of encouraging participation in their clean-up campaigns. The neighborhood clean-up campaigns not only targeted garbage and debris as environmentally undesirable but also people like "the pitiful drunks who loiter and block the sidewalks at 47th and Langley."[72] Clubs also wanted to make it clear to their communities that their programs and efforts were supported by other institutions and organizations in the city like the "Health Department, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Psychiatric Institute, the Anti-Saloon League and the Police Department."[73] Neighborhood clubs also had fund-raising campaigns among community members to "continue our campaigns for a cleaner neighborhood and to purchase the necessary equipment in order to perform this task."[74] Money obtained from the fundraisers was used to purchase lids for garbage containers and to seed lawns.

The league encouraged the neighborhood councils to participate not only in its contest but also in a number of citywide clean-up efforts like Mayor Kennelley's drive to "Make Chicago Shine in '49." The league sent out letters to its community leaders in 1949 asking for their participation in the city's Clean Up parade. Participation in the parade was defined by the league not as riding on a float but as "[marching] with brooms, mops, pails and appropriate banners."[75] The league also wanted the block organizers to "[c]ontact land owners as well as tenants and show them the need of improvement techniques" and to impress upon "[t]enants whose land owners are absent...that through cooperative effort, conditions may be rectified."[76]

The Block Beautiful movement frequently conducted public workshops (that included women) in conjunction and in cooperation with other civic organizations to promote conservation efforts. At least nine of the twenty-six speakers and consultants for a community workshop sponsored by the West Side Urban League, West Side Principals' Luncheon Group, and the West Side Ministers' Council were women; and over 90 percent of these were married women. The speakers included "Mrs. Evangeline Fahy, President of the Chicago Principals' Club, Mrs. Eleanor Dungan, Education Director, Commission Human Relations...Mrs. Marianna Bell, National President, Junior League and Teacher Emerson School...[and] Mrs. Tarlease Bell, President of the West Side Community Division, Chicago Urban League."[77] They were all invited to publicly answer the following questions: "What are the basic needs of a community? Who is responsible for developing them?"[78]

Six years into the Block Beautiful movement the league would encourage participation by other communities by communicating that their success in improving environmental conditions in the neighborhoods were due to the involvement of women. In one of their 1951 promotional fliers they would brag that "[t]here is a block which boasts the cleanest alley in the City, because over a period of three years the housewives in each building have assembled regularly twice a week at their back gates, and have swept their alleys. [...] There is a block in which the women residents sold dinners and raised money which was used to fence in vacant lots in their neighborhood, as a means of combating the problem of broken sidewalks which had formerly resulted from the overnight parking of trespassing cars and trucks."[79]

By the end of 1952 there were ninety-seven block clubs and these were chiefly organized by female volunteers.[80] The league's success was based on their decision to "further implement the process of improving communications [among African Americans] by sponsoring tours of the neighborhoods for groups desiring to see first hand what the block clubs were doing."[81] The league continued to emphasize the importance of their fieldworkers who were primarily women. In 1951 the league "decided that the worker should continue to visit in the block. She would busy herself with collecting information about the residents, and search for a person who had status with both the more stable residents and the more mobile group."[82] The league had also concluded from experience by this time that married female residents were effective community organizers. In one report they revealed, "Finally [a] person was found who seemed to possess the qualities needed to act

as a cohesive force. She was the daughter of a property owner who had lived in the block for many years, but was herself a tenant, mother and housewife...She offered her home as a meeting place and later she, the worker and a neighbor distributed notices of a planned meeting. The following week the block was organized."[83]

Environmental efforts and concerns were still at the heart of the Block Beautiful movement in 1952. The league's Community Organization Department efforts during 1952 included the "7th Annual Block Beautiful Contest, tours and demonstrations for outer community groups, parked car removal campaigns, participation in the Mayors' Cleaner Chicago Week [and] the Board of Education's Clean Up Campaign."[84] The Chicago Urban League's 1954 promotional booklet, "We Fight Blight," would reiterate the environmental concerns of the movement by stating that the "League was the first to organize and to use the block groups as a medium to prevent physical decay of neighborhoods." The pamphlet also reported that the league had 175 organized blocks taking part in its 8th annual Block Beautiful contest in 1953 and that it had "constructively influenced 53,000 residents...[because] 450 meetings by organized block groups were held in 1954 [that] worked on problems common to their particular block."[85]

Although at least another two decades would pass before African Americans in Chicago would be able to escape racially segregated communities as a direct consequence of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1968 Fair Housing Act, the 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education* may have been a factor in the lapse of interest in the league's Block Beautiful movement. The 1954 decision signified for many African Americans across the country at this time that a "new day" was coming, bringing potential changes in lives of race-based segregation. The Supreme Court decision created this hope for African Americans because it dismantled the legal justification of a "separate but equal" society, which had hardened over the decades with the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. From the turn of the twentieth century to the 1954 decision, African American communities clearly understood that they were locked into racially segregated housing and communities that were usually environmentally marginalized because of racism. The Block Beautiful contest was part of the Chicago Urban League's block movement, and it was specifically geared to help African Americans optimize the living conditions of their racially segregated and dense living spaces because they felt that they had little hope of escaping—until the 1954 Supreme Court decision. The legal decisions and political climate that followed this decision produced a domino effect, paving the way to previous all-White and environmentally sound communities hitherto unavailable to African American homeowners.

Mrs. Block Beautiful was the embodiment of the mature African American women who tried to salvage and transform the brutal environmental conditions that most African Americans found themselves trapped in because of racist housing policies that had existed for more than half of the twentieth century prior to the opening of more sustainable communities. She was also a metaphor of the importance of self-help in communities that existed in the "promise land," which all too frequently guaranteed morbid consequences for both adults and children. The "land of hope" to which Southern African American migrants fled did provide

them with access to greater economic prosperity than they could have obtained from the land of Dixie, but the trade-off for this prosperity was an unexpected environmental disenfranchisement that they had rarely faced in the South. Rather than capitulate to these conditions, the African American community relied on women like Mrs. Block Beautiful to educate and guide their families and neighbors on how to create beauty and health in the beastly and oftentimes deadly urban ghettos of the North.

Notes

1 Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago, The Making of a Negro Ghetto*, 1890–1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 26.

2 Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983, 1998), 3.

3 Ibid., 5.

4 Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865–1954* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield/Lexington Books, 2005), 148. This monograph provides a more detailed description of the environmental impacts of forced segregation on the African American community.

5 Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 110.

6 Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Voices* (New York: Thunder Mouth Press, 1941), 103.

7 John H. Mims, "How One Neighborhood Solved Its Problems," n.d., Chicago Urban League Papers (CUL), Vivian Harsh Collection.

8 Interoffice Memorandum to Alva B. Maxey from Frayser Lane. July 26, 1954, CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

9 Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight*, 127.

[10] Ibid., 121. These clubs also focused "on raising the cultural, intellectual and educational status of black women."

[11] Interoffice Memorandum to Alva B. Maxey from Frayser Lane. July 26, 1954, CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[12] "A Plan for Community Organization by Dusable District." Chicago Urban League Archives, Vivian Harsh Collection, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Voices*, 106–107.

[15] Chicago Urban League, First Annual Report 1916, p. 9. For a more in-depth history of the Chicago Urban League's block movement, read Sylvia Hood Washington's monograph, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865–1954* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004).

[16] "Block Clubs", n.d., CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[17] Ibid.

[18] "20th Annual Report, 1936," CUL Papers, University of Illinois, Special Collections.

[19] "Brief Summary of Work of Chicago Urban League, March 1–August 1, 1917," CUL Papers, University of Illinois, Special Collections.

[20] "10th Annual Report, 1926," CUL Papers, University of Illinois, Special Collections.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "Block Clubs" n.d., CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[25] The league's Community Organization Department had several names during its earlier existence and prior to the 1940s was called the Civic Improvement Department.

[26] "Civic Improvement Department Report, January 1938 " CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Junior Woman's Auxiliary's Constitution, Chicago Urban League Archives, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[38] "What the Urban League Means to Chicago," 1938 Radio Interview by Irene McCoy Gaines and Earl B. Dickerson, Irene McCoy Gaines Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

[39] Cheryl Johnson-Odim, "Irene McCoy Gaines" in *Women Building Chicago, 1790–1990: A Biographical Dictionary*, eds., Rima Lunin Schultz and Adele Hast (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 294.

[40] Ibid.

[41] The Chicago and Northern District Association of Colored Women, "Story of the Year, 1937–1938," Chicago Historical Society (CHS).

[42] Ibid.

[43] "What the Urban League Means to Chicago," 1938 Radio Interview by Irene McCoy Gaines and Earl B. Dickerson, Irene McCoy Gaines Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

[44] "Old Settlers Who's Who," in Intercollegiate Workbook (Chicago 1927), 127.

[45] "Joanna Cecilia Snowden," *Who's Who in Colored America 1941–44*, 476; "Joanna Cecilia Snowden," *Who's Who in Colored America 1933–1937*, 485; "Joanna Cecilia Snowden," *Who's Who in Colored America 1930–1932*, 396; 1927 Intercollegiate Workbook, 120.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] "Rachel R. Ridley Obituary," *Chicago Tribune*, May 5, 1986, and "Rachel R. Ridley" Bethel New Life Papers, Chicago Public Library. Ridley served as the director of the Human Relations Commission from 1980 to 1985.

[49] "Rachel R. Ridley" Bethel New Life Papers, Chicago Public Library. Ridley served as the director of the Human Relations Commission from 1980 to 1985.

[50] Ibid.

51 Ibid.

[52] Chicago Urban League Farewell Program Booklet for Rachel Ridley, August 30, 1952, CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[53] Lillian Steele Proctor, *A Case Study of Thirty Superior Colored Children in Washington, DC*, Master Thesis, University of Chicago, 1929.

[54] Mary Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans* (New York: Friendship Press, 1936), 53–62.

[55] Edith Abbott, *Twenty-one Years of University Education for Social Service*, 1920–1941 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

[56] 34th Annual Report, 1950, February 7, 1951.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] 34th Annual Report, 1950, February 7, 1951.

[61] "Block Clubs" essay, CUL, n.d.

[62] "West Side Slums Fire Claims Four," *Chicago Bee*, January 26, 1947.

[63] "So. Side Wars on Rats," *Chicago Bee*, June 22, 1947.

[64] "Wendell Elbert Green," *Who's Who in Colored America 1950*, 224.

[65] "Loraine R. Green," *1927 Intercollegiate Wonder Book*, 117.

[66] Ibid and research notes from senior historian, Anne Knupfer.

[67] 1950 Annual Block Beautiful Contest Awards Program Booklet, CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[68] "A Sight Worth Seeing" Chicago Urban League, 1951, CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[69] "Introduction to the Description of the Five Negro Neighborhoods", n.d., CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[70] "A Plan for Community Organization by Dusable District." CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[71] "The Langley Avenue Neighborhood Club announces Judgment Day has Come!" CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Urban League Letter, May 21, 1953. Chicago Urban League Archives, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[75] Urban League Letter to community leaders from Frayser T. Lane, April 5, 1949. Chicago Urban League Archives, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[76] "Organizing Neighborhood and Community Councils, Summary and Conclusions," n.d., Chicago Urban League Archives, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[77] "What are Basic Needs of a Good Community," CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[78] Ibid.

[79] "A Sight Worth Seeing," Chicago Urban League, 1951, CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[80] 1952 COD (Community Organization Department) Report , p. 2. CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] "We Fight Blight," 1954, CUL Papers, Vivian Harsh Collection.

Preserving African American Rural Property: An Assessment of Intergenerational Values Toward Land

Edward "Jerry" Pennick
Director of the Land Assistance Fund
Federation of Southern Cooperatives / Land Assistance Fund

Heather Gray
Director of Communications
Federation of Southern Cooperatives / Land Assistance Fund

Miessha N. Thomas, Attorney
Director of Communications
Federation of Southern Cooperatives / Land Assistance Fund

Introduction

African American Landownership in the Southeast: An Historical Overview

Land utilization, ownership, and retention have been resonant issues throughout African American history, particularly in the South. From the mid to late nineteenth century, it was clear that Black self-sufficiency and independence were mired in a delicate balancing act of transitioning Blacks from slavery to self-sufficiency while preventing increased tensions between North and South following the Civil War. Landownership for Blacks, though, was not a priority in this balancing act. However, despite the social and political implications of a national land redistribution agenda, there were several attempts to reallocate land to Blacks. The most notable of land redistribution efforts was General W. T. Sherman's Field Order 15. Under Field Order 15, abandoned or confiscated lands were subdivided, typically in forty-acre tracts, from Georgia to South Carolina and the Sea Islands, and redistributed to former slaves. The order provided forty thousand Blacks with possessory titles to 485,000 acres of land on the Sea Islands (Mittal and Powell 2000; Bentley 1955).[1]

On March 3, 1865, Congress created the Freedmen's Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands ("the Bureau") (Bentley 1955), which oversaw the provision of clothing, fuel, and other items to newly freed Blacks, and the management of abandoned lands. Abandoned lands were subdivided into forty-acre lots and distributed to every male refugee or freedman. The lots were leased to freedmen with a three-year option to purchase (Bentley 1955).

The potential for mass land redistribution under the Bureau was stifled under President Andrew Johnson's administration. On May 29, 1865, President Johnson granted pardons to "rebel" white landowners through the Amnesty Proclamation, restoring their property rights (Bentley 1955). With the acreage controlled by the Bureau diminishing under the Proclamation, there were too few properties to divide among the 4 million freedmen and their families (Marable 1979).

Although the federal government failed to provide large-scale land redistribution as expected, the development of a strong land base became "an ideological imperative of Black thought by the 1890s" (*The Emergency Land Fund 1980*). Agricultural and mechanical colleges for Blacks emerged, and there was a progressive increase in land owned by Blacks in the South over the next thirty years (Table 1.1).[2] Black-owned land was concentrated in the "Black Belt," which included Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The increase in Black landownership was due also to increased profitability of farming cotton.[3]

Table 1.1 Increase in Black-Owned Farmland, United States, 1875–1910 (Young 1980).

Year	Land Owned (Acres)	% Increase
1875	3 million	–
1890	8 million	62.5%
1900	12 million	33.33%
1910	15 million	20.0%

Early Twentieth Century and the Decline of Black Rural Landownership: The Great Migration (1916–1930)

Black farmland ownership reached its peak in 1910 with 15 million acres (Gilbert, et. al. 2002:56–62).[4] However, with the onset of the World War I, and the harsh economic, social, and political climate of the South, Black landownership suffered a drastic decline that would continue into the twenty-first century.

Between 1916 and 1930, the Black Southern community experienced the Great Migration. Out-migration from the South has been ongoing since the late nineteenth century, yet the rate of out-migration by Blacks was never as great as it was during the early twentieth century. The Great Migration was the largest relocation of Blacks from the rural South to Southern urban centers, and from Southern urban centers to cities in the Northern and Western regions of the United States. During this time, more than one million Blacks left the South (Marks 1989:33)[5] (Table 1.2). Between 1940 and 1950, a net of more than 1.8 million non-white persons, or 42 percent of the Southern non-white population, participated in out-migration (Bowles 1966). Further, during this decade, the rate of out-migration rose to 65 percent for non-white youth between the ages of fifteen and nineteen (McGee and Boone 1977:8–11). Many Blacks participated in the Great Migration in search of economic equality and social justice. The three primary forces inducing Blacks to migrate were as follows:

1. The invasion of the boll weevil that destroyed cotton crops and forced thousands of farm families and agricultural laborers out of agriculture and into Southern cities
2. Disenfranchisement through Jim Crow legislation
3. Employment opportunities in the industrialized North during World Wars I and II (Marks 1989:33)

Table 1.2. Black Population in Rural Areas of the South, % (Pogue 979:28)

Year	% Rural Population
1900	77%
1960	10.3%
1970	9.1%
1974	8.0%

There is some correlation between the Great Migration and Black land loss. Between 1920 and 1930, when the rate of out-migration began to escalate, Black landownership had declined by 2.7 million acres, a loss of 270,000 acres per year (*Social and Economic Status of Black Population in the United States 1974*).

