HOW SOUTHERN IS OKLAHOMA? SEGREGATION IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION, 1914-1965

By

SAMUEL DUNN DESTER

Bachelor of Arts in History and International Studies

Baker University

Baldwin City, Kansas

2007

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
July, 2010

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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Michael Logan

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Ron McCoy

Dr. Elizabeth Williams

Dr. Mark E. Payton

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the members of his committee – Michael Logan, Ron McCoy, and Elizabeth Williams for serving in advisory and professorial capacities. I also owe a special debt to the staff of the Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries, and Edward Grady of the Melvin B. Tolson Black Heritage Center at Langston University. Those who guided me through my undergraduate degree also had an impact, including – but not exclusive to – Karen Exon, Leonard Ortiz, Gwyn Mellinger, and John Richards. John Waldron, teacher and friend, inspired a love of history in high school that has never retreated. This work would not be possible without the tireless efforts of scholars like Zella J. Black Patterson and Donald Green. Lastly and most importantly, I owe it all to my parents, Debra and Lee.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND EXTENSION BEFORE SMITH-LEVER

> "I wondered then, `What in the world--why don't they make up their minds? What is good for whites, and what is good for blacks, and what is not good for blacks?' It's all confused. I would say to myself, `The white man cannot make up his mind what he wants to do with blacks.'"[1]

John Hope Franklin, well-known historian, native-born Oklahoman and African American, tells a story about researching during segregation. As a young scholar he went to research at the State Department of Archives and History in Raleigh, North Carolina. Here, archivists did not have accommodations for an African-American researcher, not even unequal ones. Eventually, the staff placed him in a small room by himself. However, white attendants would not serve him, so he received his own keys to the stacks. Shortly thereafter, as a result of protests of unfairness by white patrons, Franklin was told to give back his keys and the white staff deigned to wait on him.[2]

This anecdote serves to illustrate the confused and complex nature of

[1] John Hope Franklin, interview by Debbie Elliot, *All Things Considered*, NPR, October 30, 2005.

[2] John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 83-84.

institutionalized segregation and this is the topic of my thesis: how segregation played out in the state of Oklahoma in the Agricultural Extension Division of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (hereafter shortened to OAMC), in Stillwater, Oklahoma. When most Americans think of segregation, they are quick to think of schooling, transportation, and private businesses in the Deep and Upper South. Agricultural extension in Oklahoma is likely very far from their thoughts. The story contained herein reflects not only on segregation, but also on the murky nature of regional history.

The following pages and chapters reveal how extension work in Oklahoma resembled that of the South – in that it was segregated, with all of the cultural, political, and economic factors that come with such a set up – but how, in other ways, it was different. The differences are due in part to the nature of African-American farming in Oklahoma, which closely mirrored trends in the Border States and in Texas. Other factors were institutional – a function of the nature of the relationship between the Director of Extension at the OAMC and the Negro Extension Division directed out of the Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University at Langston (hereafter shortened to Langston). The result of these differences was an excess of funding and staff for extension activities in the state at times, and a tendency to perform above the regional norm. An explanation for such differentiation arises out of the complex place of Oklahoma in regional history, straddling the divide between the American South and the West.

While all of these aspects helped contribute to unique narrative of African-American extension work in Oklahoma, there were several themes which ran throughout

the service's history. The work of black agents was consistently undervalued in terms of salary and funding. Nowhere was this situation worse than for the female agents, who faced double discrimination in the form of racism and sexism. However, despite this compound undervaluing, the service saw its work with women – and also children – as the most successful of its efforts with the state's African-American farmers. Despite these deficiencies, because of Oklahoma's cultural geography – the tendency of its rural African Americans to live in fewer counties but representing a higher percentage of the population than in other states and counties with similar setups – the state's black farm families received a higher proportion of agency than in most other states. As a result, national reports often showed Oklahoma's black agents performing above the regional norm. However, the goal of extension to save the small family farm and preserve a nineteenth-century Jeffersonian-agrarian model of yeomen farming failed. At the turn of the twentieth century, black farmers in Oklahoma were more likely to own their property than in the region at large, but by the 1930s this difference no longer existed. The grand sweep of history led to the end of small family – both black and white – and thus the extension service failed in its efforts, which many outside the bureaucracy saw as futile from very early on.

