

# “Revolution is Based on Land:” Wealth Denied via Black Farmland Ownership Loss

## Introduction

African people were stolen from their land and forced into slavery in the US. Once free, they continued to have their land stolen and ownership rights violated. In 1920, 14% of farm owners were Black, holding 15 million acres of farmland. Since then, the USDA has systematically discriminated against Black farmers and failed to include them equally in farm programs and loans. This, along with influences such as urban migration and foreclosure, has led to drastic Black farmland loss. Today, Black farmers own only about 1% of US farmland. Denial of access to land ownership is one of many ways Black people in the US have been excluded from accumulating wealth, seen today in the 13:1 wealth gap between median white and Black families. The present analysis contributes to the research on the discrimination Black people have experienced by exploring two questions:

**Where have Black farmers lost land?**

**What is the wealth, in farmland value, that Black people have been excluded from accumulating?**

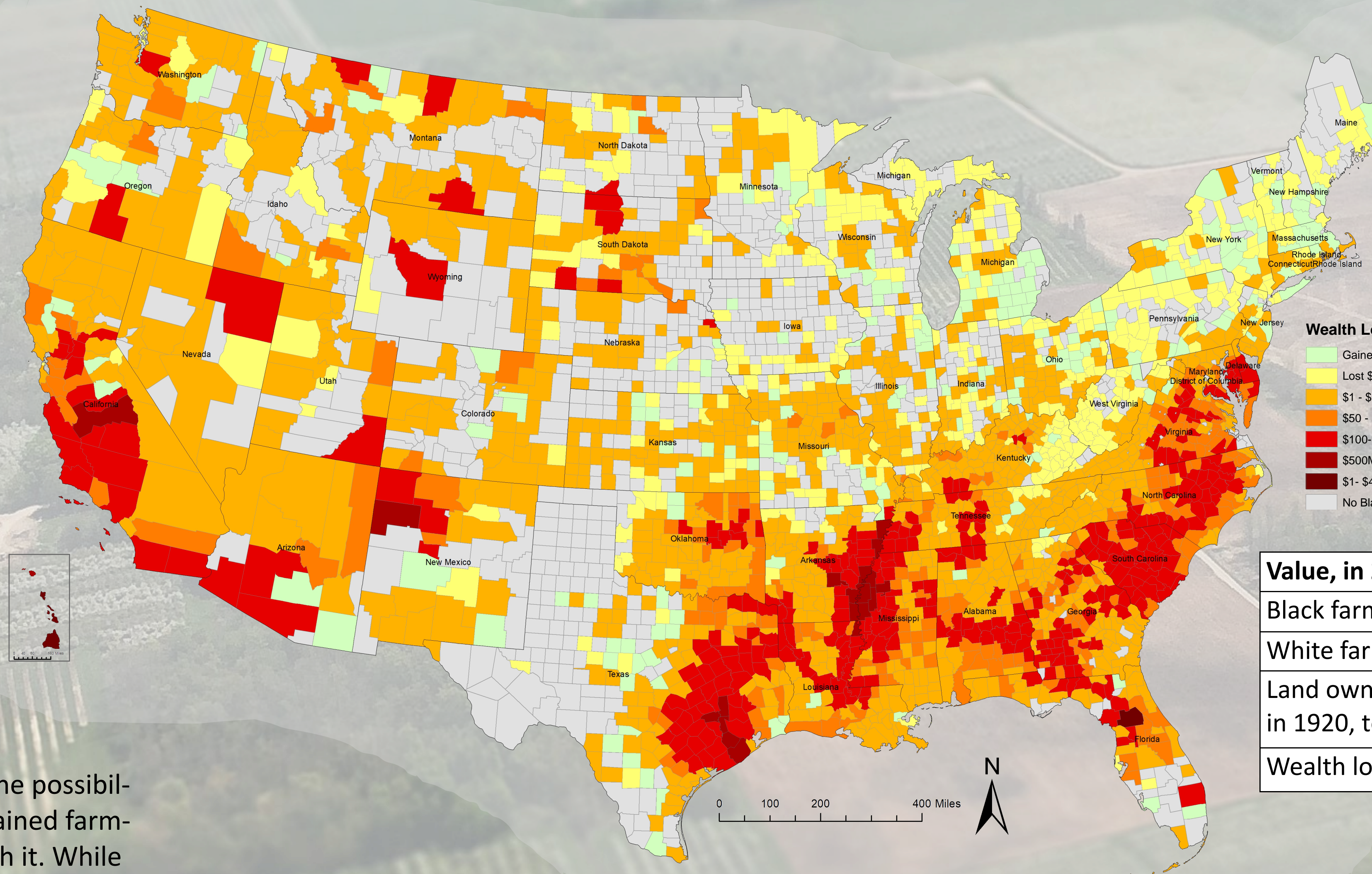
## Discussion

Since 1920, Black farmland ownership has declined, along with the possibility for wealth accumulation. White farmers, conversely, have retained farmland ownership, and the wealth and power that accumulates with it. While it cannot be known that every Black farmer would have chosen to stay on their land if they'd had access to the same supports as white farmers, there is still a notable racial discrepancy in farmland ownership today. The maps on the bottom left show where there was a decline in Black farmland ownership from 1920 to 2012. In 2012, Black farm operators nationwide held approximately \$51 billion, as compared to over \$4.3 trillion held by white farm operators (bottom right maps). Note that the Black operator map's highest category ends at \$250M, whereas the white operator map's first category is from \$0-250M; the four other classes are higher value than anywhere on the Black-held value map. The sum of Black-owned farmland in 1920 would have a value of over \$185 billion today.