The Great Migration also contributed to the declining population of young, employable Black people in the rural South (*Socioeconomic Characteristics of Growing and Declining Non-metropolitan Counties*, 1970:10). Heavy migration of Black youth to urban centers was due primarily to "insufficient job opportunities on farms to absorb the maturing Black youth population" (*Socioeconomic Characteristics of Growing and Declining Non-metropolitan Counties*, 1970:11). The 1970 USDA Economic Research Service Agriculture Economic Report found that non-metropolitan counties affected by out-migration found a shortage of residents in the fifteen- to forty-five-year age group as compared with other rural counties (*Socioeconomic Characteristics of Growing and Declining Non-metropolitan Counties*, 1970:10), resulting in minority rural populations composed primarily of young children and the elderly. Such counties are said to have a high *dependence ratio* (Coughlin 1980:9-11; Young 1980:10). This report also found that Blacks in rural counties with declining populations had the highest dependence ratio (Salamon 1979:167). As a result, out-migration from the rural South by young Blacks "further limited the human and economic resources in the black community" (McGee and Boone 1977:8–11).

The New Deal

Known for its unprecedented number of reforms addressing the catastrophic effects of the Great Depression, New Deal legislation also targeted farmers (New Deal Farm Laws).[6] Although the federal government developed agricultural policy reforms and subsidy programs designed to assist farmers, their impact on sustained Black landownership and the Black farm labor population was minimal at best. The impact of federal agricultural policy is summarized in the following statement:

The traditional underlying flaw of all agricultural subsidy programs is that they subsidize ownership of the land rather than labor upon it. The small black farmer in the South is critically affected by the substitution of capital for labor in agriculture, a substitution encouraged and exacerbated by more than a generation of government subsidies. (McDougall, 1984:173–74)

There were some successes. The Resettlement Program (1934) was designed to relocate Southern farm families from worn-out lands to better farmlands that, for one reason or another, were not in production (Salamon 1979:167). Under this program, the federal government purchased large Southern plantations that were in default, subdivided them into smaller farm operations, and sold them to farmers or farm tenants on long-term, low-interest loans (McGee and Boone 1977:8–11). Program participants were required to enter into a lease-purchase agreement, which provided for an option to buy after the five-year rental "trial" period, at which point successful program participants were offered forty-year mortgages at 3 percent interest. There were 141 agricultural resettlement projects between 1934 and 1943, thirteen of which were reserved exclusively for Blacks, and nineteen scattered farm projects that involved a substantial number of Blacks (Salamon 1979:168). The average size plot ranged from 60–100 acres (Salamon 1979:170). Lester Salamon's study on resettlement communities found that land retention and succession among Black participants through this program was high (Salamon 1979:170).[7]

WWII, Post–Civil Rights, and Reverse Migration of the 1970s

The Depression abated Black out-migration, but World War II set it in motion again, with new job opportunities in the industrial labor market (McGee and Boone 1977:8–11). In *The Land Question in Historical Perspective: The Economics of Poverty in the Blackbelt South, 1865–1920*, Manning Marable cited World War II as "the beginning of the long and tragic decline of Black agriculture and land tenure in the South" (Marable 1979). From 1940 to 1960, more than 3 million Blacks migrated to Northern and Western urban centers (Marable 1979). From 1960 to 1970, an additional 1.4 million left the South (Marable 1979).

During the 1960s, the civil rights movement and anti-poverty programs revived a consciousness of the decline of Black landownership. With the support of churches, advocacy organizations, and private foundations, Black farming cooperatives were formed across the South to assist small-scale Black farmers. In 1967, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC) was founded to participate in this movement by assisting families and rural communities in establishing farming cooperatives and credit unions, and working to secure land owned by Blacks throughout the Southeast.

This consciousness of the decline of Black landownership continued into the 1970s. Intellectual works on land loss and its implications in the Black community from Robert S. Browne, Manning Marable, Leo McGee, Robert Boone, and other scholars thrived during this period. The heightened consciousness of this issue was also an impetus for the formation of the Emergency Land Fund (ELF). Established in 1973 by Robert S. Browne, ELF was organized to address the issue of Black land

loss (*Significant Dates on Black Land Loss*). Comprised of young, Black lawyers and community activists, ELF assisted Black rural landowners through education on land-loss issues, legal representation, research, and advocacy.

Blacks also started returning to the South during the 1970s, in a trend called *reverse Black migration*. From 1970 to 1974, the volume of Black out-migration declined, and the number of Blacks returning to the South increased (Pogue 1979:29). Most Blacks who returned to the South were educated, professional, or skilled workers, seeking opportunities in professional careers, politics, and business (Pogue 1979:30). However, they did not return to rural communities, nor purchase large quantities of farmland (Pogue 1979:30).[8]

With the expansion of career and employment options, as well as opportunities to become more economically mobile, farming became a less viable career option for Blacks. Thus, rural land acquisition and retention became less desirable (*The Emergency Land Fund 1980*:25). In an interview with a native Alabamian relocating to the South, he replied that "[farming] was a good life—while it lasted... The system killed my old man and he didn't reap nothing for it. I want to die in peace" (Young 1980).

Current Trends

There have been past predictions that Blacks would be a landless population by the twenty-first century. Though this scenario has not come to pass, Black land loss still continues. Currently, Blacks own 7.8 million acres of rural land (*1999 Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership*). Sixty percent (60%) of it is not used for agricultural production (*1999 Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership*). While rural land owned by Blacks represents less than 1 percent of all privately owned rural land, it is valued at $14 billion (*1999 Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership*). The dramatic loss of Black land during the twentieth century has been attributed to the following factors:

1. Difficulty for Blacks to secure agricultural loans or other financing and loans (Pennick and Gray 2003:1)
2. The out-migration of young Blacks from rural communities and farms
3. Marginal success experienced by small-scale, Black farmers
4. Inequities in participation in federal farm programs experienced by Blacks
5. Failure of Blacks to develop estate plans
6. Heir-property ownership, tax sales, and partition sales
7. The "chicanery perpetrated under unscrupulous lawyers, land speculators, and county officials" (McGee and Boone 1979)

Despite the efforts of small-farm advocates, policy makers, and land-based centers and organizations, the perception of rural landownership as a valuable asset in the Black community has waned since the 1960s and 1970s. Further, the drastic loss of Black rural land is tied in part to heir-property ownership.[9] The motivation of Black landowners in the late 19th and early to mid 20th centuries for creating heir property was twofold:

1. To pass on an asset their children could use (not sell) to become financially secure
2. To tie up ownership in the land through their descendants so that it could not be taken from them (Pennick and Gray 2003)

However, the expectation that heir property would be a means of securing family ownership of land has, in many cases, turned out to be a precursor to land loss (Pennick and Gray 2003).[10]

Women

Until the U.S. Agriculture Census recently expanded its purview, the status of female farmers and rural landowners was not tracked (Carlton-LaNey 1992:517). But the 2002 preliminary agricultural census found 6,690 Black female farmers, which is 22 percent of all Black farmers in the United States. Of this, 2,893 are *principal operators* (2002 Census of Agriculture).[11]

Many Black women who are farmers or reside on farmland are widowed and elderly (*Risk Management Survey of African-American Farmers: Preliminary Findings 2000*). A surviving spouse of a deceased landowner will typically receive or take a share in an estate under state intestacy law, as a spousal elective share, or as a beneficiary of an estate plan (i.e., will). Thus, in instances where land is not acquired through purchase, women acquire land through their spousal status.

The Continued Decline of Black Rural Landownership in the South

During the twentieth century, Blacks lost 55 percent of their rural land base. The greatest rate of decline can be found between 1959 and 1964, where land was being lost at an annual rate of 330,000 acres (Coughlin, 1980; Young 1980:9–11). Yet, despite its drastic decline, land "remains the single greatest economic and cultural resource [in the black community]" (Morris 1981:200–210).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, land-based organizations like the Emergency Land Fund, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation, and the Land Loss Prevention Project provided legal-education outreach, worked with local attorneys, and provided technical assistance to not only increase the profits of minority and limited-resource farmers, but also to encourage the security of landownership for these farming and non-farming rural landowners. By now, many of the benefactors of such assistance have become the elders in their families, and a new generation of decision makers and potential successors to their farm operations and land is emerging. With the coming of this new generation of landowners, the issue of sustained land ownership has resurfaced, and land-based organizations and rural advocates must target this new group of rural landowners for outreach and assistance.

Attitudes toward Black Landownership

There are few studies that have assessed Blacks' attitudes toward rural landownership across different age groups. In the late 1970s, scholars Leo

McGee and Robert Boone conducted a study that explored the attitudes of Black landowners in select counties in Tennessee and their perceptions of institutional practices associated with land transfers, as well as their perceptions of the trends of Black landownership in Tennessee. This study found that, generally, attitudes toward rural landownership were similar across the generations represented in the study. The 23–28 age group recognized landownership as being "important to one's self image" (McGee and Boone 1979: 61), yet also expressed less desire to purchase land than other age groups. Similarly, those in the 55+ age group stated that they felt landownership was more fulfilling than renting. Lastly, the female participants in this study were found more likely to show a greater concern for rural land retention than males (McGee and Boone 1979).

Methods and Procedure

Case Study Rationale

Black-owned land is being lost at a steady rate, yet there has not been a systematic consideration of the dynamics within the rural Black family and its relationship to sustained landownership. Because the face of the Black landowner will change over the next twenty years to being younger and female, it is imperative to understand young, Black women's attitudes toward landownership and farming because it is they who will have to be targeted by those land-based organizations and farm advocates.

This preliminary study attempts to lay the foundation for a comprehensive study on attitudes toward landownership across age groups and genders. The primary goal will be to better understand these attitudes and how they can impact the future of African American landownership in America. Secondarily, the study will suggest strategies for addressing the needs of these "new" landowners while there is the opportunity to prevent problems in the future that would further decrease the land base of the African American community.

Methodology

The methodology for this preliminary study was the focus group. Focus groups are best used for exploration or investigation. Often a major part of our research goal is to learn more about the range of opinions or experiences that people have. Focus groups have a strong advantage here because "the interaction in the group can provide an explicit basis for exploring the issue" (Simon 1999:17).

The geographic area of the participants was Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina. Fourteen (14) individuals participated in the focus groups. Federation staff selected participants from their respective states who met the following criteria:

1. Landowners. Heir-property landowners and non-heir-property landowners. Youth participants had to be landowners and/or successors to land.
2. Gender. There had to be an even distribution of men and women.
3. Age. There had to be an even distribution of participants from specific age ranges—youth (15–30), middle age (31–55), and older (56+).

The two independent variables considered for purposes of this study were gender and age. There was a total of five (5) focus-group sessions:

Session One	Session Two
Heir-property owners (N= 8)	Middle-aged/older males (N= 6; age 45–65)
Non-heir-property owners (N= 6)	Middle-aged/older females (N= 5; age 43–72)
	Youth[12] (N= 3; age 15–27)

There was one moderator per focus group. The same discussion topics were raised within each sub-group. All focus-group sessions were recorded and transcribed. For analysis, a grid of coded responses was developed from the transcriptions.

For the purposes of this study, the findings from the second-session focus groups—middle-aged/older males, middle-aged/older females, and youth—will be discussed.

Description of Focus-Group Participants

There were a total of fourteen (14) participants in the focus group, all from Mississippi (N=4), Alabama (N=5), and South Carolina (N=5). Other demographic information is as follows:

Gender:
Males (N=6) 43%
Females (N=8) 57%

Age:
15–30 (N=3) 21%
31–55 (N=6) 43%
56+ (N=5) 36%

Landownership:
Heir property (N=6) 43%
Non-heir property (N=8) 57%

Consider Yourself a Farmer:
Yes (N=9) 64%
No (N=5) 36%

Highest Level of Education:
Completed grade school / middle school (N=2) 14%
Attended/graduated from high school (N=6) 43%
Attended/graduated from college (N=4) 29%
Attended/graduated from graduate school (N=2) 14%

Will (or other estate plan):
Have will (N=5) 36%
Do not have will (N=9) 64%

Results

The following are findings from the focus groups of (1) middle-aged/older women, (2) middle-aged/older men, and (3) young females.

Middle-Aged/Older Women: View of Success and Wealth

All of the women who participated in this focus group were landowners. Unlike the other sub-groups, the women's view of success was not so much focused on land and asset accumulation as it was on emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Contentment and good stewardship were also mentioned in this focus group as factors of success.

- *"Success to me...is having peace of mind, joy, and learning to be content."*
- *"If you got a job, family, and friends that you love...[that is] success."*
- *"Success is to me making it day by day in a stress-free world and the love of my family and friends and I can in turn love them."*
- *"God is success and wealth."*

However, when the discussion shifted to the issue of financial stability, the themes of land acquisition and ownership were drawn into the conversation. Some women expressed a desire to acquire more land. One woman stated that she wanted to become a farmer. One woman defined financial stability as the ability to pay her bills without bouncing a check.

The connection between financial stability and relationships was also made in their discussion. One woman expressed her desire for another husband, an able-bodied husband, to help out with her land. Another woman shared how her mother was her role model and how her faith in God motivates her to do her best so that she can represent both God and mother well.

The discussion then shifted to their children and their expectations of them, at which point the themes of land acquisition and ownership were left behind. The women expressed their desire for their children to be self-sufficient, to excel in education so they could get a "good job," and to be in a position to take care of their parents should the need arise. The women also discussed the role of men and women as helpmates for each other.

The women were then asked about their perceptions of their children's attitudes about landownership. One woman discussed the difficulty of acquiring land in terms of its availability and affordability. In discussing the succession of the land they own, most of the women talked about the differences in maturity level and reliability of their children. One woman stated that she did have a son who loved rural life and the land. One woman talked about the challenges of being a co-owner of heir property where there are many interests, and of trying to take proactive steps in doing things with the land.

Middle-Aged/Older Women: Opinions about Future and Changing Attitudes

The women pointed out that their attitude toward landownership has changed as they have gotten older.

- *"When I was much younger, I wasn't thinking about any land."*

There was also discussion about how, in the past, Black people were put off the land when they voted and how Black people from their communities or surrounding communities migrated off the land.

Middle-Aged/Older Women: Connection between Land and Political Empowerment/ Civic Involvement

No clear connection between landownership and participation in local and/ or national politics was made in the discussion among the women. Nor were any distinctions made between landowners and non-landowners and their awareness and involvement in local politics. One woman, who works at her county's tax assessor's office, stated that most of the landowners in her county are absentee landowners, so they do not vote at local elections.

- *"Even during the [civil rights] movement, some of them did not participate [in the electoral process], and they had the land."*

While the women were not inclined to make a distinct connection between land and civic/electoral responsibilities, it was revealed in their discussion that they were well aware that landownership played an important role in providing a place for people to live when they were forced off the land for voting in the 1960s. For example, one participant said that when people in her community were losing their homes because they voted, she and others were constantly exploring ways to house them on their own land. Also, two of the focus-group participants had held political office.

Middle-Aged/Older Women: Spousal Relationships

The women recognized the importance of their role in the family and in passing on knowledge to the next generation. Yet, again, there was little to no mention of land acquisition, ownership, or succession.

- *"They say women do teach you everything you need to know...It is good to have a man in the house. Know that in most black families, though, the woman has really carried the weight."*

Middle-Aged/Older Men: View of Success and Wealth

Like the women, the men had a holistic view of success as achieving spiritual, emotional, and financial well-being. However, the men connected land acquisition, landownership, and financial stability to success more than the women did. One man viewed success as the ability to earn an income to provide for yourself and for your family. Unlike the women, though, some of the men did not think that just being able to pay your bills was enough. One man stated that a man should strive to have more than just his needs satisfied; he should have a little extra to enjoy life.

- *"When you got land, you got a home."*
- *I view success as being able to accomplish and achieve the necessities of life for the whole man—spiritually, emotionally, and financially."*
- *"A lot of people make big money on the farm and be successful on the farm. People can be successful on their jobs. But then a job can go away tomorrow. They may close, but if you got some land, the land won't close. Your land will be right here."*

Some men believed that while landownership can play a role in success, it is not *necessary* to achieving success. They did make a correlation between land and the ability to achieve financial stability and create options, which one man likened to power. Further, these men also stated that landownership seemed to be futile without knowing how to use the land, its value, and how to make it work for you.

