

Pamela Gaiter
Professor of Sociology
Spring 2006 Sabbatical
Sabbatical Summary

After the Civil War several organizations and laws were initiated which impacted the black farmer and landowner. These include the Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union in Houston County, Texas, 1890 Morrill Act to create land grant colleges for Blacks, The Colored Farmers National Club and Cooperative Union of the United States in Arkansas, and the establishment of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in 1967 which later emerged with the Emergency Land Fund (1985), specifically created to address African American land loss. The Landowners Association of Texas, established in 1979, is an extension of this last organization and their mission is "to reduce the rate of property loss by the Black Landowners by providing support to programs that stimulate, foster, develop and implement the retention, acquisition and use of land." The Tyler chapter of LAT began working with the Houston chapter in late 1980s then established their own chapter in 1993.

The purpose of this sabbatical was to complete an explorative case study analysis of one non-profit organization, The Landowners Association of Texas, (LAT) a group consisting of African Americans who have either inherited their land from family or purchased land from other African Americans in the area. Though the main focus of this research was members of The Smith County Tyler Chapter, members of another local chapter, Crockett, Texas, as well as a few other minority landowners in the area (who also participated in some of this group's events) were interviewed.

Prior to beginning the research in January 2006, contact was made to the Tyler Chapter President and a few other members of this chapter regarding my interest in researching the group. After obtaining approval from the local President then receiving a membership list, fifty-three letters were sent to the Tyler Chapter members stating the

purpose of the research and seeking a time for an interview and possible field trip to view the land (see attachment A). Follow-up telephone calls and/or emails were sent to all fifty-three members to schedule an oral interview and possible field trip to their land. As a result over twenty-five interviews and sixteen field trips were made to members as well as non members who are family landowners and/or farmers in the area. In addition numerous telephone interviews were given to follow up on information received, gather more data, and/or schedule meeting times. During each field trip, respondents were interviewed (audio and/or video) to obtain family history, document current use of the land and seek a visual of the land. Though no field trips were scheduled with the Crockett members, personal interviews were held with the president, Cather Woods, and the state president of the Association, Ed Cline during the Southeast Chapter Annual Banquet in Crockett, Texas. Additional research information was obtained by attending the LAT Tyler Chapter February meeting (only meeting held during this time), the Southeast Chapter Annual Banquet in Crockett, Texas (March 2006), East Texas Farm and Ranch Monthly Meeting in Tyler (March 2006), and the Tyler Chapter Annual Banquet in May. Also, much information was collected by listening to participants sharing with one another while sitting on families' front porches, in living rooms, and the back of pickup trucks.

The findings of this sabbatical are too valuable to relate in a brief summary. Though most members of this group are over the age of sixty, their tenacity, dedication to their family land and willingness to share whatever resources they have with one another is reflected in the beauty of their fifty (plus) acres and fresh products. At least a third of the families in this group reside on land that was purchased in the late 1800s. Two

families have been recognized and documented by local and/or state agencies (such as the Texas Family Land Heritage Program, sponsored by Texas Department of Agriculture by State Commissioner) for utilizing land that has been in their family over one hundred years. All of the respondents are principal operators of their farms and land, and most are utilizing the land for beef cattle ranching or growing seasonal crops. Other uses of the land include growing hay, drilling for minerals such as oil and gas, growing and selling timber, Wet Land Conservation, and recreational activities, such as hiking trails, hunting, fishing and camping for youth. Their common values include strong work ethics, importance of family, and a deeply rooted Christian belief that God has “blessed” them to retain a scarce resource, land. Though not many of them have children or grandchildren who currently work the land with them, they believe they have instilled the importance of maintaining family land in at least one younger member of their family.

Members of this group are actively involved in the community through their church affiliations, voluntary associations, local school programs, and other organizations such as the East Texas Farm and Ranch Club, Soil and Water Conservation Board, Tyler Area Growers, County Extension Services, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the East Texas Fair. Their involvement in these associations have made them well known to others in the community; therefore they often serve as leaders and advocates for their community. The chapter’s president (youngest member, age thirty-eight), recently completed a two-year program entitled Texas Agriculture Lifetime Leadership. This is a select group within the community who complete over 455 hours of study and tour state and world agriculture fields to enhance their knowledge about the agriculture industry on a national and global level, including a recent trip to Brazil.

Though he was the only African American selected for this past two year class, the president shares the training and knowledge he has received with the Tyler Landowners Association and others in the agricultural community. Many of the members hope having a younger, more energized and intellectual leader will draw younger individuals to join the organization.