The organization of this thesis is chronological. This chapter serves as an introduction to the nature of rural African-American life in Oklahoma, including a brief outline of segregation in the Sooner state. This is followed by background on agricultural extension in general and cooperative extension specifically. Finally, a short discussion of the history of extension work in Oklahoma prior to 1914 rounds out the introduction. Chapter Two details the sluggish start of extension services for black farm families in

Oklahoma, beginning with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 and ending before the explosion of staffing and funding that came with the New Deal. Chapter Three follows the course of black extension work throughout the New Deal and World War Two. Chapter Four covers the course of the service during the Cold War and the civil rights era, ending with the compliance of Oklahoma State University (as the OAMC came to be known) with the United States Supreme Court ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954. Lastly, Chapter Five provides a brief summary of extension work by and for Oklahoma's African Americans after the services were desegregated in 1965, as well as concluding matter and commentary.

This work utilizes numerous resources, but some more so than others. These include census data and legislation. However, primary research in large part was undertaken in United States Department of Agriculture Circulars, Annual Reports of the OAMC Extension Division, the OAMC *General Catalog*, and the local *Oklahoma Extension News.* Additional resources such as *The Negro Yearbook* and *The Proceedings of the Conference of Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges* help to round out the most pertinent materials.

There is a growing body of literature relating to black extension work, most of it in the form of articles appearing in the journal *Agricultural History*. This secondary literature focuses largely on extension work done prior to 1945 and much of it takes the form of regional studies, but a brief discussion of a few main points will provide the reader with a comparative framework going forward. One of the earliest researchers in the field was Earl Crosby, who ultimately concluded that while black agents were able to help some African-American farmers, they fell short of their goals, which he saw as

anachronistic and oblivious to the lack of requisite conditions such as capital and property ownership. Crosby also emphasizes that the service gained white acceptance by 1920, in large part due to concern for black outmigration to the North and urban areas.[3]

Two other studies are of interest. The first is by Jeannie Whayne, who utilizes the subaltern theory of post-war colonial relationships to compare the South's rural African-American to those members of the European empires outside of the hegemonic power structure. Regardless of this paradigm's usefulness, Whayne makes the important point that, "In the end, black extension workers served the interests of agricultural modernization and undermined black rural society and culture."[4] This statement has a certain amount of validity for Oklahoma's program, where the end result was a conglomeration of farms in the hands of whites and an outmigration of rural blacks to cities in the North and inside the state. One also notes the similarities between the situations in Texas and Oklahoma in Debra Reid's book-length study of the service in the Lone Star state. Reid describes greater funding and more agents in Texas (raw total numbers, not necessarily proportional) coupled with longer hours and lower pay for blacks than whites. This was just part of what she calls "a Classic Hegelian dialectic [that] played out in the Texas countryside" that included black agency alongside black subjugation, and black talent with white racism.[5] Elements of this well-articulated

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[3] Earl. W. Crosby, "Building the Country Home: The Black County Agent System, 1906-1940," (Ph.D. diss., University of Miami, Oxford, Ohio, 1977), o-i; and Earl W. Crosby, "Limited Success Against Long Odds: The Black County Agent," *Agricultural History* 3 (July 1983): 277, 288.

[4] Jeannie Whayne, "'I Have Been Through Fire': Black Agricultural Extension Agents and the Politics of Negotiation," in R. Douglas Hurt, ed., *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 159, 187.

