

## HOME COMING...SOMETIMES I AM HAUNTED BY RED DIRT AND CLAY

### HISTORICAL TIMELINE

*"Land is the basis of all independence.  
Land is the basis of freedom, justice and equality."  
- Malcolm X*

- 1863 Emancipation Proclamation frees nearly 4 million enslaved Africans.
- 1865 U.S. Congress ratifies the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery.  
  
Freedman's Bureau established. In addition to providing medical, education and relocation services, Bureau begins distributing small plots of land abandoned during the Civil War to freedmen.  
  
Former Confederate states issue laws restricting the civil rights of freedmen and women and issue "Black Codes" that attempt to control black laborers.
- 1866 Congress passes the Southern Homestead Act, opening public lands in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and Florida to all settlers regardless of race.
- 1867 First Reconstruction Act passed by Congress. White secret societies begin forming to address the "Negro problem" in the South.
- 1868 Congress passes the 14th Amendment, granting blacks full citizenship and equal civil rights.
- 1874 Land distributed by the Freedman's Bureau have netted freed blacks 160,960 acres in Florida, more than 350,000 acres in Georgia and 116 of 243 homesteads in Florida.
- 1875 Congress passes the Civil Rights Act granting blacks the right to equal treatment in inns, public conveniences, and public amusement places, and prohibits their exclusion from jury duty.
- 1877 Presidential candidate Rutherford B. Hayes agrees to remove federal troops from the South in return for support from Democratic Southern Congressmen. Upon Hayes' election, he removes troops from South Carolina and Louisiana, signaling the end of Reconstruction.

- 1881 *Bill Mathis, Charlene's great-grandfather, is born.*

Booker T. Washington goes to Alabama to start the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute.

Tennessee enacts a law requiring racial segregation in railroad cars, initiating a segregation policy that will spread to most Southern states and become known as "Jim Crow" laws.

- 1883 U.S. Supreme Court overturns the Civil Rights Act of 1875.
- 1886 Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union is formed and at times works closely with the Southern Farmers' Alliance (later called the National Farmers' Alliance). By 1891 the Colored Farmers' National Alliance (CFNA) claims more than a million members in twelve state organizations. However, when the (CFNA) proposes to call a general strike of black cotton pickers, the National Farmers' Alliance leadership opposes the strike, arguing that blacks were attempting to better themselves at the expense of whites.
- 1888 First bank administered by blacks formed in Richmond, Virginia.
- 1890 Blacks own 120,738 farms.
- 1892 Booker T. Washington issues first call for a conference of farmers in Tuskegee.
- 1896 Supreme Court rules in Plessy v. Ferguson that "separate but equal" facilities are constitutional, a decision that reinforces segregationist policies of the South.
- 1900 *Bill Mathis marries Viccie Mathis; they have 14 children.*

*Bill Mathis sharecrops in Marion and Dooly County, Georgia.*

Within a two-year period, there are 214 lynchings.

- 1904 *Fred Mathis, Charlene's grandfather, is born.*
- 1910 Blacks own 218,972 farms accumulating an estimated 15 million acres of land. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded with Dr. W. E. B. DuBois as part of its leadership.
- 1911 Supreme Court rules against the labor conditions of the Black Codes in Bailey v. Alabama.

