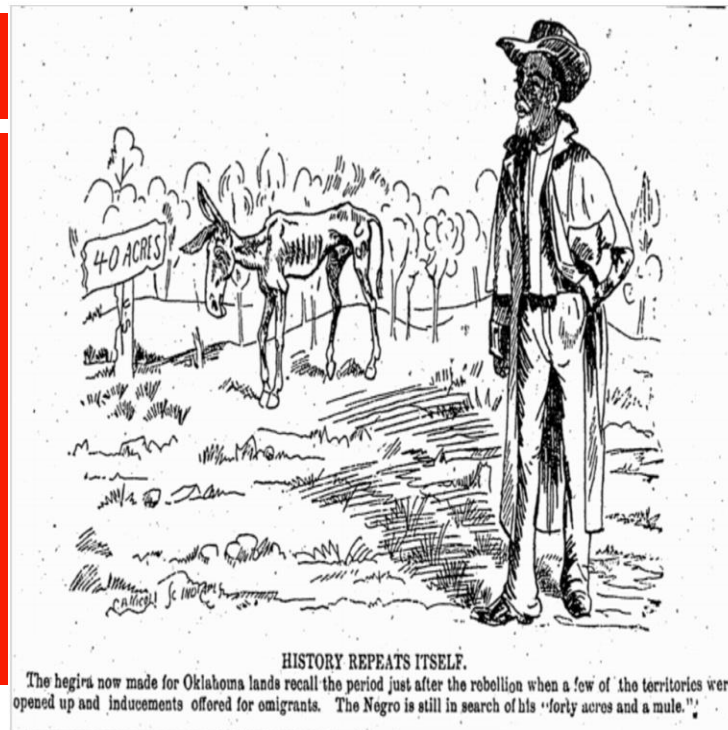


Black Landownership and Heirs Property in American History

Robert D. Bland, PhD

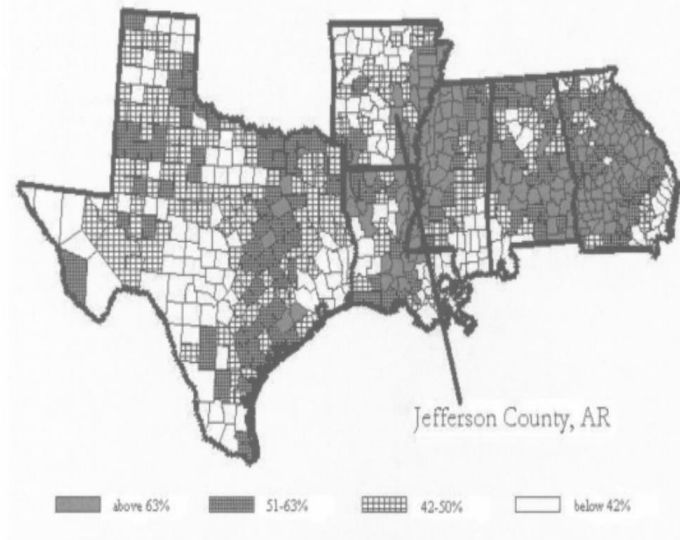
University of Tennessee

Emancipation and the Promise of Landownership



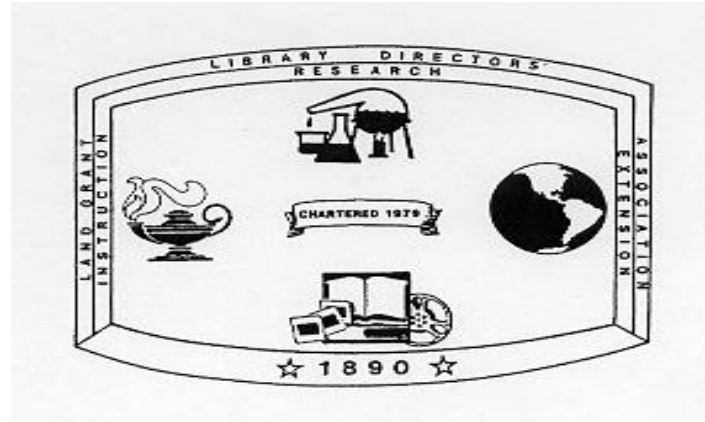
- Sherman's Field Order 15 allocated 400,000 acres to be divided into 40 acre parcels to Black heads of household
- Measure was reversed by Andrew Johnson during Presidential Reconstruction
- Some Radical Republicans sought to use the Freedmen's Bureau as a vehicle for Land Reform but measure did not pass the Congress

Sharecropping and Tenant Farming



- During the late nineteenth century Freedpeople were largely “farmers without land”
- In 1900, 85% of all black agriculturalists in Mississippi were sharecroppers; by 1935, 77% of all black farmers were landless