[5] Debra Reid, *Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service, and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2007), xxiv.

dynamic were at work in Oklahoma, where the black agents were more productive than many of their compatriots in other states, but still suffered from tangible and intangible racism. Other studies, while insightful and pertinent, are too numerous to mention here.[6]

There are also extant works pertaining to cooperative extension and African Americans in Oklahoma, although this is not the primary focus of these pieces of scholarship. Zella J. Black Patterson, herself the daughter of county agent Thomas Black, briefly discusses these individuals in her history of Langston University, as does Jimmy Lewis Franklin's work on African Americans in Oklahoma.[7] A description of African Americans in the extension service also appears in Donald E. Green's *A History of the*

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[6] For the national experience, see Crosby, "The Struggle for Existence: The Institution of the Black County Agent System," *Agricultural History* 2 (Spring 1986): 123-136; Karen J. Ferguson, "Caught in 'No Man's Land': The Negro Cooperative Demonstration Service and the Ideology of Booker T. Washington, 1900-1918," *Agricultural History* 1 (Winter 1991): 33-34; Benjamin Watkins Harris, "Status of the General Extension Function at the Sixteen Negro Land-Grant Colleges and Universities" (M. A. Thesis, North Carolina State University at Raleigh, 1973); William Bailey Hill, "A Status Study of Program Development in the Negro Divisions of the Cooperative Extension Service of Ten Southern States" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1959); Allen W. Jones, "Improving Rural Life for Blacks: The Tuskegee Negro Farmer's Conference, 1892-1915," *Agricultural History* 2 (Spring 1991): 105-114; Jones, "The South's First Black Farm Agents," *Agricultural History* 4 (October 1976): 636-644; B. D. Mayberry, *The Role of Tuskegee University in the Origin, Growth, and Development of the Negro Extension System, 1881-1990* (Tuskegee Institute, IL: Tuskegee University, 1989); Joel Schor, "The Black Presence in the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service since 1945: An American Quest for Service and Equity," *Agricultural History* 2 (Spring 1986): 137-153; R. Grant Seal, "The Formation of Agricultural and Rural Development Policy with Emphasis on African-Americans: II. The Hatch-George and Smith-Lever Acts," *Agricultural History* 2 (Spring 1991): 12-34. In addition to Reid's work on Texas, other regional studies include Mary Amanda Waalks, "Working in the Shadow of Racism and Poverty: Alabama's Black Home Demonstration Agents, 1915-1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1998); Whayne, "Black Farmers and the Agricultural Extension Service: The Alabama Experience, 1945-1965," *Agricultural History* 2 (Spring 1998): 523-551; and Gary Zellar, "H. C. Ray and Racial Politics in the African American Extension Service Program in Arkansas, 1915-1929," *Agricultural History* 2 (Spring 1998): 429-445. Two works deal specifically with black extension's most prominent official: Deborah Waldrop Austin, "Thomas Monroe Campbell and the Development of Negro Extension Work, 1883-1956" (M. A. Thesis, Auburn University, 1975); and Jones, "Thomas M. Campbell: Black Agricultural Leader of the New South," *Agricultural History* 1 (January 1979): 42-49.

[7] Zella J. Black Patterson, *Langston University: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 206-212; Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 21-23, 87-90.

Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture.[8] A general history of the Oklahoma Extension Service, is provided in "The History of the Extension Service in Oklahoma," edited by Edd Roberts, as well as Green's work.[9] Readers should approach these two secondary sources with caution – the Omicron Chapter of Epsilon Sigma Phi, the honorary Extension Service fraternity, prepared the former and the latter was part of a series promoting the Oklahoma State University centennial in 1990.

African Americans in the Sooner State have a rich – if little-known – history. To begin with, they made up a significant portion of the population from 1890 to 1910. The "peculiar institution" of enslaving human beings of African descent existed among the mixed-blood planter class of Indian Territory's Five Republics, albeit in a slightly different incarnation than in regions dominated by Euro Americans, since the arrival of the Southeastern tribes in the 1830s.[10] The abolition of slave-holding in Indian Territory was one of the primary stipulations of the Reconstruction treaties signed by the Five Tribes throughout 1866.[11] Census figures for 1890 and 1900 show that most of the African Americans or "Negroes" in what would become the state of Oklahoma resided in Indian Territory. In 1890, Blacks represented a tenth of the eastern territory's population, while the newly created – and much less populous - Oklahoma Territory possessed a Black population amounting to only 4 percent of its total. This would hold steady until

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[8] Donald E. Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture* (Stillwater: Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories Series, 1990), 95-96, 98-99, and 353-354.