This organization is viewed by its members as a type of “community” which serves as a major resource for the agricultural community. The local county extension agent was one of the original founders and through his vast knowledge of the different African American communities and state and local services, this group continues to recruit new members as they fulfill their goal to empower individuals through their programs. They present classes based on the needs of the members and/or the community. Some of their educational classes include various methods for cow/calf operation, cultivating different types of grasses for the best hay, addressing various diseases impacting cattle and other farm animals , cross-breeding of chickens, maintaining property ponds with diverse fish, harvesting a variety of watermelon seeds, onion plants, or peas and clearing land for timber. They also provide seminars relevant to available grants and assistance regarding taxes, legal issues impacting inheritance land, mineral rights and skills for developing community leaders. Many of these programs are sponsored by the Smith County Cooperate Extension Agency, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Services, or USDA Agricultural Resource Services, and area universities such as Texas A & M and Prairie View A&M University. Furthermore, LAT sponsors workshops to assist youth with an awareness of agricultural

opportunities. During the Crockett Chapter Banquet in March 2006, two youths were given scholarships to Prairie View A & M where they will study business or agriculture. The Landowners Association assisted these youth with funds to rear calves which were prize winners during the state stock show. In addition, they have an annual banquet where they recognize members for outstanding achievements such as “the producer of the year.” Yet, the field trips to members and non members’ farms and ranchers in the area were stated by all as one of the most valuable activities provided by the organization. For it is during the field trips they observe the different techniques they have learned in their classes. Usually they travel in a charter bus and caravans to the specific location. These tours are sometimes local; other times they travel to Crockett or the Houston area. During the months of my sabbatical no organized group tour was scheduled; therefore in going to each farm, I was able to make my own observations about the various methods used by each farmer/rancher interviewed.

After collecting data from interviews, I worked with Jackie Hsu in the Teaching and Learning Center and Roy Brookshire, Distance Learning Technician, at the Spring Creek Campus in Plano on average five hours every week from April until May to edit my interviews into a twenty-five minute DVD/Video production and power point presentation of my findings. I presented a copy of this production to each family and individual during the Tyler Chapter’s Annual Banquet in May when I served as the main speaker in May. Also, I submitted and was approved to present findings of my research during the 32nd Annual Mid-South Sociological Association National Conference in Lafayette, Louisiana in October, 2006.

In addition to completing my research, I participated in some of the colleges' events during my sabbatical. These events include, a division meeting (January 2006) to discuss learning outcomes, a learning community's workshop (April 27th) to establish learning outcomes for fall 2006 learning community, presentation of my summer 2005 study grant on race and assimilation (March 2nd), and serving on the search committee for the Central Park Academic Dean.

This sabbatical research is invaluable to me personally and professionally. Since many of these families reside in areas where I was raised, this information has given me much pride and admiration for my heritage, my family land and more appreciation of the sacrifices these families have made for me. Furthermore, each family expressed gratitude for being able to document and share the video/DVD production with present and future generations about the history and value of their land. It is their hope that understanding the history of the land will make the family less likely to sell or neglect the land.

As a sociologist, the impact of culture on history, especially African American history is reflected in this community of landowners. This group serves as a source of information and supportive network of friends and families who are willing to share whatever resources available to reduce land loss among African Americans in their community. They are also effectively bringing an awareness of the significance of the agricultural industry to younger generations. Information gained from this research will be presented in sociology classes, national conferences and campus wide events (such as African American History) addressing cultural issues. It will also be shared with local

community organizations such as McKinney's Historical Society and public schools as requested.

[CLICK HERE AND TYPE COMPANY NAME]

October 5, 2009

P. O. Box
Midlothian, TX

Dear Mrs. Arnick:

I am professor of sociology at Collin County Community College. I have been granted a sabbatical time from my standard teaching and administrative duties in order to complete research on the Landowners Association of Texas, Tyler Chapter. My father, Winford Bowie, is a member of this association, and he has inspired me to research and document the significant contributions your organization has made to the community as well as the farming industry. There is limited research to document African American farmers, their history and efforts to maintain and preserve their land and their culture. My purpose for this research is to document your personal story which relates to the social, political and cultural issues you have or are currently encountering to preserve your land. Information from this research will be documented in a published paper and presented to my college, the community and possibly national conferences which relates to issues of African Americans. Of course, copies will be shared with you as well. Basically, I would like your story to be told in your language and from your perspective and preserved for the others to know the significant role of African American farmers and landowners.

This research project will include an interview with you, personal visit to your land as well as participation in some of the landowners' spring events. With your permission, my interview time with you will include oral and visual tape recording. However, if you feel uncomfortable with either recording, I will just take notes during our time together. My goal is to learn from you, not inhibit you in any way. Please contact me pgaiter@ccccd.edu when would be a good time to meet. My email address is pgaiter@ccccd.edu; feel free to contact me via email, if that is more convenient for you. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Pamela Gaiter
Professor of Sociology
Collin County Community College,
Central Park Campus, McKinney, TX 75070

[STREET ADDRESS] • [CITY/STATE] • [ZIP/POSTAL CODE]
PHONE: [PHONE NUMBER] • FAX: [FAX NUMBER]

1. How long have you been a member of the Landowners Association? Why did you join?
2. Do you know the history of this association? Tell me your idea of why this is an important organization for the continuance of AA landownership?
3. Go back to your earliest remembrance and tell me how your family acquired this land? What did your parents, grandparents, brothers/sisters/ etc. tell you about the acquisition of this land?
4. What did your family grow on the land? Did they trade with others and who?
5. How was race relations at that time?
6. What were some of the challenges your ancestors talked about regarding maintaining their land ownership? Any talks of violence, threats or harassment?
7. What support systems did they have?
8. What support system do you currently have?
9. What challenges do you face in maintaining this land?
10. What do you tell your children, grandchildren about this land?
11. What does this land mean to you?
12. What would you like your children to do with this land?
13. Do you have any expectations that they will be able to preserve the land and know the history of this land?
14. Do you have any pictures of your family on this land?
15. Does this land reflect part of a community?
16. What role does the church play in the development of this community.