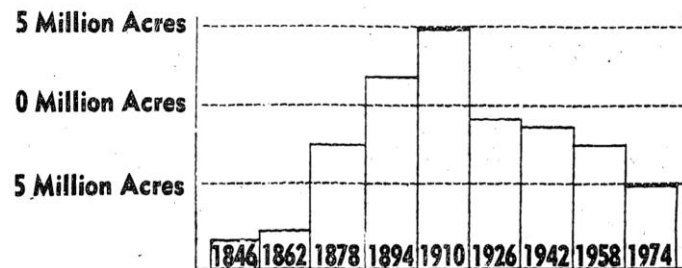
1890 Morrill Act



- Despite obstacles, landownership remained a key part of the Black southerners' American Dream
- In the coastal regions of the American South, Black Southerners were more successful in acquiring land.
- Expansion of the 1862 Morrill Act created new "1890 institutions" that offered schooling, resources, and extension agents who could help Black southerners acquire and maintain land

1910 and the Peak of Black Landownership

DECLINE In Black Rural Landownership



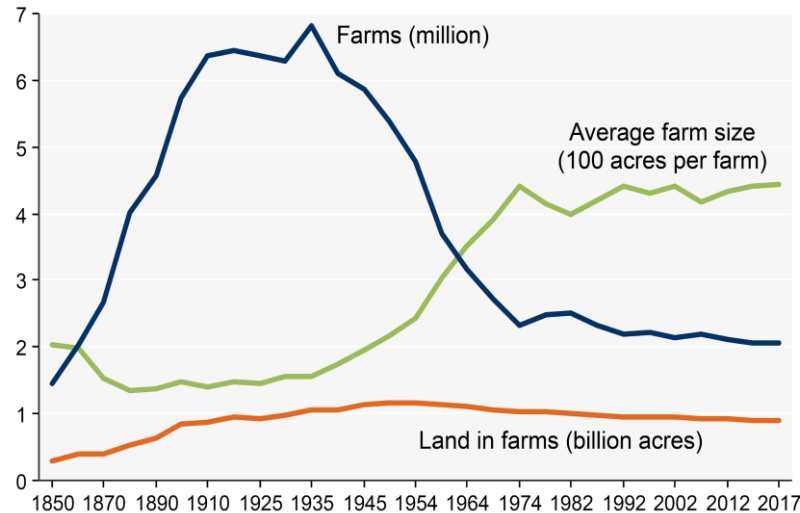
THIS TABLE GIVES A PERSPECTIVE ON BOTH THE RATE AT WHICH BLACKS ACCUMULATED AND ARE LOSING RURAL ACREAGE

- In 1910, Black landownership had grown to 15 million acres
- 1 in 5 black agriculturalists would have owned their land
- The vast majority of these lands were in MS, AL, NC, and SC
- This land was often passed on to family members without a will or clear title

The Slow Decline of Black Landownership

Farms, land in farms, and average acres per farm, 1850-2017

Million farms, billion acres, or 100 acres per farm

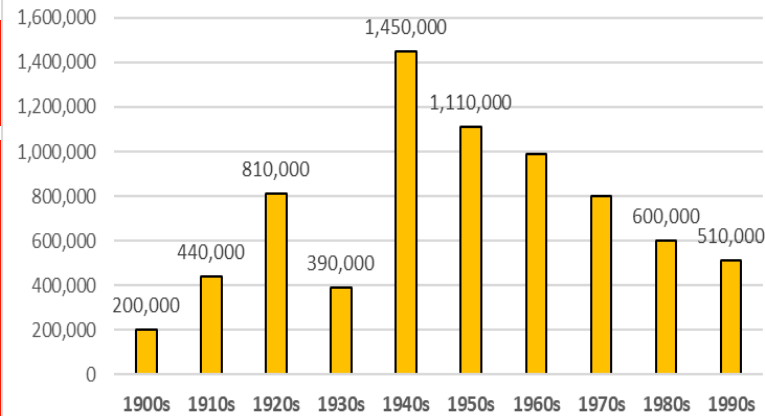


Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture (through 2012) and *Farms and Land in Farms: 2017 Summary*.

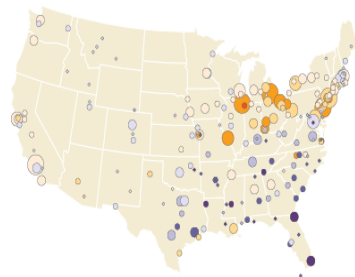
- Black landownership began to decline as the boll weevil decimated cotton crops and northern wages outpaced farm earnings
- New Deal programs like the Agricultural Adjustment Administration gave more power to large plantation owners and encouraged these large landowners to mechanize

Great Migration and Heirs Property

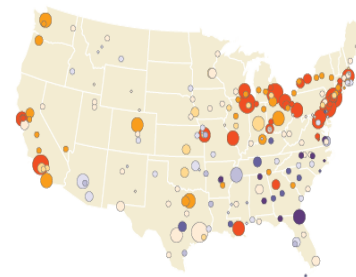
Estimated number of migrants leaving the South each decade



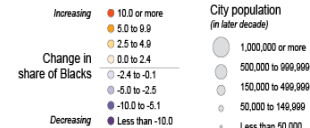
The First Great Migration: 1910-1940



The Second Great Migration: 1940-1970



The change in share of Blacks in cities is based on the percentage point difference in the percent of population that was Black in the later time period compared to the earlier. For example, 18.3 percent of the population in Gary, IN was Black in 1940 but was just 2.3 in 1910, which represented a 16.0 percentage-point change in the share of Blacks in the city. It was the largest change in share during the First Great Migration. By the end of the Second Great Migration, Newark, NJ had realized the largest increase in Black population share, with the Black proportion of the city rising from 10.6 in 1940 to 54.2 in 1970.