[9] Edd Roberts, ed., "History of Oklahoma State University Extension, 1902-1970," Omicron Chapter Epsilon Sigma Phi.

[10] Arrell Morgan Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 98; and W. David Baird and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 96.

[11] Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 128; and Baird and Goble, *Oklahoma: A History*, 113-114.

statehood in 1907, when the Twin Territories were joined. African Americans constituted 8 percent of the population of the new state by 1910.[12] This concentration of black residence in the eastern portion of the state helps to explain the geographic distribution of black extension workers from 1910 onward.

The economic state and population characteristics of rural African Americans in Oklahoma are of special concern to the present work. Figures in this area are more difficult to decipher. This may be because the federal government did not distinguish between various non-whites (in Oklahoma, these were mostly First Nations Peoples) in its enumeration of farms. The Census of Agriculture for 1900 reports that roughly under one fourth of the farms in Indian Territory were "Colored" while in Oklahoma Territory, these farms represented only 5 percent of the total.[13] *The Negro Year Book* for 1914-1915 states that nearly half of the combined "Colored" farms of the Twin Territories in 1900 were operated by Indians. A similar situation held in 1910. By this time, the white population had so swelled that "Colored Farms" made up only a tenth of the total number of farms. In this case, slightly under a third of these were Native American-operated.[14] Extension work with Native Americans in Oklahoma is not the topic of the present work, but it receives brief treatment in Chapter Five, because of the initial and eventual relationship between these two minorities in the state where agriculture is concerned. In the South, Oklahoma ranked only above West Virginia and Maryland in terms of numbers of black farms, but like the state itself, the numbers of these farms grew

[12] "Census of Population and Housing," 1890, 1900, and 1910, *U.S. Census Bureau.*

[13] "Census of Agriculture," 1900, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *United States Department of Agriculture.*

[14] Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Yearbook: An Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1914-1915* (Tuskegee Institute, AL: The Negro Year Book Publishing Company, 1914), 295.

dramatically – an increase of 108 percent during the first decade of the twentieth century.[15]

It is helpful to understand *what* black farms in the South were producing and raising. During the first years of the twentieth century, in the South as a whole, black farmers devoted a majority of their work to cotton crops (37 percent), with corn the second largest crop (20 percent).[16] In Indian Territory at the turn of the century, principal crops were split nearly fifty-fifty between cotton and "hay and grains" – including corn – while in Oklahoma Territory, the same held true. Thus, at its beginning, the agriculture of Oklahoma's African-American farmers diverged from that of the nation, where cotton farming represented nearly ten times the amount of farming of "hay and grains."[17]

There were other differences in the composition of Oklahoma's farms that will help in understanding its exceptionalism. One can begin to see during this period how the operation of farms delineated differing situations in different states, especially where black extension workers were concerned. As a whole, black farms in the South during this period were operated by tenants - overwhelmingly so, by a three to one majority. Only in a few places was this not the norm. Florida and Kentucky's black farms were split evenly between owned and tenanted. But, Oklahoma, Virginia, and West Virginia

[15] Ibid., 288.
[16] Ibid., 290.
[17] "Census of Agriculture," 1900, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *United States Department of Agriculture.*

were the only states in the period where "Colored" farm owners rather than tenants were truly in the majority.[18]

If Oklahoma's farm situation for blacks differed from the rest of the South, the same was not true in the area of civil rights. Southern-style discrimination was typical in Oklahoma, which would see the political dominance of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, as well as the horrific Tulsa Race Riot.[19] In addition to terrorist activities, the daily lives of Oklahoma's African Americans were subject to institutionalized racism. Of greatest interest to this study is the role of racism in education. The Constitution of the State of Oklahoma, Article XIII, Section 3, stated that, "Separate schools for white and colored children with like accommodation shall be provided by the legislature and impartially maintained. The term 'colored children' as used in this section, shall be construed to mean children of African descent. The term 'white children' shall include all other children."[20] Segregated public education existed at all levels in Oklahoma and pertained not only to students, faculty, staff, and facilities, but also to outreach education for the state's non-college residents.