## Methods

I cleaned Census of Agriculture Data from 1920 and 2012 and then calculated the percentage of farms of Black and white farmers out of the total number of farms. I then multiplied the farmland value per county in 1920 by \$11.68 to approximate 2012 value. By county, I multiplied the average farm value by the number of farms to get total farmland value. I multiplied this land value by the percent of owners/operators of each race, to approximate the percent of the value each race group owns.

In ArcMap, I joined the 1920 and 2012 spreadsheets with a map of US counties and states. I visualized the percent of Black farm owners in 1920 and 2012, and the land value today held by white and Black farm operators. I then removed from analysis the counties where there was no Black landownership in 1920 (eg AK & PR), because those are not cases where wealth accumulation was denied. Finally, I multiplied the percent of farms that were Black-owned in each county in 1920 by the value of all farmland in the county in 2012, and subtracted the value held by Black principal operators in 2012, resulting in the value *not* gained. Summary statistics calculated the value per state.



**Wealth Lost or Gained in Mil (M) or Bil (B)**

- Gained \$0 - \$37M
- Lost \$0 - \$1M
- \$1 - \$50M
- \$50 - \$100M
- \$100 - \$500M
- \$500M - \$1B
- \$1 - \$4.68B
- No Black Farmland Ownership in 1920

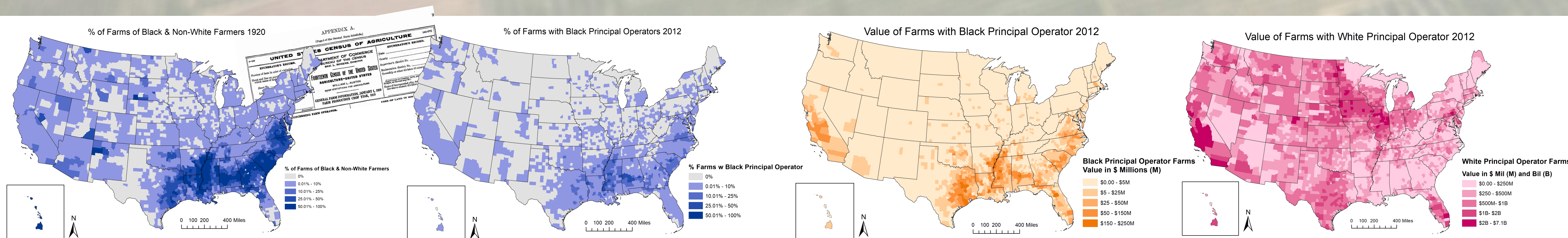
Value, in 2012 Dollars	
Black farm operators' land:	\$51 Billion
White farm operators' land:	\$4.3 Trillion
Land owned by Black farmers in 1920, today:	>\$185 Billion
Wealth lost by Black farmers:	>\$120 Billion

