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The American Agriculture System: A History of Racism, Power, and the Construction of the American Mindset

It is no secret that the American agriculture system was built on the backs of enslaved Africans on American soil. Slaves in America were the ones cultivating the fields, tending the crops, and working as the main producers of food in America. As slavery ended, African Americans still worked heavily in food production, many as sharecroppers (Tyler and Moore). However, through the years African American farmers experienced heavy discrimination from government agricultural institutions such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Farmers House Administration (FmHA). These two government institutions that were designed to be the “people’s department” and to help socially disadvantaged individuals in farming proved to do just the opposite. The FmHA continuously gave African American farmers less loans compared to their white farmer counterparts. The USDA gave no federal oversight to stop the discrimination against African American farmers. Various other government policies proved to be discriminatory against African American farmers as well such as the New Deal Program, the Bankhead- Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937, and the economic opportunity act of 1964 which all favored white farmers over African American farmers. The continuous discrimination led to a decrease in African American farmers and African American land ownership that is still seen today (Tyler and Moore).

This paper will examine how years of discrimination against African American farmers has led to a lack of interest of African Americans in the food production system as a whole. This paper will further discuss how governmental agencies and policies have the power to shape a group of people's mindset. The agriculture system and food movement initiatives today are all dominated by white Americans, as African Americans tend to be uninterested (Hoover). The research in this paper will argue that when governmental policies exclude a specific group of people from a specific labor through discrimination these policies then have the power over the group that was discriminated against to create a sense of not belonging to that specific labor. When a discriminatory governmental policy becomes normalcy in society the people the policy is discriminating against begin to believe the exclusion is normal and begin distancing themselves from the thing they were excluded from (in this case African Americans and agriculture). This ultimately creates a lack of representation of African Americans in farming, food movement initiatives, and food justice initiatives. This lack of representation creates further discrimination and injustice to be taken towards African Americans in the food production system because now people in the majority feel allowed to speak for them. This paper will conclude with a look into the future of different approaches food activists and advocates can take to ensure more inclusion from African Americans in America's food production system.