Other forms of legal discrimination were common. In the grand tradition of Louisiana and the infamous case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Senate Bill Number One, passed by Oklahoma's upper chamber in 1907, instituted "equal but separate coaches or compartments, and separate waiting rooms at stations and depots" for railways and other

[18] "Census of Agriculture," 1900 and 1910, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *United States Department of Agriculture*; and Work, ed., *Negro Yearbook: An Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1914-1915*, 291-295.

[19] Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 213 and 216.

[20] Henry George Snyder, *The Constitution of Oklahoma: With Copious Notes Referring to and Digesting Decisions Construing and Applying Identical and Similar Provisions of the Constitutions and Statutes of Other States and of the United States* (Kansas City, MO: Pipes-Reed Book Company, 1908), 330.

means of transit utilized by the public.[21] Other well-known measures, used by Southern Democrats to trample on the rights of Black voters and insure the dominance of their resurgent party following the Civil War, were the so-called "literacy tests" and "grandfather clauses." Oklahoma voters approved the "grandfather clause" in August 1910. The final statute, formalized in House Bill Number Twenty-Seven in 1911, contained the notorious requirements of being able to read and write a portion of the state's Constitution, but exempting from suffrage denial descendants of qualified voters on or before January 1, 1866.[22]

Having established institutional segregation for Oklahoma's African Americans prior to 1914, the development of extension during this period is of interest. Agricultural extension, as a form of outreach from agricultural experts to farmers in order to bring research into the field for practical application, is generally acknowledged as beginning in 1904. It was in this year that agricultural scientist Seaman A. Knapp initiated "farmer's cooperative demonstration work" in Texas, by convincing a local farmer to allow him to use of one or some of his plots to demonstrate new farming techniques.[23]

Scholars trace the beginnings of extension work in Oklahoma to 1907. This is not because of statehood, but rather because it was in this year that W. D. Bentley, who would become OAMC's first Director of Cooperative Extension, moved to Oklahoma to

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[21] Coach Law, Separate Coaches – Waiting Rooms, *Oklahoma Session Laws 1907,* ch. 15, art. 1, 201.

[22] General Elections – Amendments, *Oklahoma Session Laws 1911,* ch. 106, sec. 12, 231-232.

[23] Wayne D. Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 34-35; Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture,* 89-90; and Roberts, ed., "History of Oklahoma State University Extension, 1902-1970," 1-3.

supervise extension work in the western part of the state.[24] It was also in this year that W. M. Bramberge assumed authority over the Sooner State's eastern portion.

Black extension work also pre-dated the institution of federally-funded cooperative extension work under the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. Booker T. Washington and H. B. Frissell worked to bring farm demonstration to the respective schools over which they presided – the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and the Hampton Institute in Virginia – culminating in the appointment of Thomas Monroe Campbell as the nation's first African-American agent, followed shortly by J. B. Pierce, both in 1906.[25] Thus, a year before farm demonstration officially arrived in Oklahoma, African-American agents in the South had already begun their work.

It did not take long for black extension workers to initiate outreach to rural constituents in the state. Annie Peter of Boley, Oklahoma, in Okfuskee County, was the nation's first female African-American Demonstration Agent.[26] This occurred in 1910, the same year that Oklahoma received its first male agent, also for Okfuskee County.[27] The Census Bureau considered this county to be entirely rural, with no towns or cities with a population of 2,500 or more people. More importantly, it had the largest proportional (40 percent) and second largest total population (8,073) of African Americans in the state. Wagoner County's population of 8,761 Blacks – roughly 39 percent – was less-qualified because it was 18 percent urban. Okfuskee County was

[24] Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 92.
[25] O. B. Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," *United States Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Circular No. 72* (October 1926), 3.
[26] J. A. Evans, "Extension Work among Negroes: Conducted by Negroes, 1923," *United States Department of Agriculture Department Circular 335* (September 1925), 2.
[27] Jones, "The South's First Black Farm Agents," 643.