- 1914 Approximately 55 black banks have been organized.
- 1915 Precipitated in part by farm labor wages falling to \$ .75 a day and the boll weevil devastation of cotton crops, Southern blacks begin migrating to Northern and Western cities when war industries seek their services. By 1930, almost one million blacks leave the South in what becomes known as the Great Migration.
- 1925 *Fred Mathis marries his first wife Janie Milliron.*
- 1926 *Bill Mathis purchases 200 acres of land in Macon County referred to as the "Blue Ruen" farm.*
- 1929 October stock market crash triggers the Depression. Price of cotton bottoms out and devastation leads to foreclosures. Black farmers' inability to repay loans leads to the failure of 30 independent black banks.
- 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) created under New Deal favoring large farms. Subsidy payments to South are siphoned off by white landowners. Sharecroppers are deprived of assistance.
- 1935 Failure of AAA leads to formation of Southern Tenant Farmers Union (also known as Southern Sharecroppers Union) uniting black and white tenant farmers and sharecroppers in their fight against exploitation by large landowners.
- 1937 Farm Security Administration (FSA) created to make loans to farmers. With an appropriation one-fifth of the amount appropriated to the AAA, the FSA's mission to establish communities of small farms results in thousands of blacks purchasing land with FSA loans.
- 1940-45 Second major migration of blacks from South seeking opportunities in Northern cities during war years.
- 1945 *Fred Mathis marries Lula Duncan; they have 7 children.*
- 1946 *Bill Mathis dies.*
- 1948 *Earlene Mathis Gilbert, Charlene's mother, begins working on the farm.*
- 1950 *Bernice Mathis, Earlene's sister, marries Leroy James; they have 7 children including Warren James, the youngest boy.*
- 1942 After years of attack, the FSA appropriation is cut drastically.

- 1954 *Earlene leaves Montezuma, Georgia for the Tuskegee Institute.*

*Fred Mathis is named first African-American Merit Farmer in Macon County.*

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* that segregated schools are "inherently unequal" and thus unconstitutional, reversing *Plessy v. Ferguson*. *Brown* also establishes that other public facilities, which are separated based on race, are inherently unequal.

Farmers in the South attempting to register to vote are denied credit from the Farm Home Administration and banks.

- 1961 Earlene Mathis marries Charles Gilbert; they have 2 children and settle in Temple, Texas.
- 1964 A study commissioned under the Johnson Administration reveals widespread discrimination against black farmers by the Department of Agriculture (USDA).

U.S. Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Act gives the U.S. Attorney General additional power to protect citizens against discrimination and segregation and establishes a federal Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC).

- 1969 *Viccie Mathis dies*

Freedom Farms founded by Fannie Lou Hamer.

- 1970 *Earlene, Charles and family move from Texas to Washington, DC*
- 1978 Another period of sharp decline in farms owned by black farmers begins. Blacks own 6,996 farms.
- 1981 U.S. Department of Agriculture begins closing its Civil Rights Office, which is responsible for investigating civil rights complaints.
- 1982 U.S. Civil Rights Commission issues a report predicting black farmers would be extinct by the year 2000.

- 1983 *Fred Mathis dies*

Land Loss Prevention Project created by the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers.

- 1985 Constitutional Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee holds hearings in Robeson County, NC to investigate complaints of alleged discrimination in Farm Home Administration programs.

- 1987 *Lawyer attempts to steal the farm of Charlene's uncle, Leroy James*
- 1992 Black-owned farms fall to 2,498, a decline of 64% in 15 years.
- 1994 The Land Loss Prevention Project files a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit on behalf of black farmers and turns over information to Congress to investigate discriminatory practices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1980s and early 90s.
- 1996 1000 Black farmers file class action lawsuit against the USDA for discriminatory practices against black farmers.
- 1997 Black Farmers & Agriculturists Association is founded by Tim Pigford - lead plaintiff in the black farmers class action lawsuit against the USDA.
- 1998 After years of pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus members serving on the House Agriculture Committee, Congress passes a law waiving the 2-year statute of limitation in the Equal Credit Opportunity Act. This waiver allows farmers who tried to file complaints at the USDA during the period between January 1981 and July 1997 and were victims of the USDA closure of its civil rights investigative arm, to file new complaints today. This law also becomes basis of Federal Judge Paul Freidman's consent decree order settling the class action lawsuit in 1999.
- 1999 *Lula Mathis dies*

On January 5, the USDA settles the lawsuit, agreeing to pay \$50,000 to black farmers who claim discrimination by the Agriculture Department through denial of government loans, disaster relief and other aid. Many of these farmers have already lost their land. The Land Loss Prevention Project files another lawsuit seeking protection for black farmers from default by the U.S. Government in paying claims.

- 2000 The Land Loss Prevention Project, in conjunction with the Black Farmers & Agriculturists Association, plans to file a class action lawsuit to challenge USDA practices that continue to discriminate against Black farmers.