State	Value Lost (\$)
TEXAS	17,165,959,401.00
MISSISSIPPI	10,641,218,332.00
GEORGIA	9,850,223,678.00
ARKANSAS	8,993,657,207.00
HAWAII	8,440,847,936.00
NORTH CAROLINA	8,120,921,776.00
LOUISIANA	6,964,117,112.00
SOUTH CAROLINA	6,837,716,332.00
VIRGINIA	6,003,275,298.50
CALIFORNIA	5,979,148,482.60
ALABAMA	5,740,743,086.50
FLORIDA	4,791,986,841.00
TENNESSEE	4,368,647,300.50
OKLAHOMA	3,117,896,473.00
KENTUCKY	2,452,862,079.17
SOUTH DAKOTA	1,599,178,145.00
MARYLAND	1,502,450,123.00
NEW MEXICO	1,500,217,788.00
MONTANA	1,116,452,002.00
MISSOURI	881,990,776.20
ARIZONA	848,896,489.00
WASHINGTON	427,909,108.00
KANSAS	398,382,898.00
NORTH DAKOTA	364,448,620.00
UTAH	355,477,174.00
DELAWARE	328,251,792.00
OREGON	327,504,159.00
NEBRASKA	323,068,733.00
IDAHO	307,858,970.00
COLORADO	305,595,976.00
NEVADA	290,117,821.00
OHIO	266,124,770.90
WYOMING	235,072,550.00
ILLINOIS	226,386,977.60
WISCONSIN	147,379,131.30
INDIANA	117,489,071.20
NEW JERSEY	99,861,963.40
PENNSYLVANIA	66,691,804.40
WEST VIRGINIA	63,250,955.13
MINNESOTA	57,973,261.10
IOWA	57,229,184.00
NEW YORK	19,179,529.39
CONNECTICUT	9,619,954.00
RHODE ISLAND	3,196,687.00
MICHIGAN	817,554.90
MAINE	+3,106,279.10
VERMONT	+7,338,519.00
NEW HAMPSHIRE	+10,686,791.20
MASSACHUSETTS	+14,561,802.00
TOTAL	121,681,601,912.48

The central map shows where Black-owned farmland from 1920 has accumulated Black-held value (green). Everywhere else (yellow-red), the decline in Black farmland ownership means wealth has *not* accumulated in the hands of Black farmers, surpassing \$1 billion lost in some single counties. By the metrics used in this analysis, if Black farm owners had retained ownership of their land, they would have accumulated over \$120 billion. Lost wealth is concentrated in the southeastern states, where Black farmland ownership was previously highest. The 11 southeastern states alone total nearly \$90 billion lost. By putting a value on and location to where wealth has been denied, this analysis can be used as a tool in “The Case for Reparations.”

## Data Limitations

1920 data includes Black and other Non-White farmers, “farm” means yearly sales of at least \$250, and farmland value is only land. 2012 data only represents Black farmers, “farm” means \$1000+ yearly sales, and land value also includes buildings. This analysis uses number of farms owned/operated in a county, not specific farm acreage or number of owners. 2012 data uses farm operators as a proxy for ownership, which means lost value could actually be higher than reflected here.



Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic  
 Data from: USDA, Census of Agriculture, and US Census  
 Thank you, Sumeeta!



Quotes: Title- Malcom X; Discussion- Ta-Nehisi Coates  
 Intro: Penniman, Leah. *Farming White Black*. White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2018.  
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 Melissa Gordon  
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