- *"[T]he land itself...doesn't make you successful, but it...give[s] you more options or things that you can do, and it equates [with] power."*
- *"[W]hen we start looking at success, let's stop looking at what we owned or how much we possessed. It is what we did with what we owned and what we will be able to pass on."*
- *"We need something that is built to last."*

Landownership was also tied to survivability—being able to grow your own food. One man expressed that being able to accumulate enough money to own a piece of land was "more successful than a car and a job." And still, another man looked at success in terms of what we can pass on to the next generation—not what is accumulated during life, but what remains after death.

Middle-Aged/Older Men: Opinions about Future and Changing Attitudes

Passing on knowledge in addition to land appeared important to the men. The men focused on their children. One man stated that his son had no knowledge and no will to be taught about how to make land work for him. Another man stated that it is equally important for the children to listen and want to learn as to have someone there to show them and teach them about land.

- *"[O]ne of the biggest parts of passing on ownership is passing on knowledge that we have acquired so that they don't have to make the same mistake."*
- *"If you take a young, twenty-four-year-old man right now that has never been experienced with [farming] that you could give ten acres of land out there with tractors and everything and he still could not do what he needs to do with it."*
- *"...if we can just look at the land issue as an anchor we can use to hold them together."*

Another man made a connection between the current job trend and the number of Blacks who farm or own land. He mentioned that when he was growing up, farming was the major source of income in the Black community. As he moved into the '60s, most people were getting industrial or office jobs. This shift thwarted the passing of information on farming and landownership to the next generation.

- *"I would say in the last forty years they haven't really been taught to operate a farm and to keep it running."*

Just as the women spoke on how Black people had been put off their land, the men discussed the inequities in farming that can affect one's desire to continue farming and, thus, one's desire to pass on information about landownership and land use. Specific mention was made of the Black farmers' (*Pigford v. Veneman*) class-action suit, which settled in 1997 and confirmed the struggles and discrimination faced by Black farmers.

- *"You making these hardships for me. You making it so hard, I can't survive on my land. You making my land useless to me."*

As far as passing down information on the value of landownership, one man stated that he wants his children to acquire land for themselves because only then can they appreciate what they have. He also mentioned that most young men are not thinking about valuing land. He stressed setting examples in addition to talking with young people. One man expressed that the youth of today do not know basic survival skills, such as how to get their own food (fishing and hunting). Further, another stated that because the land was synonymous with hard, year-to-year work with no vacation, families left the land. Most men agreed that their children are not ready to come back to the land. One man did say that one of his children, though living away from the land, is still connected to it.

- *"Right now, young people don't look at the land as being valuable or have any assets to it whatsoever."*
- *"[R]ight now I don't see none of my children taking the time to learn more. I have offered them."*
- *"The average young man—twenty-one to thirty-five—most of them do good to own a home. They are not thinking about...knowing the value of land. You have to set examples."*

The men recognized that the profitability of farming could potentially motivate children to return to the land. If farming can be seen as a lucrative means to make a life for oneself and to be financially stable, then it would increase the chance of children coming back to the land.

- *"If the best we can do is struggle...making off this little farm, then ain't no hope for our children."*

Middle-Aged/Older Men: Connection between Land and Political Empowerment/ Civic Involvement

The men viewed being a landowner as an opportunity for more civic involvement.

- *"Being a landowner, having your own property, your own house, you can afford to be more outspoken."*
- *"Socially, ...[landownership] provides more freedom for you."*

Middle-Aged/Older Men: Value of Land

The men discussed their desire to hold on to their land and to continue farming in spite of the struggles. One man opted not to farm the heir property in his family, but instead chose to acquire his own land, stating that had he chosen to use the heir property, he "would not appreciate it as much" as the land he acquired himself.

Like the women's group, the men talked about the difficulty of acquiring land, including obtaining financing ("it is easier to buy a car than land"). The men spoke more of the inequities of the system—USDA, private lenders, etc.—and its contribution to the challenges of owning and farming land.

The men also talked about society's need for convenience and how it can make it hard for youth to return to the land.

Middle-Aged/Older Men

There was a discussion on the inequities between Blacks and whites in terms of access to resources. One man attributed the difficulty in accessing resources to the problem of individuals not being able to manage their assets. Some attributed inequities in the system to the loss of land.

- *"All black people haven't lost their land because of negligence and lack of management skills and abilities."*
- *"You will get more prosperous based on the way you control your money, your business, or control your assets. We are not doing a great job controlling our money."*

Middle-Aged/Older Men: Spousal Relationships

The men also talked about women and relationships. They seemed to think that the women were less inclined to encourage their children to return to the land. One man expressed the need to have spouses more involved with the day-to-day management of the land. The men also believed that it was the woman or mother who has the most influence on the children's lives, and so it is she who needs to be educated with the goal of her loving the land, and then that love can be passed on to the children. One man did point out that a parent's influence, whether mother or father, is key.

Young Females: View of Success and Wealth

The youth's view of success was focused on ownership and being debt free, which ties well into the other groups' desire for self-sufficiency for their children. The youth group's view of their peers was that they were more focused on acquiring material possessions than on understanding what it means to be financially stable and independent.

The youth identified a desire among their peers to leave rural towns and head for big cities, without any thought of land and ownership. The lone youth from the city, though desiring to remain in the city, also expressed a desire to acquire land and to use the skills she acquired in college and graduate school to assist small farmers. These goals likely stem from her being one generation removed from farming and her attendance at an agricultural school.

Seeing and hearing the struggles of past generations also seemed to elicit an appreciation for what those generations have acquired, which seems to contradict what the groups stated about people who leave the farm because of the struggle to acquire/keep/work the land.

The discussion shifted to the agriculture-school experience. The youth who came from and are still in agriculture school expressed disappointment that the school does not teach farming techniques, how to use land, or how to grow edible foods. The agriculture school is more focused on classroom learning and research, and is not hands-on.

The topic of agriculture schools was also briefly touched on in the men's group, where one of the gentlemen said, "Even if [the youth] went to an agriculture school, they are not teaching them exactly about farming."

Young Females: Opinions about Future and Changing Attitudes

The youth expressed differing views on the future and changing attitudes. This was reflected in the immediate desire to achieve skills, such as in computer science, while recognizing that attitudes toward landownership are likely to change and have more priority later in life. Interestingly, the youth were aware of the attitudes of their peers regarding landownership—that landownership was generally not appreciated—and recognized that education on the value of land was needed.

- *"Right now, I want to go into computers and...when I get older I want to own my own land."*
- *We have to have [youth] understand that owning your own land is success."*

The importance of grandparents and their teaching was also evident. One participant said, regarding her grandmother, "She had a harder day...we are a different generation now, so we've got more than they did back in the day." Another participant responded, "But, do you understand that your grandmother did that to make you more appreciative of what you have?" "Yes," was the response. "She needed to show you," the participant continued, "not just to tell you. Nowadays you have to prove to a youngster rather than tell them."

Young Females: Connection between Land and Political Empowerment/Civic Involvement

The youth spoke more about empowerment generally, and the connection of landownership to power. One youth noted that while ownership of land or a home seems to be a positive trend within the Black community, there are still some who are expecting it to be given to them (i.e., "I did not get my forty acres and a mule.") Among the youth in this group, self-sufficiency, self-motivation, and the drive to get what you want are of central importance.

With a strong belief in the connection between landownership and power, the youth expressed disappointment in how people are so quick to sell their land for less than it is worth. Further, as for the ones who have received a sizable amount of money for their land, they do not know how to properly manage that money, and thus not only lose their land but also lose the money they received from its sale.

The youth also talked about what they referred to as the "Jones Syndrome" as a way to entice individuals to purchase and/or hold on to their land. The Jones Syndrome is where you teach by example. This goes back to a common theme in all the groups' discussions: Individuals are more apt to keep land and/or acquire more land and use it if they can see the benefits of doing so.

- *"[Y]ou own land [and] you have power."*

Young Females: How Land Is Valued

Unlike the older group participants, the youth viewed land from less of an emotional and cultural perspective and more from a financial perspective. For example, one of the young farmers expressed a desire to expand her financial opportunities by exploring other markets. She wanted to consider adding more corporate markets.

All three of the participants in this group expressed interest in purchasing land. Another of the youth expressed the desire to develop skills to help small farmers.

- *"I plan on helping the small farmer. [...] I want to help the small farmer with their produce. I know there is a problem with marketing in small areas such as economically depressed counties."*

Land was also viewed as a place you can go back to after you are older and have "lived the fast life." Lack of opportunity was also cited as a reason for their peers wanting to leave their hometowns. One youth expressed that young folks need to find their own way, which supports the trend of individuals leaving the land, farm, or rural hometown to find their place in the world, then returning to the home site when they are more settled or are ready to leave the "fast life."

The group stated that a lot of young people do not care about landownership. One of the youth explained that the value of land is not with the youth because parents are not teaching their kids about how valuable it is. Working the land, experiencing what can be done with land, and seeing its financial benefits would make young folks more appreciative of owning land.

- *"When I think of land, I think of responsibility and ownership because when you own your own land you have a sense of peace. You can go on your land when you get old and wrinkly. You can go on your land and lay back and do nothing."*
- *"[P]arents forget to tell [their children] how important land is."*
- *"I just feel if somebody just talk and tell them about [land] and they will understand."*
- *"[The] message of needing to own your own home or own land has really not been taught."*

Conclusion

*(**the term "elder" is used to encompass the men and women sub-groups)*

Summary of Findings

- All of the groups valued landownership and viewed it as essential to building wealth and achieving economic and political independence.
- Compared to that of the youth, the older generation's value of landownership appears to go far beyond economics. They view land as a source of power, acceptance, and as a means to maintain a connection to past generations. The older generation appeared to think that the values they hold toward land are being lost; they blame themselves as well as society for this loss.
- The men were primarily concerned about being able to sustain their land and the production on the land. They repeatedly mentioned the lack of support and interest from their children—and from the younger generation generally—in continuing the farming tradition.
- The older generation, particularly the men, blame themselves for encouraging youth to leave the land and take advantage of "integration." There is a general feeling that they could have done more to teach the value of owning land, even to those who have jobs away from the land. They also blame society, which prohibited Black landowners from enjoying the economic benefits of landownership, thereby preventing them from setting a positive example for their children.
- In contrast to the men, the women expressed concern about their children or grandchildren's having good jobs and being "normal" and responsible. There was no expression of concern that their children were not helping on the farm.
- Compared to their elders, the younger participants appeared to view land as an opportunity, even in spite of the oral history of the struggle on the land. They emphasized the need to learn more about how they can economically benefit from landownership. The intrinsic value of land, therefore, was not enough to encourage them to want to stay on the land.

- The men recognized the importance of the role women play in teaching the children. Some of the men felt that they did not receive adequate support from their wives in transferring knowledge and values as they relate to land. It was pointed out, however, that this could be due to the fact that they do not involve their wives in the operation of the land, nor in the decision-making process when it to comes to the land.

Interestingly, all of the three groups—particularly the men and the youth—expressed concerns about the Black youth's lack of interest in landownership and in understanding the value of land. There was also a view that the youth are largely "material" driven, wanting immediate gratification rather than understanding the concept of long-term investments and asset building.

Analysis of Findings

In the late 1970s, a similar study was conducted by McGee and Boone to assess the intergenerational differences of attitudes toward Black rural landownership. In our preliminary study, as with the McGee and Boone study, we found some differences in the youth category. While the youth interviewed in the 1970s study recognized and expressed the connection of landownership to identity, the youth participants in our study appeared to view land more as a financial opportunity. Further, the youth participants also expressed a desire to acquire land, and considered it a priority at some point in their lives, which also contrasts with the McGee-Boone study. Another contrast to the 1970s study was that the women seemed to be less concerned about landownership than the men.

Societal changes since the 1960s, such as affirmative action and integration, have likely created exceptional challenges to landowners. For example, the participants in the focus group mentioned that land had served as a unifying force in the past, but they seemed to think that that has now changed.

There is some indication that while there have been changes in policies and statutes ending the repressive Jim Crow laws, the rural South and the agriculture-system area might not have kept pace with these changes. The *Pigford v. Veneman* lawsuit mentioned by the focus-group participants and the ongoing discrimination faced by Black farmers are cases in point. Discrimination presents another challenge to Black farmers as they attempt to attract their children to maintain the family's land.

The men, women, and youth subgroups were concerned about what they perceived as a lack of regard toward landownership by most youth. This contrasts, of course, with the views of the youth participants, but even they recognized this lack of regard among their peers. In fact, the comments from all three groups likely emulate the McGee-Boone study in that the participants appear to believe that most young people do not have an interest in land.

The focus-group findings also provided information that might assist community-based organizations and 1890 land-grant colleges in future technical assistance with landowners. This preliminary study revealed that farm families have an array of views regarding landownership, success, and wealth that might at

times be at cross purposes. For example, women appear to want their children to explore opportunities apart from a rural life, yet men appear to value an ongoing farm family and assistance from their children to achieve that goal. The youth, on the other hand, want to learn about how landownership can be financially beneficial. All of the groups felt that the youth need guidance and education on the value of land—the ways it might benefit them economically and give them other opportunities in life.

Recommendations

As stated in the literature review, the age of the Black landowner population in the South is increasing, and at present there do not appear to be many in the succeeding generation willing to take their place. Consideration needs to be given to how land will remain in the Black community and how it can be made productive for families and individuals in terms of reaching life goals, generating income, and/or building assets.

In the past, technical assistance has largely been provided to farm families in traditional agriculture outreach, as in production, debt restructuring, and farm management. Relatively little attention has been paid to family dynamics as a strategy to also assist families in sustaining their livelihood, landownership, and legacy. Nor has there been systematic research to understand the value of land to African American family members and the pressure on families from macroeconomic factors, such as the youth finding new opportunities away from the land due to changes in the economy, society, and the environment (e.g., drought, shifts in commodity prices, market trends, USDA policy changes, increased civil rights, and changes to voting laws).

It is likely that providing more in-depth information and ideas about economic opportunities for landowners might be beneficial for rural families, particularly if coupled with technical assistance. For example, there are opportunities such as niche markets, agro-forestry, organic production, hunting, and tourism that could be considered by some landowners as means of increasing their income and providing land-based careers for young people.

It might also be beneficial for farm families to better understand the role that men and women play in knowledge transfer. If this is a need, it might be coupled with information about how to increase the involvement of more family members in decisions regarding landownership and agricultural production.

It is important to emphasize that this study is preliminary. A more in-depth study and/or survey is required to substantiate and build on what has been gleaned from these focus groups. Additional studies are needed to consider (1) the various roles members of the Black landowning family can play in sustaining their land, (2) ways in which more information can be provided to youth about the economic opportunities in land ownership, and (3) the views of young Black males, as well as young females, regarding their role in the farm family and/or in landownership and agricultural production. Ultimately, an extensive survey across the South, based on the preliminary findings of these focus groups, is needed to develop a better understanding of how the Black community values landownership.

Notes

[1] When asked by General Sherman on January 12, 1865, in Savannah, Georgia, how they thought they could take care of themselves and best assist the federal government in maintaining their freedom, one of the meeting participants replied: "The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn in and till it by our labor—that is, the labor of women and children and old men—and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare...We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own."

[2] "Within a single generation, thousands of young, black men had become more competent in the agricultural sciences than any white plantation owner had ever been" (*The Emergency Land Fund 1980*: 23–24).

[3] During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century the main crop was cotton.

[4] This study estimated that Black rural landownership—of both farmland and non-farmland—was between 16 and 19 million acres by 1910.

[5] One of the three propositions the author makes in this book is that a majority of the migrants from the Great Migration were urban, nonagricultural laborers, refuting past presumptions that Black agricultural producers made up a majority of the migrants. In fact many rural Blacks who migrated went to Southern urban centers, not to the North or West. Further, a majority of Black migrants to the North and West were not agricultural farm owners nor agricultural laborers, but nonagricultural skilled laborers who had either migrated to Southern urban centers from rural areas or resided previously in urban centers of the South.