better-suited for the state's initial experiment in black demonstration.[28] This status of two agents, one male and one female, remained the case in 1914, when Congress approved the Smith-Lever Act. Peters was spread quite thin by this time, her jurisdiction including not only Okfuskee, but also Logan, Muskogee, Oklahoma, and Kingfisher counties, while male agent J. R. Council was only responsible for work in Okfuskee County. At this time, Oklahoma's Black farms represented only 1.5 percent of the South's total, but the state possessed 5 percent of the nation's Black agents.[29]

Thus, as the passage of federally-funded cooperative extension under the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 loomed on the horizon, several facts about Oklahoma's place in the nation's Extension work became clear. The state was possessed of a sizable rural African-American population that faced much of the same discriminatory treatment as their Southern counterparts. Unlike most of the South, however, these black farmers were more likely to own their property rather than working on it as tenants. Black extension work began early in Oklahoma, with a small but comparatively, proportionally large contingent of two agents. These trends would bear out in the next three decades as Cooperative Extension between the states and the federal government struggled through two home front mobilizations and a severe depression.

[28] "Census of Population and Housing," 1910, *U.S. Census Bureau*.

[29] Work, ed., *Negro Yearbook: An Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1914-1915*, 291 and 295-296.

CHAPTER II

FROM THE SMITH-LEVER ACT TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION

> "The purpose of the bill is to help the tillers of the land discover the hidden riches of the soil, to devise methods of cultivation which will lessen the burden of farm life by shortening the hours of drudgery, and render more productive land… to improve the man, enlarge his mental horizons, and give intelligent direction to his effort… to add comfort to country life, lighten the burdens of women, afford greater opportunities to boys and girls upon whose shoulders soon will fall the responsibility of the home and the burdens of government."[30]

When the Omicron Chapter of Epsilon Sigma Phi - the Honorary Fraternity for the extension service at the OAMC and later OSU – prepared its history of the program up to 1970, it did not deign to include information about work by African-American men and women. It did, however, include the above quote from Senator James Kimble Vardaman, Democrat from Mississippi. In addition to being one of the leading proponents of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which would initiate cooperative extension between the local and federal governments, Senator Vardaman possessed a questionable record on the issue of race, one that earned him his nickname of "The White Chief."[31] Moreover, no one could convince the senator – so adamant in his support for cooperative

[30] James K. Vardaman, speech cited in Edd Roberts, ed., "History of Oklahoma State University Extension, 1902-1970," Omicron Chapter Epsilon Sigma Phi., 123; and in George Coleman Osborn, *James Kimble Vardaman: Southern Commoner* (Jackson: Hederman Brothers, 1981), 182-183.

[31] William F. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1970), 34-38.

extension – of the value of such work with African-Americans. He opposed allowing black leaders at their land grant colleges to be in charge of distributing the funds derived from the Smith-Lever Act.[32]

Just as it did at the national level, with challenges coming from influential senators like Vardaman, African-American extension work in Oklahoma had rocky beginnings. For the first sixteen years of cooperative extension in Oklahoma, outreach to the state's Black farm families progressed at a sluggish pace. In Oklahoma, as in other Southern states, it would take a considerable amount of time before the necessary resources – both human and otherwise – reached what resembled acceptable levels. This chapter examines these early years, first by looking at the institutional developments at the state and national level, and then by examining the OAMC's perception of its own work with Oklahoma's rural African Americans, as portrayed in the *General Catalog* and the *Oklahoma Extension News*.

Cooperative Extension began in earnest in 1914 when the United States Congress passed House Resolution 7951, commonly known as the Smith-Lever Act, after its sponsors Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia and Representative A. Frank Lever of South Carolina. The stated purpose of the act was "to provide for cooperative agricultural extension work between the agricultural colleges in the several states receiving benefits of an act of congress approved July second, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and acts supplementary thereto, and the United States Department of Agriculture."[33] In short, the Act provided for federal funding for agricultural and home economics extension work by

[32] George Coleman Osborn, *James Kimble Vardaman: Southern Commoner* (Jackson: Hederman Brothers, 1981), 182.

