

BLACK FARMERS & AGRICULTURALISTS ASSOCIATION

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PRESS RELEASE

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Shirley Sherrod and USDA Discrimination

As the president of the 20,000 plus members of the Black Farmers & Agriculturalists Association (BFAA) and the sixty-six year old son of two lead plaintiffs in the Wise v. Venneman class action, the late Matthew and Florenza Moore Grant whose 30 year old case was supposedly settled but painfully never paid, I would like to weigh in on the racially embedded political/media controversy and the “destroy the black woman syndrome” of the Shirley Sherrod incident.

I am personally acquainted with Ms. Sherrod, and have always found her to be an honorable and hard working representative to save farmers suffering from the economic impacts of an unfair and often discriminatory and racist USDA.

The statement from Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, that USDA does not “tolerate” racial discrimination is a complete lie.

Talk to almost any family member of a black farmer or check out the C.R.A.T. Report (February 1997) published by the USDA resulting from the “Listening Sessions” of 1996 and see the government’s documentation of how USDA employees, on the local and federal level discriminated against Black farmers, in particular. And nothing was ever done to penalize the all white officials bent on destroying a society of black farmers across the nation: not one firing, not one charge brought, and not one pension lost.

Yet at the first erroneous offering by a conservative blogger that a black woman from USDA might have discriminated, she is immediately forced to resign. This is becoming a vicious pattern against black women: outstanding examples are former Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney (D-GA), Bertha Lewis of Acorn where black women were in charge, Desiree Rogers, social secretary for the Obama White House, and now Shirley Sherrod, led by the prestigious NAACP, respected African American reporters, and the Obama governing complex.

Arguably, these kinds of actions are also a symptom of the callous and brutal way black men often treat black women and their children in everyday life.

USDA is a perfect example of the power to create, destroy, and redistribute wealth and employment, in the past and for future generations. At the funeral service of my 86 year old uncle yesterday, I was reminded of the long standing economic impact on the life and death of black farmers.

As three of his daughters ritualistically drove bronze screws with an automatic drill into his handsome self-handcrafted oak casket, a former sharecropper and self-described “conservative democrat,” was among one of the few successful claimants in Track A of Pigford vs. Glickman. But his life of worry and abuse by USDA and local farm offices imperiled his economic security and life choices, and those of his children.

A law suit that has already cost the American tax payers over \$1 billion dollars in settlements with another \$1.25 billion waiting approval by the U S Senate, that seemingly has worked tirelessly to prevent justice from being served. However, no one has had the balls to introduce the bill on its own merits, neither black nor white, based on the judges ruling.

But let Fox News put out an outrageous news story with no investigation and a Black woman can be summoned to pull off a Georgia Road and forced to resign her position with USDA, immediately, while all those other agents who truly did discriminate and cost the American tax payer billions, have gone free and to higher positions in the USDA agency. Oh what an indictment on just how far we have come on the race issue as a nation.

Besides the US Congress calling for the immediate reinstatement of Ms. Sherrod, it must set the example of leadership on justice and fairness by allowing the Pigford Class and all outstanding Civil Rights claims at USDA to be “settled once and for all” which will allow the country be able to begin to move toward the healing process of racial disharmony in the nation.

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