[6] New Deal legislation that targeted farmers included the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps of 1933, the Farm Security Administration of 1935 and 1937, the Soil Conservation Service of 1935, and the Rural Electrification Administration. The basic policy of the federal government during the New Deal has remained to keep prices up by keeping production down.

[7] Interviews with Resettlement Program participants found that 282 members of the fifty-five Black families in the study that had secured land still owned the land, in whole or in part, thirty years later. Further, 17,000 of the 41,000 acres of land included in this study still remained in the hands of the original Black participants.

[8] Those who migrated back to the South did purchase homes or residential properties, which demonstrates Black Americans' enduring desire to own and acquire real estate.

[9] Heir property is land that is owned by those who are entitled to inherit from a deceased landowner. State law determines who is entitled to inherit an ownership interest in the land.

[10] Heir-property ownership is a precursor to partition sales, another contributor to the drastic decline in Black rural landholdings.

[11] *Principal operator* is defined as "the person responsible for the on-site, day-to-day operation of the farm or ranch business. This person may be an owner, renter, a hired manager, or business manager.

[12] There were no young men selected to participate in this study, due in large part to their unavailability to participate on the scheduled day for the focus-group sessions.

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PachaMaMa* Got the Blues

*(*Indigenous Peruvian name for Mother Earth)*

I am elder now hopefully like
Good wood or
Rich autumn wine,
A poet drinking deeply from an Ancient Well
Seeking clarity still
I know I may offend,
    Though I don't seek it:

I belong to the Earth now
Standing for what I stand on now
No nation, no race, no religion, no gender
No guru, no teacher, no method.
Emptying of identity, I am full and
I have no cause to render.
Except the majesty of the Trees,
The honesty of good Water,
The glory of the Thunder,
The sacredness of the Soil,
And the Children of 2045.

Born on the breath,
I will die on breath,
Yet, born again in a new dimension truer.
Truth is, we breathe one another, plant & animal all the time,
So we might as well embrace in present time,
Celebrating our healing with sacred transgressions:
The disintegration,
The liberation,
The freedom from the known,
The present & past torn asunder,
Next, A Love Supreme and silent wonder.

Mestizo, Masala,
2 Spirit, Habasha,
Creoles, mulattoes, Holy impurities' mystery
Hue-man genealogy unfolding.
Gender-blurred gatekeepers opening the passageways between worlds,
Chanting Spirit-Rivers arising and descending,

Sounding magic chords that all can hear, sense & feel,
Wrapped up in this Rapture,
This is music to me.
All the music I ever loved
Is about the yearning,
The hunger to be free,
All still in my head,
All still in my heart,
All still whispers and screams
Agonizing my ears with ecstasy
And so I come to you:
Caressing and blessing with the sacraments of sound—
Leaves of Grass and Kinda Blue
Laying down in kindness, in greenness I melting fuse.
PachaMaMa, PachaMaMa got the blues!

The sacred invites the profane to lie down,
Licking his ear,
Lay down, touch the earth and know you're really here.
The Buddhist and Sufi write crazy love poems,
The Christian and Jain erupt in a new song,
The vegans dance with the dairy farmers
Undulating with the same rhythm and refrains.
The prostitute forgives the priest,
The desert gladly forgives rain,
And here are the Wildflowers, wet with dew again.

The sanctity of unity
Turns on transgressions' Crazy Wisdom.
That which has been broken moves toward mending,
That which has been shattered,
With no fear, prays for the trial by fire,
prays for the trial by fire.
This is a test, this is a test...
Tekum Olam—to heal the world,
This
is
a test!
Disintegration, liberation, freedom from the known,
Could this be the end?
Creativity in chaos is born,
All my relations, Hold on, don't give in.

Psychopath's in the executive suite,
PachaMama got the blues.
Oil & energy barons set Mid-east policy,
They're experts with the spin.
A Christian-Jewish-Muslim nightmare
Wake up! Hurry sunrise!
Let a new morning begin!
Yeah we got troubles people,
Pacha got the blues,
We got troubles people, Pacha, PachaMaMa
PachaMaMa got the blues
Yeah we got troubles people, Pacha, Pacha, Pacha got the blues,
Open the door so Dawn comes in...
We got troubles people, and joylessness, joylessness
is really the only sin!

Shhhhhhhhhh Listen!
Frankly just between you and I,
Men as a group scare the shit outta me!
Now there are a lot of men I love deeply, trust profoundly,
Absolutely, but oh baby,
Unless we are doing something Right and Righteous like:
Making music, caring for the babies, healing the wounded, being wise or growing food,
Put us all together and uh oh...
Jesus wept, weeps blood
Endlessly.

Collectively men are like Republicans
Women, their Democrat collaborators, aint it a trip?
Two heads arguing, but joined at the hip,
(It's the system people, our relationship to one another and Mother Earth!)
Oh Lord, don't let them drop that nuclear bomb on me!
Oh Lord, don't let them drop that nuclear bomb on me!
What does it say about our system if we put our children in harm's way
slaughtering brown babies in another land
in the name of "democracy"?
As corporate profits sooooooooooooooaaaaaarrrrrrrrrr!

In order for there to be peace on this Earth,
A whole lotta men gonna hafta to hold hands,
A whole lotta women gonna hafta to keep holdin' on,
A whole lotta children gonna hafta to hold on,
A whole lotta untouchable infidels gonna hafta, gonna hafta...
In this life,
In this life,
A whole lotta people gonna hafta hold hands &
Embrace!!!
Just to live,
Just to stay alive.
Come on!
Huddle near the light children,
Gather by the light.
This is a test, this is a test...

Thousands of years of nationalism, religion, the gifts of technology
And it has come to this?
You are NOT who you think you are!
Huddle near the Light people,
Be the Light
Now, be the Light you are, you are the Light
Now Thrive & luminous Smile, from your inner Light divine shine!
You are the
LightyouaretheLightyouaretheshineyouaretheLightyouare,
Shine on, shine on, you are one another, you are the Light, the Light you are,
Shine on, shine, shine,
shiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnnnnnnnneeeeeeeeee!
Our house is made of Dawn.

Louis Alemayehu, 2007

African American Environmentalism: Issues and Trends for Teaching, Research, and Extension

Clyde E. Chesney, PhD

Introduction

The conservation, ecological, and environmental research base is not fully developed for African Americans. Although research in several areas has increased, it is often difficult to identify the starting points for a comprehensive, holistic teaching, research, and extension practice. In 2006, using the collective findings from all of the reviews and using my work experiences, I conceptualized an interdisciplinary model for articulating "The Environmental Heritage of African Americans." It was at once a fluid and an ongoing paradigm that acknowledged the African diaspora, but also included rural and community resource-development concepts and cultural artifacts. The model accepted the principles and theories of John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, and others. It also acknowledged the historical contributions of W. E. B. Dubois, George Washington Carver, John Hope Franklin, and others. This model was particularly mindful of the literary treatment of land, natural resources, and environment by the Harlem Renaissance and contemporary African American writers.

The basic elements of the model include historical antecedents, African natural-resource influences, the Middle Passage, slavery and emancipation, American natural-resource influences, including Western exploration, and the process of transformative evolution via landownership, labor, and leisure. The model concludes with the manifestation elements of the environmental heritage in the literature, art, and other cultural artifacts of the African American people. It is my belief that such a model would be helpful in addressing the intractable issues facing African Americans and others such as:

1. Ensuring environmental justice
2. Strengthening rural roots
3. Feeding a hungry world
4. Sustaining small farms
5. Preparing youth
6. Responding to globalization

The purpose of this paper is to review major research and trends, discuss the rationale for an interdisciplinary model, outline the major elements of this

model, provide a representative illustration for each section of the model, suggest an updated environmental philosophical base, and identify future issues and challenges.

The Environmental Justice Movement

In the late seventies, significant research and editorials started to focus on the concept of environmental justice as a response to perceived and documented environmental racism (Hare, Pollack & Grozuczak, Taylor, and Caron).[1]

> *Environmental racism is defined as racial discrimination in environmental policy making and the unequal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. It is the deliberate targeting of "people of color" communities for toxic waste facilities and the official sanctioning of a life threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in "people of color" communities.*[2]

In 1994, Jim Schwab published *Deeper Shades of Green: The Rise of Blue-Collar and Minority Environmentalism in America*. He wrote that his research documented the convergence of two great American movements—conservation and the struggle for social justice.[3] Also in 1994, Robert D. Bullard edited *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color*. He wrote:

> *Whether in urban ghettos, barrios, or in rural "poverty pockets" and native American reservations, pollution presents potential threats to public health that individuals with affluence or political clout are unwilling to accept. [...] Over the years, disparities have been created, tolerated, and institutionalized by local, state and federal action. [...] The current system provides greater benefits and protection for middle- and upper-income whites while shifting costs to the poor and people of color. Moreover, the dominant environmental protection paradigm reinforces, rather than challenges, the stratification of people (race, ethnicity, status, power, etc.), place (central cities, suburbs, rural areas, unincorporated areas, Native American reservations, etc.), and work (i.e., office workers are afforded greater protection than farm workers).*[4]

In 1997, Arp and Boeckelman published "Religiosity: A Source of Black Environmentalism and Empowerment?" Their study compared and contrasted the environmental participation of active Black church members as opposed to non-active Black church members. The sample population consisted of respondents located along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, LA. The authors concluded that the church plays more important political roles for African Americans than for Whites.

Religion is a factor in explaining Black environmental activism. However, the authors further conclude that "religious factors fade into insignificance when other predictors of Black activism are present, such as income, levels of anger, and

most importantly, levels of community participation." In the Black community, participation may be driven by the perceived relative importance of an issue and its potential harmful impacts within the Black community.[5]

In 1999, Parker and McDonough published "Environmentalism of African Americans: An Analysis of the Subculture and Barriers Theories." According to the subculture theory, African Americans have different environmental attitudes and behaviors from European Americans. The barriers theory suggests that African Americans and European Americans have similar environmental attitudes, but African Americans are less likely to act on their environmental concerns due to differences in participation styles, feelings of disenfranchisement and powerlessness, and because they experience different barriers when joining environmental groups.[6]

The authors conclude that their study provides insights about subculture and barriers theories while acknowledging the limitations of their sample size (720) and the region of the country (urban Midwestern city) used for the study.

Three major researchers in the environmental justice movement, Robert D. Bullard at the University of California at Riverside,[7] and Paul Mohai and his colleague Bunyan Bryant[8] at the University of Michigan, conclude in a 2003 study that African American concerns about the environment are not a recent phenomenon that began in the 1980s with the environmental justice movement. "These concerns have existed for some time and are supported by data. Although concern is significantly related to environmental participation, the differences in participation rates between blacks and whites cannot be attributed to differences in levels of concerns."[9]

In his 2003 article, "African American Concern for the Environment: Dispelling Old Myths," Mohai effectively summarizes the 1980s environmental justice movement as a grassroots protest over toxic waste and pollution in people-of-color communities and introduces the concept of Black environmentalism.[10] Mohai differentiated the types of environmental concerns into the following five categories:

- Pollution issues with implications concerning human health (air pollution, water pollution, and hazardous wastes)
- Nature-preservation issues (loss of wildlife habitat, loss of natural scenic areas, and oil spills)
- Resource-conservation issues (scarcities of energy, water, and other natural resources)
- Global environmental issues (global warming, ozone depletion, and acid rain)
- Neighborhood environmental issues (litter and garbage in the streets, exposure to lead, and local air and water pollution)[11]

People of Color Grassroots Environmental Groups

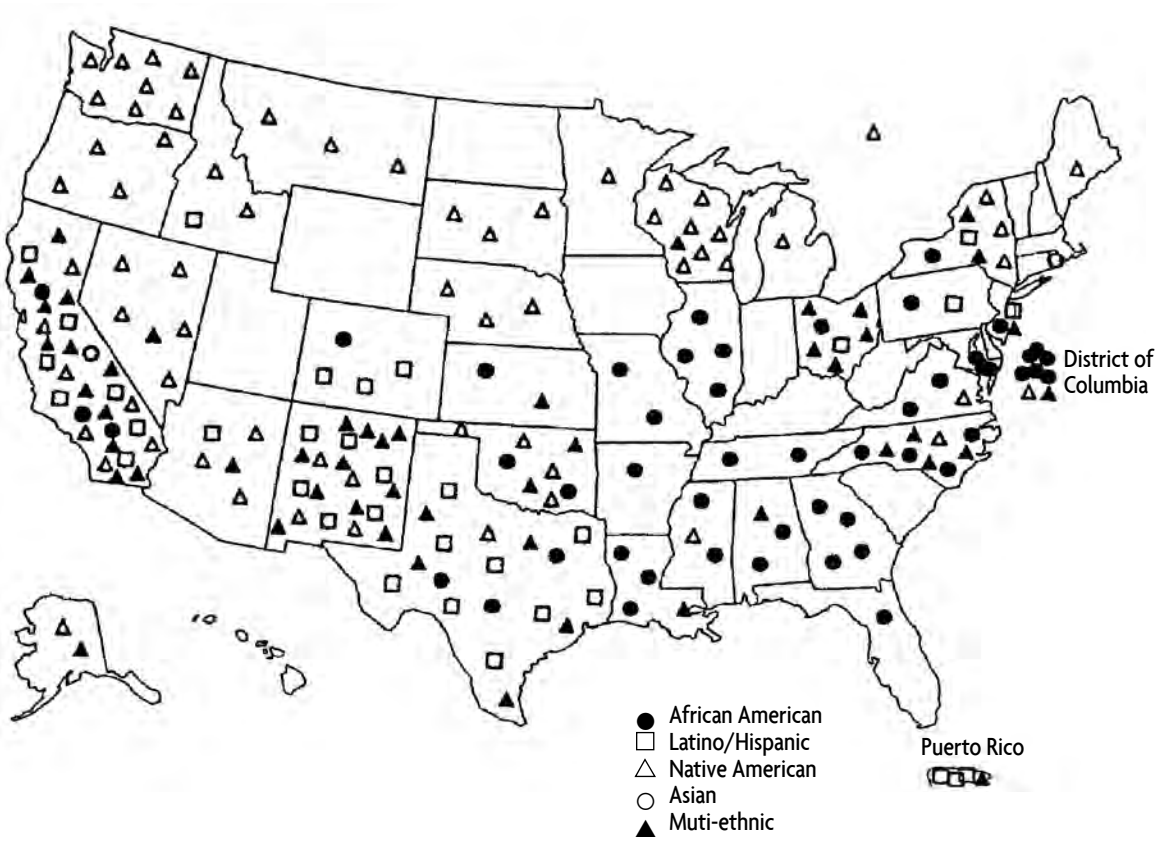


Figure 1: Robert D. Bullard, editor, People of Color Grassroots Environmental Groups, *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994), 8.

Based on his research, Mohai makes the following conclusions:

- The results of this research contradict the notion that African Americans are not as concerned about the environment as are White Americans.
- While African Americans are not members of traditional environmental organizations in large numbers, there are a number of community organizations and groups working in this arena (see Figure 1).
- Environmental organizations made up of people of color are working on an array of environmental issues that are more reflective of the concerns and priorities of the American public than the traditional focus of environmental organizations—namely park, wilderness, and wildlife protection issues.
- African Americans are strong environmentalists, as demonstrated by their expressed concerns, individual actions, membership in environmental groups, and votes by African American members of Congress.