[33] *Smith-Lever Act of 1914.*

land-grant colleges designated by the First Morill Act of 1862 –such as the OAMC – as well as those designated by the Second Morill Act of 1890 (mostly historically Black colleges like Langston), accompanied by federal oversight of such programs.[34]

The act formally defined extension work on the basis of the informed consensus among extension advocates about appropriate extension activities. The work of agents would include "instruction and demonstration in agriculture and home economics to persons not attending or resident in said colleges in the several communities." Programs and their agents were responsible for disseminating information in these areas "through field demonstrations, publications, and otherwise." The act itself does not specifically mention work with boys and girls or issues of race, two primary concerns of the present study. Like most federal legislation during the era of segregation, the Smith-Lever Act skirted the issue of race, but by including the 1890 land grant institutions assured that blacks would be involved in cooperative extension. What role colleges like Langston would play was another matter. If a state contained two or more land-grant institutions, whether established in 1862 or 1890, it would be within the purview of the state legislature to direct how federal funds would be allocated. [35] Additionally, the USDA – which oversaw the distribution of federal funds via the Treasury Department - acknowledged in 1917 that special cooperative agreements between the federal government, the state's white agricultural college(s), and the state's black colleges, would

[34] *Smith-Lever [As Amended through Public Law 107-293, November 13, 2002].*
[35] *Smith-Lever Act of 1914.*

be "perfected by the college for white people receiving the benefits of the Smith-Lever Act."[36]

It is perhaps a good idea to look at the federal government's view of African-American extension at this time. Senator Vardaman was not alone in his dismissive view of Black ability to lead on the issue of agricultural reform. Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia, co-sponsor of the legislation, also had a dim view of the African-American farmer and manual laborer. "These people are descended from ancestors who a little more than a century ago were mere savages in Africa… They are prone to idleness and carelessness even when at work… The best benefit he [an African American] can have will be found in the white man who will control and direct him and furnish him an example of the benefits brought from intelligent industry," Smith proclaimed at a conference on Southern education in 1909.[37] Within the USDA bureaucracy, the situation was similar. O. B. Martin, officer in charge of cooperative extension work in the Southern states, in reflecting on the first ten years of Black Extension work after the passage of Smith-Lever, uttered the unfortunate phrase, "It is not surprising that it has taken a backward race a long time to acquire property and develop farms."[38]

Martin, Smith, and Vardaman's opinions raise important questions. First, one might have wanted to point out to Officer Martin that in the South, nearly all members of this so-called "backward race" were not allowed to acquire their own property until a

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[36] *Annual Reports of the U. S. Department of Agriculture for the Year Ended June 30, 1917* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 344.

[37] Hoke Smith, speech cited in Richard Stephen Glotzer, "Higher Education in the American South 1660-1984: Class and Race in Institutional Development," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984), 262.

[38] Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," *United States Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Circular No. 72*, 2.

mere thirty-nine years prior to the beginning of cooperative extension. Or what of the fact, as far as Oklahoma is concerned, that the state's black population had lived in the region for a much shorter time than that of the rest of the South and that many did, in fact, own farms? The danger, as we will see from the discrepancy in staffing, salaries, and other funding, is that racist rhetoric became a self-fulfilling prophecy. That racists could assert that blacks lagged behind whites in agricultural development and yet not acknowledge that the fault for this lay almost entirely with the whites, is not surprising given the era in which cooperative extension began. It makes even less sense that they believed such a disadvantaged group could succeed given fewer opportunities than their more fortunate white counterparts.