- In 1910, 90% of Black Americans lived in the rural South.
- By 1970, most Black Americans lived in a city; just under 50% lived in a city in either the North or the West
- In 1983, the Emergency Land Fund estimated that 5 out of 8 Black landowners lived in a northern city

Ringing the Alarm on Black Land Loss

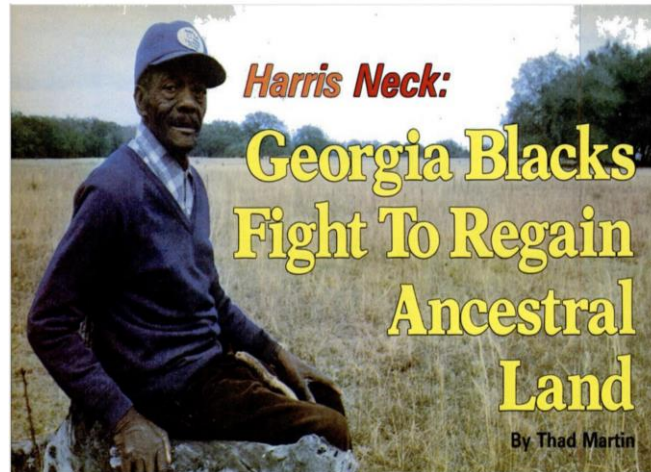


Photo by Pat Goudvis

BLACK LAND LOSS

**6,000,000 acres
and fading fast**

by Eleanor Clift



The Great Migration and the Urban Crisis caused many Black scholars and intellectuals to bring awareness about the loss of black land

James Foreman, Elijah Muhammad, and others called for Black self-determination through southern land ownership

In 1973, Robert S. Browne wrote "Only Six Million Acres," which highlighted the gravity of Black land loss

South Carolina Lowcountry and Heirs Property



The New York Times/Bill Barter
Mrs. Evelina Jenkins, with some of her children and grandchildren, in front of the house on her cousin's property where she now lives

Blacks in South Struggle to Keep the Little Land They Have Left

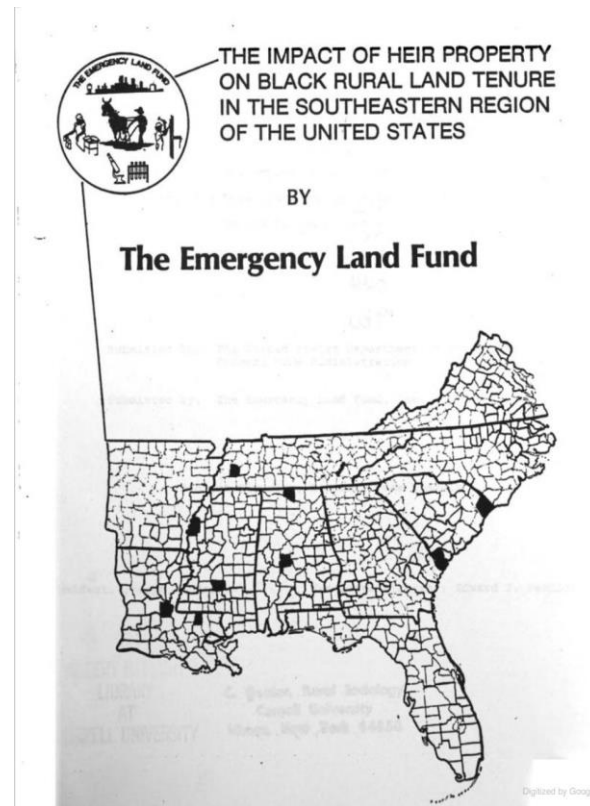
The South Carolina Sea Islands were the epicenter of Black Land Loss in the United States

Real estate developers took advantage of partition sale laws to purchase heirs property without negotiating with all heirs property owners

Rising property tax burdens caused by new development in the region exacerbated the crisis

Black Land Services, Inc., a subsidiary of Black Economic Research Center, sought to provide legal support and funding for black landowners in

Federal Policy and Heirs Property



- In 1980, Emergency Land Fund estimated that 41% of Black-owned land was heirs property (3.8 million acres)
- By 1997, only 2.4 million acres of black farmland remained
- Since 2019, Fourteen states have passed the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act