Our Rural Roots: Gardening and Landscaping

In 2003 Dianne Glave linked rural African American women, gardening, and progressive reform to the foundation of an "African American environmental perspective." She writes:

> *African American women were the creative sources of gardening in their communities from slavery to the early twentieth century. By using yards in different ways, women took possession of them. They manipulated and interpreted the spaces for sustenance, comfort, joy, and sometimes profit. In the early twentieth century, they effectively blended gardening techniques that had come down from slavery and freedom with those taught by Home Demonstration agents and at African American schools. To enhance their skills through Progressive scientific housekeeping, women trained with and participated in garden clubs through the federally funded Home Demonstration Service of the Cooperative Extension service and private southern African American schools. African American schools like Hampton Institute complemented community and Cooperative Extension experiences. They offered Progressive-era educational opportunities ranging from flower arranging to garden landscaping. African American wives, mothers, agents, community volunteers and student created gardens that were both new and old, with practices that integrated tradition with Progressive practice.*[12]

Glave supports her position based on Michael Vlach's *The Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (1993), Richard Westmacott's *African-American Gardens and Yards in the Rural South* (1992), and the historical documentation of extension work in North Carolina and other states. Vlach uses images from the 1933 Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and writes, "well before their official emancipation, slaves were already laying claims to portions of the plantation landscape, even to spaces not specifically ceded to them. Through acts that ran the gamut from courage to accommodation, slaves defined landscapes that were uniquely theirs...At the end of the Civil War, African Americans' view of land tenure was firmly rooted in sense of place. Former slaves did not want just any land; they wanted land that was familiar to them, plantation land with which they had developed a personal bond."[13]

The plantation landscapes of African Americans were different than that of the owners:

> *Beyond their master's immediate scrutiny, at the margins of the plantation and in the thickets beyond its boundary lines, slaves created their own landscape…paths and trails into the countryside were the central elements of the slave landscape in Virginia…A shortcut through the woods or marshlands that surrounded the fields may have allowed slaves from different plantations to rendezvous more conveniently and to return to their assigned tasks with less chance of detection. On those plantations located near navigable streams and rivers, the water ways were yet another domain whose ensemble of sites and pathways constituted an alternative territorial system.*[14]

Richard Westmacott, a landscape architect and a native of Great Britain, used both systematic description and symbolic analyses to interpret African American gardens. Fieldwork was conducted in three Southern communities of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina.[15]

Westmacott began with the concept of the garden as a place that not only serves specific functional needs, but also expresses values, aesthetic preferences, and spiritual beliefs. He hypothesized that by studying gardens in areas with distinctly different climatic, environmental, and social constraints, he would gain a greater understanding of the traditions and continuities of African American culture in the South. He discovered that yards were used for subsistence, as an extension of the kitchen, for leisure and recreation, and for ornament and display. Major findings from his study were as follows:

- There was a cultural continuity between the gardens and yards of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina.
- The homestead was a source of great pride. It embodied the values of home, family, ownership, and self-reliance.
- Gathering of family and friends in the yard was symbolic of commitment to family and community.
- The vegetable garden from which produce was shared with family members and friends was a symbol of commitment to the family and a demonstration of self-sufficiency, of resourcefulness, and of hard work.
- Hogs and chickens were seen as symbols of productiveness and good food.
- The yard and the shaded, decorated seating areas within it and visible from the road were gestures of welcome and invitations to stop and visit.
- Piles of secondhand building materials and other miscellaneous items awaiting reuse were not considered trash; instead they were symbols of the resourcefulness and thriftiness of the gardeners.
- All of their possessions, including their homes and their way of life, were seen by these families as symbols of their devotion to God.[16]
- As the amount of leisure time increased, simultaneously the role of the yard as a work place became less important; therefore, the yard's function as a place for leisure, recreation, and entertainment increased.[17]

Sustainability of Small Farms

The 1985 Farm Bill established the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE), and funding was first provided in 1988. Since 1988, SARE of the Cooperative Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), has been the USDA's primary means of studying and spreading the word about farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound, and good for communities. Today the term *sustainability* is diffused throughout much of the practice and official jargon of teaching, research, and extension professionals:

Sustainability is an attempt to provide the best outcomes for the human and natural environments both now and into the indefinite future. It relates to the continuity of economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects of human society, as well as the non-human environment. It is intended to be a means of configuring civilization and human activity so that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs and express their greatest potential in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and planning and acting for the ability to maintain these ideals in a very long term. Sustainability affects every level of organization, from the local neighborhood to the entire planet.[18]

SARE has active participation from all 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities. In the Southern region, funding is available to support the following seven grant opportunities: research and education, planning, graduate students, producer, sustainable community, professional development, and on-farm research. Although SARE has increased African American participation in the USDA programs and has collected its outcomes and impacts in an official database, additional research is warranted to determine if major elements of African American environmental heritage have emerged or can be identified.[19]

For example, in *People Sustaining the Land*, Cynthia Vagnetti uses black-and-white pictures and oral-history interviews to present a perspective on land connectivity. Some of the more illuminating comments from African Americans are listed below:

Arthur Bean, Forest City, AK—"*Believe it or not, I have prayed over this land. In fact, when we went through financial problems and health problems, I walked in these fields and prayed for hours up and down the rows.*"

Ephron H. Lewis, Memphis, TN—"*I tell my friends, in the spring when it dries up and we can start farming after the winter, you have to come out and break the ground and smell the good aroma from freshly broken ground. It's like a dose of penicillin to a man with pneumonia.*"

Opal Ragsdale, Jacksonville, TX—"*I enjoy the people out here. I enjoy the contact with the customers and their calling and coming by over at the shed. I don't know whether I am unique or not, but I don't mind it. I'm here. I don't have to do it, but I just enjoy it.*"

Rufus Ragsdale, Jacksonville, TX—"*I really own the place and I know just about every hill and hollow on it. It's part of me. I know all about it by being in the family so long. I don't know what I would do without it now.*"

Rosa Nagi Shareef, Sumrall, MS—"*What we see here in people sustaining the land are people making good use of that land, people making good*

use of themselves, of the skills and talents that almighty God has given them to develop themselves, because we ourselves come from land. Once we have finished all our work on this land, we have to go back to the land. Therefore, we have to care for it now."[20]

Rationale for Interdisciplinary Model

African Americans have lived in America for almost 400 years. Despite the brutality of the Middle Passage and slavery, they have adapted, survived, and developed a distinctive culture based on a set of unique, location-specific natural resources. These resources include landscapes, a biodiversity of plants and animals, soil, water, and air in conjunction with the social, financially built, political, human, and cultural attributes. Given the general theory of cultural adaptation and survival, African Americans have a rich environmental and natural-resources heritage.

The challenge has been to pursue research in its many related and diverse areas and to identify and analyze the fragments of information without a solid theoretical framework. This process is similar to producing a final argument without having enough supportive information. While the environmental-justice theme has been the focus of the most recent research, Dianne Glave reminds us that there is an African American gardening and landscaping perspective that, to my understanding, is greater and more encompassing than just the environmental-justice theme. From the almost twenty years of SARE-funded projects, the resultant database of outcomes and impacts provides an engaging opportunity for additional research.

Over the past twenty years, I have worked to conceptualize a model via ongoing applied research and professional work in a variety of positions and leadership roles with the Cooperative Extension Systems in North Carolina and Tennessee. This environmental-heritage theoretical framework or paradigm has merit as an intellectual endeavor to increase awareness and understanding. In addition, it has greater merit in its effort to increase the equity and efficiency of the renewable-resources policy and decision-making process.

Increasing awareness and understanding is a prerequisite for increasing the perception of relevance for appropriate consumption, landownership, forest management, development of other natural resources, selection of appropriate professional career options, small-business development and entrepreneurship, and in utilizing outdoor recreation resources. These are 21st-century issues that still have not been adequately addressed by various public and private institutions, including the land-grant universities.

The Historical and Ethno-History Model

Historiography is "the writing of history based on a critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials and the synthesis of particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods."[21] Historical studies, if accurate and complete, are excellent sources for data. An example is William Katz's view that no phase of American history is more

celebrated and glorified than the settlement of the American West. Until the 20th century, however, historians largely ignored the Black experience in the westward expansion as a manifestation of this environmental heritage. Additional data sources are warranted where there is incomplete or inaccurate historical research. For example, in *The Exodusters*, Nell Painter documents the movement of African Americans westward after the Civil War in order for them to seek landownership as an opportunity for economic empowerment.[22] She writes that approximately six thousand African Americans migrated to Kansas over a few months during the year of 1879 from four states: Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Tennessee. Overall about twenty thousand African Americans migrated during 1879 and 1880, and their exodus was a rural-to-rural migration, a quest for land.

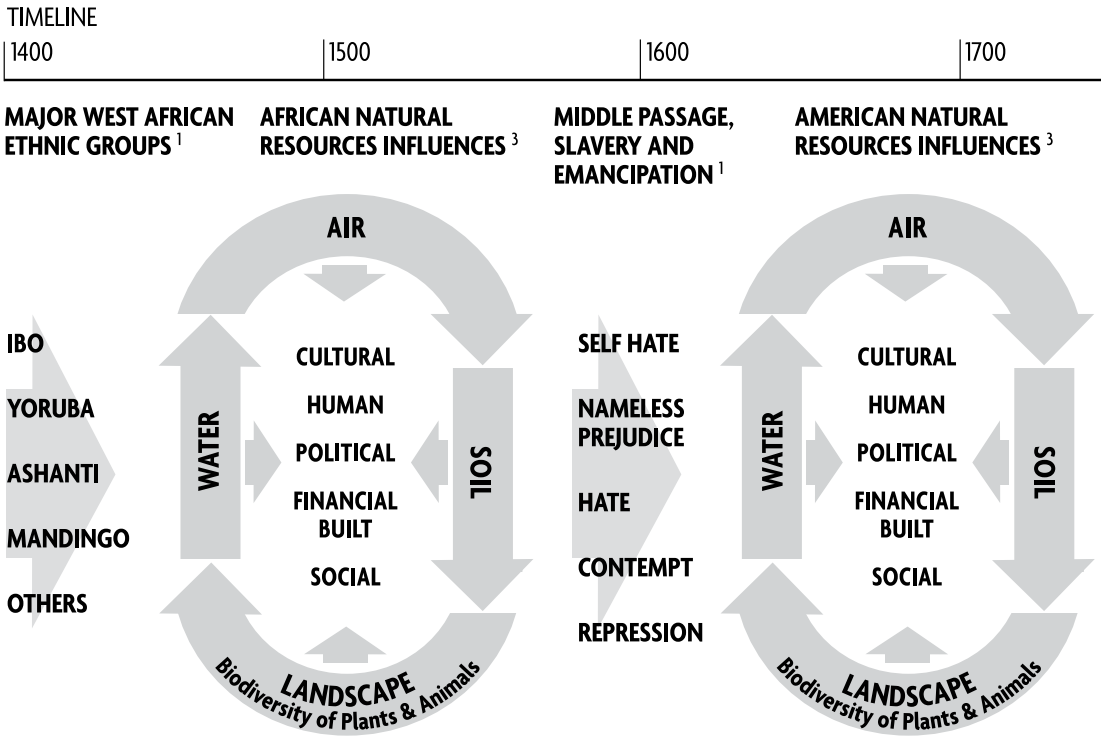
In 1998, Quintard Taylor documented the presence of and the roles of African Americans in the American West from 1528 to 1990.[23] In *The Search of the Racial Frontier*, Taylor writes:

> *Until the 1960's the image of the West centered on Frederick Jackson Turner's ideal of rugged Euro-American pioneers constantly challenging a westward-moving frontier, bringing civilization, taming the wilderness, and, in the process, reinventing themselves as "American" and creating an egalitarian society that nurtured the fundamental democratic values that shaped contemporary American society. This interpretation was reinforced by western paintings, by novels, and, most importantly, by movies and television programs, which cemented into our national consciousness, as no historical work could, the image of white settlers as "conquerors" who superimposed their will on a vast, virtually uninhabited virgin land. African Americans, according to this interpretation, were not an indigenous conquered group, and certainly they were not among the conquerors.*[24]

Taylor challenged this interpretation by documenting the 1528 arrival of Esteban, a Black slave from Morocco, in the area of Texas and Arizona. Later, hundreds of other Spanish-speaking Blacks arrived. By 1800, the earliest English-speaking Blacks had moved west as slaves, fur trappers, or servants, and created the nucleus of post–Civil War communities. Thousands of African Americans later migrated to the high plains while others drove cattle up the Chisholm Trail (which brought about the famous Black cowboys) or served on remote army outposts.[25]

Finally, Taylor's research moved beyond the glamour roles of the Black explorer, hunter, and cowboy in order to focus on the role of Black families and Black women in the settlement and development of the West.

The ethno-history (a study of the development of cultures) model is adapted from the field of anthropology. There are two principal definitions of this model. The first is the use of written historical materials in preparing ethnography (often a reconstruction of a past culture), with the documentary data supplemented, if possible, by the "memory culture" supplemented by historical records. The second principle is the use of a people's oral literature in reconstructing their own history.[26] Ivan Van Sertima documented in *They Came Before the Mayflower* the presence of Africans in the Americas long before Columbus in 1492. He used



Model Elements Taken From The Following Sources
[1] W.E.B. Dubois - Souls of Black Folk, 1903.
[2] John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, A History of African-Americans, 5th Edition, 1980
[3] Cornelia Butler Flora, Etals, Rural Communities - Legacy And Change, 2nd Edition, 2004

a variety of anthropological sources that acknowledged Africans' knowledge of sailing, navigation, exploration, and settlement.[27]

The Geography and Identity Model

In 1987, Dixon examined the relationship between geography and identity in selected major works of African Americans. He analyzed images of physical and spiritual landscapes that revealed over time a changing topography in Black Americans' quests for selfhood (defining themselves as real persons). From early slave songs and narratives, which first located alternative places of refuge and regeneration (wilderness), to works by modern authors, who construct equally complex geographical figures leading to the discovery (darkness or underground) and the performance of identity (the mountain top), his analysis reflected the quest experienced by Blacks. Dixon concluded in his study that the images of a land and the conquest of identity serve as a distinguishing feature of African American literary history.[28]

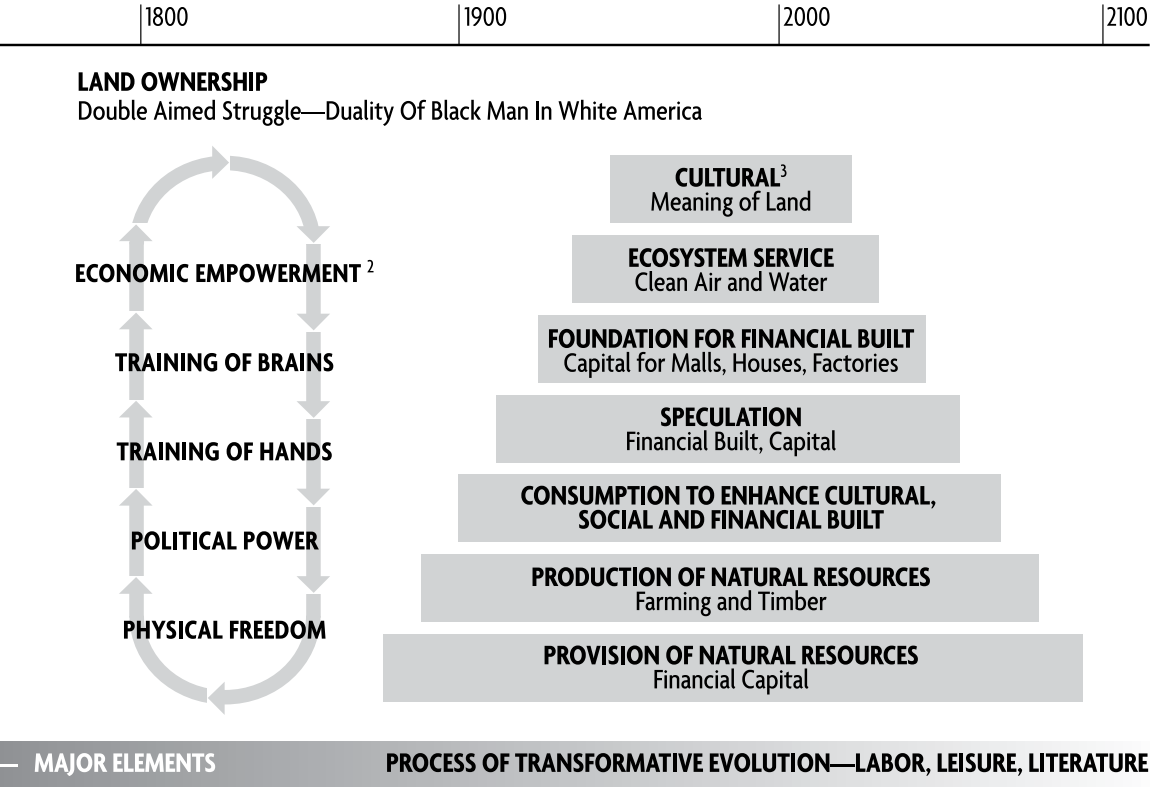


Figure 2. Clyde Chesney, The Environmental Heritage of African Americans: A Paradigm for Teaching, Research, and Extension (2006)

In examining the geographical resource today, the recently opened Underground Railroad Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio, gives visitors an interactive visual and emotional experience of the trauma that African Americans experienced in their escape from slavery via the Underground Railroad. Geographically, wild lands were vital assets to them in their escape.

