

PRESS RELEASE

I'M JUST A LAYMAN IN PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

BLACK FARMERS FIGHT
AGAINST THE USDA

PRODUCED BY SHOUN HILL
AND WAYMON HINSON



I'm Just a Layman in Pursuit of Justice chronicles the injustices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, also known as 'the last plantation,' and the lived experiences of Black farmers who chose to fight against discrimination.

Their love for the land and farming as well as their pain and suffering are revealed in voices you will hear. Between 1997 and 1999, fifteen farmers appeared before the USDA and the Department of Justice and won their cases administratively. This film brings the stories of nine of these farmers and families out in the open.

Others bear witness to the farmers' stories: the farmers' legal counsel; a former Secretary of Agriculture; farmer and former Director, Office of Civil Rights; President Emeritus of the USDA Coalition of Minority Employees; and the author of the pivotal work, *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights*. Together they form a cohesive and compelling story of what it means to farm while Black in America.

These nine farmers and families will tell their stories of the USDA's injustices at the local county level when applications were trashed or altered, loans denied, farm operating loans came in too little and too late, disaster relief denied, and how the USDA attempted to foreclose on them. They will also describe how even in the settlement agreements between the USDA and the farmers, the USDA still treated them unjustly. These are stories of struggle and resilience, and how they prevailed against all odds.

66

Justice. That was my goal with this project. To do justice to the farmers in telling their stories and hopefully get them the justice, legally, that is due to them. I don't think anything could possibly make up for the pain, heartache, and humiliation that these men and women went through over the course of their life; all because of their skin. From the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..." but not to these farmers, these words were hollow. All they wanted was to make a living for themselves and their family by farming, their "pursuit of Happiness".

I got frustrated, angry, and just pissed off listening as they told their stories. So I could only imagine how they felt having to live through it! I'm trying not to get racial, however, it comes down to white people feeling that black people didn't deserve what they had, and they did everything in their power to make it difficult for them to succeed and make a living at something they enjoyed doing. There was just pain in their voices and heartache on their faces. I wanted to show the emotional trauma they had to go through and are still going through because stress like that takes a toll on the body.

- Shoun Hill, Producer

99

66



I was simply not prepared twenty-five years ago when I interviewed the first Black farmers and their families who had been discriminated against by the USDA. Little did I know then that their stories would capture me in incomprehensible ways and that those earliest of thoughts, feelings, and experiences would lead to the making of this documentary. So, why make this film? Hopefully to bring about justice because justice has been denied for so long.

These interviews were raw and deeply personal. They were painful to hear, but how much more painful to live: racist employees, altered applications, dead cows, a bullet cracking the back window of a tractor while the farmer worked, property of a deceased mother seized against a farmer's indebtedness, too little funding, too late in the planting season, land loss, the constant threat of an eviction notice, generational wealth denied.

Our wish is that this film will engage the listener in the lives of Black farmers who simply wanted to own and work their land. Is that too much to ask here in America? We hope we have done well with their stories. That is our deepest desire and commitment.

- Waymon Hinson, Producer

99



TO BE RELEASED
FALL 2020

Shoun Hill
www.shounhill.com
shounhillphotograpy@gmail.com

Waymon Hinson
www.letjusticering.blogspot.com
waymonrhinsonphd@gmail.com

For more information:
www.laymaninpursuitofjusticefilm.com
laymaninpursuit@gmail.com

***Underwritten by the Black Farmers
and Agriculturalists Association
and friends around the globe.***

www.bfaa4us.org

Gary Grant, President

tillery@aol.com