In "Race, Rural Residence, and Wildland Visitation: Examining the Influence of Sociocultural Meaning" (1997), Cassandra Y. Johnson and others suggest that living in rural areas creates a rural milieu:

> *The physical sensations, folklore, and economics of the rural environment may combine to make rural blacks, in part, rural beings who have developed a pace of life, a perspective, that distinguishes them from urban blacks…for rural African-Americans, these combined selves (black group-identity and rural place-identify) contribute to the formation of an out-of-doors perspective which is distinct from that held by either urban blacks or rural whites.*[29]

Since the two models have different strengths and weaknesses, I conceptualized an interdisciplinary model where disparate data and evidence can be gathered using a multiplicity of data sets and sources. Integrating the data into a holistic and integrated model that can accommodate this diversity can, in my opinion, provide a platform that can be used by various practitioners to address some of the continuing issues facing African Americans.

Elements of the Environmental Heritage Model

The Environmental Heritage Model (see Figure 2) is organized into three overlapping sections. The left section reflects or acknowledges the Historical Antecedents: West African Ethnic Groups, African Natural Resources Influences, and Middle Passage, Slavery, and Emancipation. The center section reflects the Resiliency of the Human Spirit: overlapping the Middle Passage, Slavery & Emancipation with American Natural Resources and Land Ownership. The right section reflects the process of Transformative Evolution: overlapping Land Ownership with Labor & Work, Leisure & Recreation, and Literature, Art & Cultural Artifacts.

Within these major elements, there is a fluid movement that is an interactive and alliterative process represented by the arrows and steps devoted to these processes. These three sections are set on a historical timeline reflecting the major elements and the recognition that the environmental heritage formation is an ongoing process and is not a static one-time event.

Major West African Ethnic Groups

After Alex Haley's book *Roots: A Saga of an American Family*, its 1977 ABC television adaptation "created both the concept of the miniseries and, more importantly, a black genealogy craze that has yet to abate."[30] For most African Americans, *Roots* provided a fictional re-connectivity to the African homeland and unleashed perhaps the most profound growth in genealogy research by all races, which continues today.

African Americans have long celebrated the family reunion. However, after the *Roots* phenomenon, and now with the advent and advances in DNA testing that can match maternal mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and paternal linkages (Y chromosomes) to various African countries with an accuracy of up to 99.4%, African Americans can move beyond the North American continent and the limitations of the lack of written documentation to find the country or region of their African ancestors.[31] As African Americans travel to these regions, it does not take long to see the connectivity that they have with Africans some 400 years later. While the African diaspora has isolated them from those faraway places, significant African influences have survived and still flourish today. As John Hope Franklin and others have so elegantly expressed, there are many things that African Americans take for granted in 21st-century America that can be traced back to African sources or can be identified with a specific African country or ethnic group. Franklin writes in *From Slavery to Freedom* that in work, in play, in social organizations, and in various aesthetic manifestations there are some evidences of African culture:

The survival of varying degrees of African culture in America does not suggest that there has been only a limited adjustment by Africans to the New World situation. On the contrary, it merely points up the fact that they came out of an experience that was sufficiently entrenched to make possible the persistence of some customs and traditions. There is a certain amount of validity to the view that in the conflict of cultures only those practices will survive whose value and superiority give them the strength and tenacity to do so. African survivals in America also suggest a pronounced resiliency in the African institutions.[32]

African societies traditionally included the communal ownership of land, egalitarian character of village life, collective decision making, and extensive networks of social obligations.[33]

Middle Passage, Slavery, and Emancipation

Although an estimated 11.4 million African slaves were shipped to America from the African continent, a conservative estimate suggests that 10–30 percent perished at sea from disease, starvation, brutal treatment, and suicide.[34] One could say that only the physically, mentally, and spiritually strong survived this passage. Dubois writes that while the Middle Passage and slavery are filled with self-hate, nameless prejudice, contempt, and repression, the resiliency of the human spirit allowed African slaves to overcome this adversity. Based on Franklin's theory, they learned and adapted to America's set of natural resources and survived.

Two examples of this resiliency of the human spirit that relates to future use of natural resources are Stephen Bishop, a Kentucky slave, and Solomon G. Brown, a freed slave from Washington DC. Stephen Bishop became a slave guide in 1838 at Mammoth Cave when he was about sixteen to eighteen years old. He is credited with making numerous discoveries including crossing the bottomless pit, finding an underground stream, and also discovering eyeless and colorless river animals. Later his former owner described him as "a self-educated man; he had a fine genius, a great fund of wit and humor, and some little knowledge of Latin and Greek, and much knowledge of geology; but his great talent was a perfect knowledge of man."[35]

Solomon G. Brown was the first African American employee at the Smithsonian Institution serving under Smithsonian Secretaries. According to the Smithsonian Web site, Brown started working at the Smithsonian in 1852 and worked in continuous service until 1906. He held a number of roles during his fifty-four-year tenure as laborer, building exhibit cases, moving and cleaning furniture, assisting in preparing maps and drawings for lectures, and working in the International Exchange Service. Solomon Brown was also self-educated and while at the Smithsonian obtained considerable knowledge in the field of natural history. He became well known for his illustrated lectures on natural history. He frequently lectured at scientific societies in Washington DC, Alexandria, VA, and Baltimore, MD.[36]

American Natural Resources

America's natural resources, while significantly different from that of Africa's in its biodiversity of plants, animals, landscapes, water, soil, and air, provided an environment both challenging and full of opportunities in landownership. America is the world's third-largest country in size after Russia and Canada and in population after China and India. Its location, mostly temperate climate, and abundance of natural resources allowed it to produce the largest and most technologically powerful economy in the world.[37] Flora and others write in *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change* that in the course of American history, land and landownership have been viewed as valuable in terms of the following:

- Provision of natural resources to be turned into financial capital (logging, mining, trapping)
- Production of natural resources to be transformed into financial capital (farming and some timber production)
- Consumption to enhance cultural, built, and social capital (those with wealth purchasing land on which to build elegant homes and large estates to entertain their friends)
- Speculation to directly increase financial capital (land bought on the assumption that its price would increase)
- Foundations for built capital (housing developments, shopping malls, factories)
- Provision of important ecosystem services (clean water, air, biodiversity, carbon sequestration)
- Cultural capital (land valued for its spiritual meaning)[38]

The People Influence

In America the social, financial, political, human, and cultural influences are significantly different from Africa. The specific human factors that impact the natural resources are the following:

- Social Capital—features of organizations, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and incorporation for mutual benefit. Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital.
- Cultural Capital—includes the values and symbols reflected in clothing, books, machines, art, language, and customs. Cultural capital can be thought of as the filter through which people live their lives, the daily or seasonal rituals they observe, and the way they regard the world around them. Legacy is what families, communities, groups, and nations pass onto the next generation.
- Human Capital—includes those attributes of individuals that contribute to their ability to earn a living, strengthen community, and otherwise contribute to community organizations, to their families, and to self-improvement.

- Political Capital—organization, connections, voice, and power. It is the ability of a group to influence the distribution of resources within society, including helping set the agenda of what resources are available.
- Financial Capital—resources that are translated into monetary instruments that produce profit. Tangible forms include capital goods (built capital) physical objects (machines, buildings) that individuals or businesses invest in to generate new resources. Land becomes an investment because of the resources it has or the development space it offers. Other financial instruments include stocks, bonds, derivatives, market futures, and credit.
- Built Capital—the permanent physical installations and facilities supporting productive activities in a community. It includes roads, streets and bridges, airports and railroads, electric and natural-gas utility systems, water-supply systems, police and fire-protection facilities, wastewater treatment and waste-disposal facilities, telephone and fiber-optic networks and other communications facilities, schools, hospitals, and other public and commercial buildings. Built capital also refers to the equipment needed to support a series of networks that enable people to travel, communicate with one another, and gain access to services and markets.[39]

Landownership and Control

Land and other related natural resources are crucial to production, consumption, speculation, financial capital, the financially built, and culture. Its ownership and control have dominated exploration and expansion. While religious freedom was important in the early settlement of America, it was the lure of land and related natural resources that ignited the migrations to the New World. President Thomas Jefferson's vision and concept of the Manifest Destiny caused him to purchase the Louisiana territory from France in 1803 and subsequently to invest in the Lewis and Clark expedition (1803–6), which started as a search for a water route to the West Coast.[40]

In the American capitalistic system, landownership is a sacred right. One of the initial criteria determining one's right to vote was that the (White male) voter be a landowner. Raleigh Barlowe writes eloquently about the significance of land:

> *Much can be said about the basic importance of land resources in the modern world. They provide people with living space, with the raw materials necessary for filling material needs, and with opportunities for satisfactions dear to the heart of man. People look to land for their physical environment, for the food they eat, for fibers and the other materials needed to clothe their bodies and to provide housing and manufactured goods, for building sites, for recreation opportunities, and for scenery and open space.*
>
> *History speaks eloquently of the high regard with which man has viewed land in times past. The ancient Minoans and Greeks prayed to an earth goddess, a reverence that has come down to us in the respect we show for Mother Earth. For long centuries most wars were fought for the possession of land, and the*

average man everywhere lived in close association with the soil, fields, forests, and fishing grounds that provided him with sustenance. Rights in land were often the key factor that determined an individual's economic, social, and political status. Hunger for land and for land ownership brought thousands of immigrants to the Americas and still affects the thinking of people in many places.[41]

In the 1980s, the Emergency Land Fund (ELF) was vigorous in publicizing, providing research and advocacy of landownership, and making known the loss of ownership of African Americans by a variety of legal and illegal means. Additionally, many of the 1890s land-grant universities, other Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in Birmingham, Alabama, have sponsored conferences, workshops, or ongoing programs in this area.

Within the last century, African American landownership has rapidly declined. A comparison of the U.S. Agriculture Census data on African American farmland ownership in 1910 to the landownership in 2002 shows a drastic decline from its peak of 15 million acres in 1910 to 3.5 million acres in 2002. The 1999 Agricultural, Economics, and Land Ownership Survey, which assessed private rural landownership across race and use (farming, forestry, etc.), found that there are currently 68,000 African American rural landowners. They own approximately 7.7 million acres of land—less than 1 percent of all privately owned rural land in the United States—60 percent of which is owned by non-farmers. This acreage is valued at $14 billion.[42]

In Tennessee, there are 1,266 farmland owners controlling 129,776 acres.[43] Since 1975, the Tennessee Farm Centennial Project at Middle Tennessee State University has identified and recognized over one thousand farms in continuous ownership for over one hundred years, and four African American–owned farms have been identified.[44] *The Tennessee Home & Farm* magazine recently ran a feature article on the 110-acre centennial farm of McDonald and Rosetta Craig. McDonald shared this perspective on being Black landowners:

My great-grandparents, Tapp and Amy Craig, purchased this place on Christmas Day in 1871. They were both slaves, and after the Civil War, they worked to save money to buy their own farm. He gave $400 for the place, put a yoke of oxen as a down payment and paid the rest off in less than two years.[45]

It would be interesting to identify other African American centennial farms throughout the United States and to interview the current owners about their families and their continued ownership.

In a recent collaborative effort with Dr. Rory Fraser, associate professor in the Center for Forestry and Ecology at Alabama A & M University, a team of diverse professionals conducted forestry workshops and performed documentation work in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Michael McLendon, a former media specialist with the TSU Cooperative Extension Program, and the Extension Technology, Communications, and Marketing Team produced a videography on these workshops and conversations about landownership, land management, and land loss. The objectives of the workshops were to reach and empower minority forestry landowners and to document the educational programs and conversations.[46]

Over the past year the *Minority Landowner*, a quarterly magazine devoted to articles, editorials, news releases, photographs, and artwork, also documented the excitement of people engaged and empowered to use their land legacy.

Labor, Work, and Career Selection

Work is what one does to provide the basic necessities of life: food, clothing, housing, transportation, etc. Without education or exposure to other opportunities, people tend to gravitate to the work of their fathers and mothers. They may know the major occupational groups—teachers, ministers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, actors, singers, and athletes—from a distance, but the first influences are their parents, grandparents, and immediate community. Yet for those involved with working or living close to the land (farming, forestry, and mining), those early experiences help to shape their perceptions and provide learning and part-time work opportunities.

According to a model suggested by Joyce Perry, the career-opportunity structure is shaped by the political and economical system; however, career decision making by Black youth is shaped by a cultural system, limited career-awareness exploration, and limited perceived opportunity structure. Perry suggests that guidance counselors should be more proactive and should expose youth to all kinds of careers in meaningful ways with intervention to prevent perceived opportunities from being restrictive.[47]

As African Americans learn their preferences and their skills and abilities, they may start to think beyond their immediate sphere. Often broader exposure may come from an energetic teacher, reading a book, or from a close personal relationship that propels them to think more broadly. Of course today with the prevalence of the media, mass communication, and transportation, many people may dream those big dreams, but most tend to rely on the familiar or what other family members are doing. The goals and dreams of many have dried up like the "raisin in the sun."

The world of work has changed to where knowledge and machines have replaced people or changed the requirements for the labor force. Physical labor by itself does not produce the necessary monetary compensation to attract and keep satisfied an American workforce that is constantly bombarded with media images of the "good life." Historically, people have migrated for jobs and better living conditions. For African Americans it was the Great Migration of the 1940s and 1950s from the South to Northern and Western cities. Today, that trend has reversed.

Fuguitt and others, in *The Shifting Patterns of Black Migration Into and From the Nonmetropolitan South, 1965–95,* document a reversal of the long-

standing trend of Black migration from the South. From 1990 to 1995, the South had an unpredicted net movement of over 300,000 Blacks into the region.[48] Once Blacks left the South, economic opportunities, family ties, and the decline of racial discrimination after the passing of civil right laws such as the Voting Rights Act influenced this changing stream of migration. While many are returning migrants to the South, many newcomers are children or spouses of returning migrants. Fuguitt and others speculate that family ties may induce migration to nonmetro areas, despite the typically lower levels of nonmetro economic opportunities.

Since 1986, Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS) has been active in supporting students and career-development professionals in their success in agriculture and natural resources. For student members, MANRRS provides role models and networking opportunities. It also offers students opportunities to enhance leadership, organizational, and public-speaking skills. MANRRS also serves employers in the broader agricultural and natural-resource sector by providing its organization as a vehicle to identify prospective, well-qualified employees who are members of ethnic groups that, when combined, are projected to be the new majority in the workforce in the not-too-distant future.[49]

In the 2004 *Inventory of Natural Resources and Environmental Courses at 1890 Land Grant Universities*, McLaren and Pereira identified only five 1890 land-grant universities with substantive courses: Alabama A & M—forestry; Florida A & M—environmental science; Lincoln—range management; North Carolina A & T—natural resources and environmental science; and Southern—urban forestry.[50]

Leisure and Recreation Participation

Leisure is time off that people have from earning a living and meeting family, personal, and community obligations. It is a time that allows people to pursue self-actualizing activities if the individuals have the resources, physical health, transportation, relationships, etc. However, many people are forced to work second jobs and therefore do not have the option of much-needed recreation. As in work, they are first exposed to leisure activities or learn many activities from parents, the community, friends, and/or acquaintances. Place of birth, interaction with land and natural resources, and experiences all help dictate some of the optional uses of leisure time. What people do on their own time is perhaps a window into their souls.

> *Participation in wild land recreation is a form of behavior that is no different from other forms of human behavior. It is a human activity that involves making choices among alternatives. The Fishbein model of reasoned action, if applied to the question of limited participation by blacks in wild land recreation, simply would assume that what a person thinks about wild land recreation would influence the intention to participate (or not to participate). What a person thinks is a function of his [or] her belief system. Therefore, to understand black wild land recreation participation patterns, the first task is to understand blacks beliefs about wild land recreation and the sources of those beliefs.*[51]

Literature, Art, and Cultural Artifacts

Literature, art, and other artifacts reflect our cultural manifestation. By examining them in a historical interdisciplinary model, we may discover new insights. John Michael Vlach, in *The Work of Their Hands: Studies in Afro-American Folklife*, writes that while African influences have long been noted in religion, music, oral literature, and dance, Africanisms have been more difficult to discover in material expressions than in the performing arts. Vlach returns to the two-ness or duality concept of W. E. B. Dubois (see Environmental Heritage Model). Material artifacts of Black culture can claim the heritage of a distant past reaching back to Africa and simultaneously claiming a more recent historical source of inspiration. African American artifacts fall into two major categories: the retained African artifact (comparatively rare) and the hybrid artifact (very common).[52]

Vlach documents this maintenance of an African American tradition in six material art forms:

- Basketry—rice fanners in South Carolina
- Musical instruments—drums and the banjo
- Ironwork—African American ironworking of Charleston
- Pottery—large storage jars by Dave the Potter
- Textiles—quilts
- Wood carving—walking stick
- Grave Decorations—common artifacts used by the deceased[53]

Maude Wahlman, in "Hidden Charms," a chapter in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, writes:

> *When African religious ideas appeared in the new world, they often assumed new forms and meanings and were transmitted in unprecedented ways. As essential tools for survival, these ideas were encoded in a multiplicity of forms, including architecture, dance, funerary practices, narratives, rituals, speech, music, and other visual arts, especially textiles. Arts preserve cultural traditions even when the social context of traditions changes, yet the codes are neither simple nor easy to decipher.*[54]

In 1999 Tobin and Dobard documented these codes in *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*. The quilt code is a mystery-laden, secret communication system employing quilt-making terminology as a message map for Black slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad.[55] It is an example of the survival of the African oral tradition within the contemporary African American community.

Landownership and land control; labor, work, and career selection; leisure and recreation participation; and literature, art, and cultural artifacts—these are all elements involved in the process of the transformative evolution of the newly

freed slaves and their descendants from Reconstruction, the Jim Crow period, the Great Depression, two world wars, the civil rights era, and the post–civil rights period to the twenty-first century.

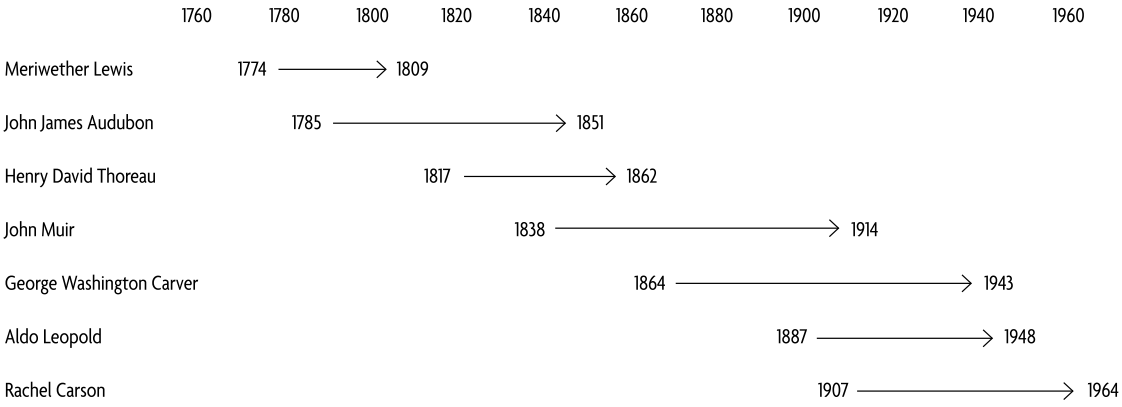
A Revised Philosophical Base

In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash writes eloquently about this subject and what it means to America. He identifies three great icons that helped to provide the philosophical base of our contemporary conservation, ecological, and environmental perspective: Henry David Thoreau, philosopher (1817–62); John Muir, conservation advocate (1838–1914); and Aldo Leopold, prophet (1887–1948). To that illustrious triumvirate, I would add George Washington Carver, *Scientist and Symbol* (1864–1943)—the title of Linda O. McMurry's 1981 biography;[56] Meriwether Lewis, explorer (1714–1809); John James Audubon, ornithologist and naturalist (1785–1851); and Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring* (1907–64). There is a 190-year overlap of the lives of these seven individuals (see Table 1). Meriwether Lewis is first, but each subsequent person is connected to the work of the previous person. While Nash shows the linkage among Thoreau, Muir, and Leopold, it is my conclusion that the works of Lewis, Audubon, Thoreau, Muir, Carver, Leopold, and Carson are linked in numerous ways and form the philosophical basis for the current conservation, ecological, and environmental movement today:

- Love of nature and wild things
- Passion for their work
- Curiosity and search for truth
- Use of similar words and phases

Table 1

American Conservation Ecological and Environmental Icons



African American Environmentalism: Future Issues and Challenges

Two pertinent questions to guide future research are: What themes did this model uncover, and how useful is the African American Environmental Heritage model? Reflecting on the commonalities of these interdisciplinary researches, I have used this model to identify at least thirty-five concepts, which can be grouped as six themes:

- Connectivity: family, social obligations
- Freedom: hard work, landownership
- Improvisation: resourcefulness, learning, and adapting
- Spirituality: sustainability, resilience of the human spirit
- Place: geography and identity, continuity of culture
- Black Group Identity

Historically, the eighteen 1890s land-grant universities have not been adequately funded at the federal or state levels. Only in 1972 did the1890 land-grant universities receive federal funding for research and extension programming. In addition the 1998 Farm Bill required states to match federal funding starting at 10 percent and moving forward each subsequent year to reach a maximum of 100 percent funding. Even now in 2007, acquiring this matching state funding remains an ongoing concern for many 1890s.

Since 1976, the National Urban League has issued an annual State of Black America report which documents the status of African Americans in the following areas: education, homeownership, entrepreneurship, health, and other areas. While some trends have improved for many, there are still many serious issues facing African American citizens from the 1960s War on Poverty, the benign neglect of the 1970s and 1980s, and that the 1990s "Contract with America" did not erase.

More recently in 2006, *The Covenant with Black America*, a project lead by Tavis Smiley, has renewed a call for action on ten major issues: health care, education, unequal justice, community policing, affordable housing, democracy, rural roots, jobs, wealth and economic prosperity, environmental justice, and the racial digital divide. Each chapter in *The Covenant* opens with an introductory essay, followed by a statement of facts, a list of what the community can do, and a list of what individuals can do.[57] In the Rural Roots chapter, the authors recommend implementing a national agricultural education program. This call challenges everyone in the land-grant universities to become more focused on developing teaching, research, and extension educational programs that will produce measurable impacts and outcomes to address more of those issues.

In 2005 Thomas L. Friedman wrote in *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* that because of recent technological advancements such as the Internet, fiber-optics, and the personal computer, the competitive playing fields between industrial and emerging market countries are leveling, and more diverse people such as Indians and Chinese are participating.[58] At the same time,

there are still three billion or so people who still live in an "unflat world" unaffected by the technologies and socioeconomic changes sometimes caused by poverty.

Developing countries, particularly on the African continent, are suffering from wars, famine, poor leadership, and now AIDS, which is leaving many children orphaned and also infected with the virus. Martin Meredith writes in *The Fate of Africa* that "after the euphoria of the independence era, so many hopes and ambitions faded."[59] She continues:

> *Although Africa is a continent of great diversity, African states have much in common, not only their origins as colonial territories, but the similar hazards and difficulties they have faced. Indeed, what is so striking about the fifty-year period since independence is the extent to which African states have suffered so many of the same misfortunes.*

Recommendations

While this environmental-heritage theoretical framework has merit as an intellectual endeavor to increase awareness and understanding, it has even greater merit in the effort to increase the equity and efficiency of the renewable-resources policy and decision-making process. While there is a need for increased understanding of the interaction between the economic, environmental, and social aspects of agriculture, natural resources, and consumer sciences, there is equally a need for programs, strategies, and engagements to help address and resolve some of the issues and challenges that have been enumerated above.

Fully exploring an environmental heritage model provides a conceptual framework and helps to identify a future road map and appropriate benchmarks. We need to continue to focus on these benchmarks in our teaching, research, extension, engagement, and outreach activities. The end result is that this is an engagement model that provides an opportunity for many disparate disciplines to see the connectivity of their interests, greater knowledge, and understanding of the big picture.

African Americans must not let urban living and increased alienation from the land and our rural heritage distract us from the basic founding principles of the land-grant university system. While many people may be two to three generations removed from the farm or even from rural non-farm living, land and resultant natural resources are just as important or even more important today because of increased populations and the demands on the natural resource base.

A challenge for all 1890 land-grant universities is to continue developing effective programs to reach elementary- and middle-school youth and to help them gain an appreciation, understanding, and interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. These areas are basic for successful careers in agriculture and natural resources. There need to be more "students of color" preparing and entering these fields for future careers in agriculture and natural resources.

It is my belief that the eighteen 1890 land-grant universities collectively have the historical track record, intellectual power, and leadership skills to address

these problems. In addition, with increased technology and connectivity and the potential of distance education to reach people, there can be major transformative educational programming. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is the legacy of the Cooperative Extension educational programs based on needs and input from the people at the grassroots level. If 1890 land-grant universities return to their roots and tackle these issues with innovative and creative multi-state and interdisciplinary programming, they can then produce measurable impacts and outcomes.

It must be accepted that most American citizens now live in urban and suburban areas and may not have close linkages to rural environments and lifestyles. Adaptation and change must be made to reach this new clientele group. All agricultural and natural-resources teaching, research, and extension programs must accept and reflect this fact. Here are some specific recommendations for using the Environmental Heritage Model of African Americans to address problems and issues:

1. Agricultural and natural-resource professionals need to aggressively focus on helping the general public understand the impact of the relationship between natural resources and human interaction on their quality of life.
2. Teachers of history, economics, geography, and other subjects need to incorporate a perspective of the conservation, ecological, and environmental heritage of the students in their classes, including the role of African Americans.
3. Land-grant universities should ensure that all faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders gain an appreciation and understanding of the land-grant mission and vision of the 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant laws.
4. There is a need to identify, nurture, and recruit students for future careers in science, technology, engineering, and math. Natural-resource and environmental education provides opportunities for hands-on learning, which should be provided in elementary, middle, and high school, and in after-school programs.
5. Use interest in genealogy and the return Southern migration to help people reconnect to their rural roots.
6. Ensure that students and adult learners gain an appreciation and understanding of the "rights and responsibilities" of landownership.
7. Use distance-education technology to develop learning opportunities and to gain a greater appreciation for the Environmental Heritage Model.
8. Cooperative Extension needs to reinvest significant resources in the areas of educational organizing or community leadership-development programs. Most of the contemporary issues such as ensuring environmental justice, land use, food security, and others require well-informed and engaged citizens.
9. Continue to form multi-state and interdisciplinary partnerships and collaborations to tackle some of the more intractable issues.

10. Support sustainability of small farms with alternative crops research and extension programs, community farmer markets, succession planning, and other activities.
11. Respond to increased globalization by incorporating an international perspective in our teaching, research, and extension and outreach programs. Focus on the public-policy issues surrounding food security and GMOs and their impact on developed and developing countries.
12. Long-term social, economic, and environmental outcomes should include measures of environmental justice.

If sustainability is the goal or objective of all our collective efforts, then it will be achieved when interconnectivity and interdependence occur among the many environmental forces, institutions, and people. *Land* and related natural resources (biodiversity of plants and animals, landscapes, water, soil, air) are blessings from God. *Power* is based on knowledge and how we use the social, financial, political, human, and cultural resources. *Sustainability* will be possible only when the natural-resources blessing and the teaching, research, and extension knowledge are appropriately integrated to address not only the basic needs of Maslow's hierarchy—food, clothing, and shelter—but also the higher needs that ultimately help African Americans to become self-actualized and hopefully achieve their full potential as human beings.

Land Resources + Knowledge Power = Human and Environmental Sustainability

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Environmental Thought and Activism: An 1890 Land-Grant University Perspective

Walter A. Hilll

In 1890 respective states and the federal government selected 17 historically black institutions as land grant institutions. Unlike their 1862 land grant counterparts, the 1890 land grant universities did not receive federal and state formula funds, until 1967 and 2000 respectively, to carry out research and Extension programs. Despite limited funding, the 1890 Land Grant Universities have worked with community-based organizations, other universities and agencies to address issues of agricultural and environmental sustainability, inequities and poverty, and family and community empowerment and wealth creation in the Southern Black Belt. Development of effective partnerships has been a central factor in serving those most in need. Regional examples include the Southern Food Systems Education Consortium (SOFSEC, nine states), Small Farm Regional Marketing Project (nine states) and the annual Professional Agricultural Workers Conference (PAWC, 18 states). State-based examples include the Alabama Agricultural Land Grant Alliance (AALGA), Black Belt Community Foundation, and Black Belt Action Commission.

In 1862 President Lincoln signed into law the Morril Act, which established the land-grant universities in order to provide educational opportunities for the masses, including farmers and industrial workers. Prior to this enactment, higher education was available only to the wealthy and privileged members of society. Thus in 1862 the land-grant universities were born, one in each state. Along with the land-grant designation, 30,000 acres of public land per legislator (two senators plus the number of representatives; not to exceed 1,000,000 acres) was provided to be used as the source of funding through selling it and investing the receipts in an endowment for operations. Subsequently other acts of Congress provided funding for food and agricultural research, extension, forestry, and other activities. In 1887, the 1862 land-grant universities began receiving funds for agricultural research from the federal government via the Hatch Act. The Hatch Act funds were allocated by a formula, which required a 1:1 match by their respective states. Extension funds were also allocated by formula beginning in 1914 via the Smith Lever Act, which required a 1:1 match from each state.

The 1890 land-grant universities were initiated in 1890 through the Second Morril Act when the Southern and border states refused to permit people of African descent to participate in the 1862 land-grant universities and their activities because of their policies of racial segregation. Thus seventeen states chose instead

to develop a separate land-grant institution for the education of Black Americans rather than permit them to attend school with their white counterparts.

The 1890 land-grant universities were never granted the public lands for financing their operations as explained above for the 1862 land-grant universities, and they did not receive funds from the other funding acts of Congress for land-grant activities until 105 years later. In 1967 the first funding ever—$283,000—was distributed among sixteen 1890 land-grant universities for research. This amount gradually increased and by FY 2007 a total of $72,151,933 was distributed by formula to eighteen land-grant universities for research and extension activities. In 1999 Congress passed legislation requiring each state to match 1:1 the USDA formula funds received by the 1890 land-grant institutions for research and extension, as had been the case for the 1862 land-grant universities. By law the 1:1 state match occurred gradually over a seven-year period beginning with a 1:0.30 ratio (federal funds : state match) in 2000 and increasing to a 1:1 ratio in FY 2007 (145 years after the 1862 land-grant universities began receiving matching state funds).

Essential to the mission of the land-grant universities has always been the threefold function of education, research, and service. Food, agriculture, natural resources, and the environment have always been and remain an important function of the land-grant universities. Thus curricula, research, and service activities in these areas have more than a one-hundred-year history at the 1890 land-grant universities. During this time the students attending and graduating from these schools were initially nearly 100 percent African American; but, at the outset, international students from Africa, Latin America, and Asia as well as Native American, Hispanic American, and Asian American students attended and graduated from these institutions. From the very beginning, African Americans were the predominant members of the faculty and staff, but white Americans and international faculty have been an important part of the 1890 land-grant history.

Tuskegee University and Environmental Studies

Tuskegee University was founded in 1881. Booker T. Washington's arrival at Tuskegee signaled the development of an institution whose mission and legacy would be built upon education and service for its core constituency, African American people, as well as for the nation and the world. George Washington Carver's arrival in 1896 began the focus on science-based agricultural, natural resource, and environmental studies.

Selected Milestones in Agricultural and Environmental Studies at Tuskegee University

Year	Milestone
1881	Tuskegee University founded
1896	Arrival of George Washington Carver
1896	Department of Agriculture established
1897	Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station established
1936	Department of Chemistry established
1946	Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences established
1956	Department of Biology established
1997	College of Agricultural, Environmental, and Natural Sciences established
2000	Division of Integrative Biosciences established

Upon Carver's arrival in 1896, the Department of Agriculture was established at Tuskegee University, and a year later the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station was established with a $2,000 budget from the state of Alabama. The MS degree in Environmental Science was established at Tuskegee University in 1967, and the BS degree in Environmental Science was established in 1995 with options in natural resources, science, and waste management. The Forest Resources program was established in 1968 and has expanded its current 3/2 and 3/3 programs to include options in forestry, hydrology, fisheries, wildlife conservation, and ecology.[1] The Environmental Engineering option at Tuskegee University was established as a part of the Chemical Engineering Major. Environmental Science and related BS, MS, and PhD programs currently at selected 1890 land-grant universities are shown in the table below.

Selected* Academic Majors Related to Environmental Studies at Six 1890 Land-Grant Universities, 2007

University	BS Degree	MS Degree	PhD Degree
Alabama A & M University	Environmental Science Plant Sciences	Forestry Plant Sciences	Forestry Plant Sciences
Florida A & M University	Environmental Science Agronomy Forestry & Natural Resources Landscape Design and Management Ornamental Horticulture Biological and Agricultural Systems Engineering	Environmental Science Entomology	Environmental Science Entomology
North Carolina State University	Environmental Horticulture Bioenvironmental Engineering Earth and Environmental Science Landscape Architecture Soil Science	Plant, Soil, and Environmental Science	Energy and Environmental Studies
Southern University and A & M College	Agricultural Sciences Urban Forestry	Urban Forestry	Urban Forestry Environmental Toxicology
Tuskegee University	Environmental, Natural Resource and Plant Sciences	Environmental Sciences Plant and Soil Sciences	Integrative Biosciences
University of Maryland Eastern Shore	Agriculture Environmental Sciences	Marine-Estuarine-Environmental Sciences and Toxicology	Marine-Estuarine-Environmental Sciences and Toxicology

*In addition to majors, environmental science and engineering options exist at several 1890 land-grant universities. These options include twelve to fifteen credit hours in environmental science courses when accompanying a traditional major such as chemistry, chemical engineering, agriculture, biology, forest resources, soil science, or plant science. In some cases students opt to double major in a traditional discipline plus environmental science.

Selected Actions Initiated by the 1890 Land-Grant Universities Related to Land, Power, and Sustainability in the Southern Region

As a direct result of the struggle of Black people for freedom and justice in the 1960s and 1970s, leaders at the 1890 land-grant universities were able to mobilize supporters in the U.S. Congress, resulting in an increase in funding for these universities in the form of federal formula funds, capacity-building grants (1980s and 1990s), and eventually state matching of formula funds (2000–present). With these new resources and an ensuing spirit of cooperation, the 1890 land-grant universities began to work more effectively together and with others within their respective states and across the 1890 region. Below are three regionwide initiatives and two state-based initiatives that exemplify the spirit of cooperation among the 1890 land-grant universities and their partners during the period from the 1980s through 2007.

Southern Food Systems Education Consortium (SOFSEC)

In 1993 the Southern Food Systems Education Consortium was initiated through a partnership of six 1890 land-grant universities and selected community-based partners. Funded initially through the Kellogg Foundation, over a nine-year period the number of 1890 institutions involved in SOFSEC grew to ten and community-based partners increased substantially. The SOFSEC program focused on institutional change, sustainable food and agricultural systems, K–12-university partnerships, and community and economic development. SOFSEC functioned using the following principles: value community input and leadership highly, share resources and credit, and err on the side of inclusion. Through its Executive Council, SOFSEC learned to make a consortium-wide decision in twenty-four hours when necessary and develop a consortium-wide proposal in two weeks. Impacts across the region included: K–12 mini-grant program for teachers that increased hands-on science and natural-resources learning experiences in underserved school systems; expansion of research and demonstrations for alternative agricultural products/practices including goat, agroforestry, small landholder timber management, and organic/low-input vegetable production; assistance to Black farmers in the Black Farmer Lawsuit against USDA; increased focus on diet, nutrition, and health for African Americans; emphasis on interdisciplinary research, team teaching, and distance learning; recommendations of reward systems for both individuals and teams for research, teaching, and/or outreach effectiveness; better communications among 1890 land-grant universities and their partners; and increased emphasis on policy issues that impact underrepresented communities.

Southern AgBiotech Consortium for Underserved Communities (SACUC)

Led by Alabama A & M University and co-led byTuskegee University, the Southern AgBiotech Consortium for Underserved Communities was a regional partnership between 2000 and 2005 that involved 1890 land-grant universities in ten states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. SACUC focused on reducing information and knowledge gaps in agricultural biotechnology among underserved

communities through hands-on experiences by K–12 teachers and students, small farmers (vegetable production), and community leaders. As a result, farmers, community leaders, teachers, students, and consumers were better informed about biotechnology, and fears about seeds and foods produced with biotechnology were of minimal concern to those involved. Continuation projects have been funded in several states to continue to bridge the biotechnology and genomic information gap for K–12 teachers and students.

Black Belt Regional Commission

In partnership with the University of Georgia and North Carolina State University, SOFSEC universities and community-based organizations focused on addressing persistent poverty in the South. This eleven-state initiative included 353 counties where the poverty levels have not decreased over the past twenty years. Intensive work was done across the region to collect information regarding key challenges to overcoming persistent poverty. Issues and indicators included health care, jobs and economic development, quality of K–12 education, and transportation. Resulting reports included "Dismantling Persistent Poverty," published by the University of Georgia, and "Persistent Poverty in the South," published by Tuskegee University. The impact of this initiative was that the reports served as the basis for legislation that was introduced bills into the Senate (by Senator Zell Miller) and House of Representatives (by Congressman Artur Davis). Differences in the two bills are shown in the table below.

Differences in Two Bills Introduced into Congress to Establish a Black Belt Regional Commission

Senate Bill Sponsored by Zell Miller 3/05/03 – Based on UGA Study	House Bill Sponsored by Artur Davis 2/11/03 – Based on SOFSEC/CBO Study
Creates a new ARC	Expands and builds on DRA
Recognizes UGA study	Recognizes UGA study, SOFSEC, and CBOs
Overall power: governors and alternates	Overall power: governors, alternates, and a representative from constituency representation boards
Local decisions by local development districts	Local decisions by local development district (80%) and in constituency representation boards (20%)
Input role for higher education and community-based organizations	Integral role for higher education and community-based organizations
Includes two-thirds of eligible counties	Includes all eligible counties
$20 million per year for seven states	$500 million per year for fourteen states Includes four sub-regions

The work by SOFSEC and community-based partners raised the central question of the extent of participation by local constituencies, involvement of higher education and community-based organizations, inclusion of all eligible counties in the Southern region, and adequate funding on par with the Appalachian Regional Commission. The struggle to implement a Black Belt Regional Commission continues as a goal of legislators, university faculty and staff, and community-based organizations.

Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (IFAFS)

The Integrated Food and Agricultural Systems project was competitively funded by USDA and included the SOFSEC institutions and community-based partners involved in marketing agricultural products. The project included eight states, nine 1890 land-grant universities, Southern Rural Development Initiative (SRDI) Land-Based Centers, and other organizations across the South. The project focused on a regional approach to marketing goat meat, fruits, and vegetables. The project (1) identified lead underrepresented-minority goat producers in each state whose farms served as demonstration sites for new goat farmers, often those who had a history of raising cattle, (2) provided starter goats for new goat farmers and identified markets for goats across the South, (3) worked with vegetable and fruit farmers across the region in the development of niche markets and direct farm sales through farmers' markets, (4) set up demonstrations sites for organic vegetables and fruit production and assisted with providing drip irrigation and mulching systems, (5) explored sales to school lunch programs, and (6) examined the feasibility of processing-center hubs across the region. The biggest impact of the IFAFS project is that the number of goat and fruit and vegetable farmers, who are underrepresented minorities, increased in all of the participating states. Farmer participatory research, demonstration, and marketing projects are continuing across the region, though the grant was completed in 2005.

Alabama Agricultural Land Grant Alliance (AALGA)

SOFSEC provided outstanding leadership development for the agricultural administrators, faculty, staff, and students involved. Thus, when the opportunity arose to forge an alliance in the state of Alabama among its three land-grant universities to work together on problems confronting farmers and rural communities, Alabama A & M and Tuskegee Universities were ready to partner with Auburn University and other state bodies in a new way. The catalyzing opportunity arrived with federal legislation passed in 1999 that required each state to match USDA formula funds at the 1890 land-grant universities. This practice of matching federal formula funds for research at the 1862 land-grant universities had been ongoing since 1862, but had never been done for 1890 institutions. The federal laws required that, beginning in 2000, states would match federal funds at a ratio of 0.3:1 and would increase by 0.1:1 each year until a 1:1 match was obtained. In Alabama this requirement was manifested through a new line item in the state budget (AALGA). The AALGA line also included separate funds to be split equally among the three land-grant universities for joint research. The impacts of this process were: (1) historic barriers were broken between faculty from the three land-grant universities working together on joint research projects, (2) the state legislature increased their overall support to all three land-grant universities for agricultural research and extension, (3) the increases in state funds required by the USDA formula were met each year until the 1:1 federal match was attained at Alabama A & M and Tuskegee Universities, (4) citizens of Alabama began receiving the benefit of collaboration by three institutions to solve agricultural, environmental, and food-related challenges in the state, and (5) duplicated efforts have been minimized.

Black Belt Family Farm Fruit and Vegetable Market Center (BBFFFVMC)

A direct result of SOFSEC, IFAFS, and AALGA has been the development of the Black Belt Family Farm Fruit and Vegetable Market Center to be located in Selma, Alabama, to serve underserved farmers in the twelve Black Belt and adjacent counties. The center is being developed to process fruits and vegetables grown by Black Belt farmers and to identify markets for their high-quality produce. The center will utilize the faculty and students of the three land-grant universities to test production and processing methods that fit market demand and are appropriate for the crops grown by the participating farmers. Partnerships will be developed between the participating farmers through their marketing cooperative and through market outlets. Funding for the market has been provided by the state legislature. The center evolved from the Governor's Black Belt Action Commission and is the number-one project of the Governors' Black Belt Action Commission Agriculture Committee. The expected impact is to increase income to underserved and limited-resource farmers in the Alabama Black Belt; develop stable markets for fruits and vegetables; increase the availability of nutritious, locally grown produce for local consumers; provide new jobs; and show the local youth that cooperative marketing can improve the quality of life for rural African Americans. A key component of the initiative is that through AALGA the three land grants are committing the human and technical resources to ensure a modern, efficient food-processing and market center, including joint research and demonstrations by faculty, staff, and students from the three land-grant universities.

Professional Agricultural Workers Conference (PAWC)

Initiated at Tuskegee University in 1942, the Professional Agricultural Workers Conference has served as a forum for professionals to come together and explore challenges, successful models, and new approaches to serving farmers, rural communities, and consumers. At the heart of the unique role of PAWC is the coming together of the faculty, staff, and students of the 1890 land-grant universities with USDA and other federal, state, and community-based partners to:

- celebrate career efforts of outstanding leaders through the Carver Hall of Fame Award Banquet
- honor the legacy of 1890 land-grant leaders who contributed significantly to the land-grant mission
- provide keynote addresses by national and regional leaders on challenges and opportunities in agriculture, rural development, and related areas
- host research-presentation competitions by graduate and undergraduate students on agricultural, alimentary, environmental, and rural-development topics
- share presentations of success stories by faculty, staff, and community-based organizations
- support the annual MANNRS-Tuskegee Chapter student banquet, an international-issues workshop

- engage participants in workshops on topics such as:
  - food, nutrition, and health
  - natural-resource, forestry, and environmental issues
  - community and economic development
  - small-farm issues
  - preventing Black land loss
  - African American connections with Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans
  - marketing agricultural products by small and limited-resource farmers
  - K–12 and community youth education and career opportunities in agricultural and environmental sciences
  - rural community challenges
  - forging partnerships to move the Southern region forward
  - international challenges and opportunities

An important part of PAWC is the development of and adoption of policy recommendations to be implemented at the federal, state, and local levels. The PAWC Advisory Board is a cross-section of leaders from throughout the Southern region and the nation.

Summary

The above examples reflect both thought and activities by faculty, staff and students at the 1890 land-grant universities, focused on improving the quality of life for African Americans and other underrepresented minorities and limited resources persons in the Southern region. In all cases the thought involved and actions undertaken included education and experiential learning for students, a focus on serving the underserved, and building partnerships based on shared leadership, shared resources and shared credit. Compared to the 1862 land-grant universities the 1890 land-grant universities only recently began receiving funds at the federal and state levels, enabling them to fully function as land-grant institutions and provide consistent and sustainable service to targeted communities. The Black Environmental Thought Conference is timely in that it serves as a forum to provide the opportunity for the 1890 land-grant universities to work with new partners to address issues of land, power and sustainability from fresh perspectives in the Southern region and beyond.

Notes

[1] 3/2 and 3/3 refer to three years at Tuskegee University and two or three years at a partner university to receive the BS from Tuskegee University and MS from the partner university. Partner universities include: Auburn University, California Polytechnic Institute, North Carolina State University, Mississippi State University, Oregon State University, University of California at Davis, University of Florida, and Washington University.

Power in the Blood

The reason we ***still*** here,
Is cause we ***been*** here,
soooo long!
Things at rest
Tend to stay put.
Now that's a curse ***and*** salvation child.
We may not know every hair on the head of our long history,
But what know what's
Underneath the skin,
And pulses inside.
We ah deep, deep people,
Flowin',
    Like a river,
        Through time...

Louis Alemayehu

Authors

Louis Alemayehu, Poet, Educator, Performer, and Activist on the topic of African American and Native American heritage, Minnesota

Owusu Bandele, Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Clyde E. Chesney, Administrator, Cooperative Extension Program, Tennessee State University

Kwasi Densu, Assistant Professor, Florida A&M University

John S. Ferrell, Archivist (retired), National Archives and Records Administration, Oregon

Heather Gray, Director of Communications, Federation of Southern Cooperatives / Land Assistance Fund, Georgia

Tasha M. Hargrove, Assistant Professor, Tuskegee University, Alabama

Mark Hersey, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Mississippi State University

Walter A. Hill, Dean, College of Agriculture, Tuskegee University, Alabama

Jeffrey L. Jordan, Director, Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE), Professor, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, UGA-Griffin Campus, Georgia

Edward "Jerry" Pennick, Director, Land Assistance Fund, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Georgia

Kimberly N. Ruffin, Assistant Professor of English, Department of Literature and Languages, Roosevelt University, Chicago, Illinois

Miessha N. Thomas, Attorney, Federation of Southern Cooperatives / Land Assistance Fund, Georgia

Sylvia Hood Washington, Research Associate Professor, School of Public Health, Institute for Environmental Science and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago

Robert Zabawa, Professor, Tuskegee University, Alabama

In 2007, over 100 people gathered at Tuskegee University to move innovation in Black sustainable agriculture forward and contribute to the overall diversity of thought in sustainable agriculture. The papers in this volume were only some of the presentations, posters, discussions, and performances that made up this extraordinary conference. The conference was a joyous event that also featured poetry and music. The essays in this collection are a starting point for dialogue. They represent the opinions, not always scholarly opinions, of the individual authors and seek to capture the spirit of a unique conference. The essays present a moment in the early 21st century, preserving what some leaders in various segments of Black American culture were thinking about land and power as it related to sustainable agriculture and Black American traditions.

Black American agricultural experiences are grounded in unique cultural, historical, and ecological experiences, informed by the values and history of the African Diaspora. This includes agronomic traditions brought from Africa, the experience of slavery, sharecropping and tenant farming, the story of migration to the industrial North and the gardening traditions that were carried with them, and concerns about contemporary food-systems issues.

The papers in this volume are like eclectic, diversified family farms. Some writers touched on more than one subject, and some subjects attracted writers from diverse viewpoints. All of the writers, however, place African American farmers, their cultural traditions, as well as the historical circumstances they have faced squarely in the forefront of the sustainable agriculture movement.

Second printing

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