Before looking at the work done in Oklahoma during the first sixteen years of cooperative extension, it is necessary get an understanding of how the state's extension service saw their employees. Extension work may be divided into three categories: 1) work with men (done by county agents); 2) work with women (done by demonstration agents); and work with children (carried out by both agents, respective of the child's gender). Agents worked out of county courthouses and post-office buildings. County agents' responsibilities were to "keep abreast of latest experiment station results, new and better crops, improved practices, proper management, new disease and insect control methods… [to] advise families on complete farm management, provide soil testing facilities, counsel with farmers on fertilizer needs and arrange for frequent county meetings with state extension specialists." The services provided by home demonstration agents were to organize and carry on "monthly meetings of her farm women's clubs, always with a practical lesson designed to benefit the housewife" and to work "with

county and state health official [*sic*], school lunch officials and others in the interest of good eating habits for young and old alike."[39] The exact nature of work done by black agents can be ascertained by examining their reports, but they worked within these general parameters, in addition to organizing boys' and girls' clubs in the form of 4-H programs. A key part of segregation was differentiation, and so black boys' clubs were known as "farm makers' clubs" and girls' as "home makers' clubs," to avoid confusion with their white counterparts, simply known as "boys' clubs" and "girls' clubs."[40]

In August 1915, the OAMC issued its first annual report of extension work. Here there was a brief section on so-called "Colored Work." The plan described in Smith-Lever resulted in a connected agreement between OAMC and Langston to "carry on Agricultural Extension Work among colored people in sections of the state where a majority of the people are negroes." Descriptions of black extension work would eventually make their way into the OAMC Catalog, but not until the 1920s. As of the 1914/1915 school year, the only county to have an assigned agent was Okfuskee County. At this time, the report indicates, funding for such work came from the Board of Education and the OAMC.[41] The overall money for extension work came from numerous sources, mostly the federal and local government organizations. In Oklahoma, an initial appropriation of $10,000 came from the Smith-Lever Act itself, another $42,000 from the USDA, $32,873 from "county boards of commissioners, boards of education, railroads,

[39] *Extension Service News,* November 1959, OAMC/OSU Oklahoma Extension News Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

[40] *Annual Reports of the U. S. Department of Agriculture for the Year Ended June 30, 1917,* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 344.

[41] "Annual Report of Extension Division," *Circular No. 19* (August 1915), 8.

commercial clubs and others," with the smallest amount coming directly from the OAMC at $18,114."[42]

The criteria for determining representation were delineated by the state extension service and the language concerning them was subject to change. Over the years the phrasing changed from "where the majority of the people are negroes"[43] to "where there is a large number of negro farmers"[44] and then again to "where they ['colored people'] are the most numerous."[45] For the service's first three years of operation there continued to be only one black county and one home demonstration agent, both working out of Boley in Okfuskee County (see Map 1).[46] There was an explosion of staffing for the 1917/1918 school year. The number of county agents increased from one to four and home demonstration agents from one to three. Counties with Black agency now included Atoka, Hughes, Logan, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Okmulgee, Seminole, Wagoner, and Tulsa.[47] Aside from the obvious act of increasing staff, the service admitted the deficiencies of its outreach to black farmers, noting that the original setup of two agents in two or more counties each, supervised in each county by a separate white agent "has not given satisfactory results," due to complexities caused for black agents who operated under multiple supervisors. From 1918 onward, a new system wherein each agent was responsible for only one county where "there were enough negro farmers in

[42] Ibid., 1.
[43] Ibid., 8.
[44] "Report of the Extension Division for 1915," *Extension Circular No. 33* (April 1916), 14.
[45] "Annual Report of the Extension Division," *Circular No. 48* (February, 1917), 13.
[46] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1914/1915*.
[47] "Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1917-1918," *Extension Circular No. 91*, 10.

that county to justify" was instituted. In addition, the service created the position of "negro district agent" to supervise the county agents.[48]

These updates, changes, and reforms were overdue, but in some areas they made little sense. The estimation of need was based almost purely on the total number of black citizens, without regard for per capita demographics or urban versus rural splits. The first indication of this is the inclusion of Oklahoma and Tulsa counties. They contained a large number of African Americans, but were predominately urban. Counties such as Carter, Choctaw, Kingfisher, McCurtain, McIntosh, Nowata, and Sequoyah all possessed a black demographic representing between 12 and 38 percent of the total population, but they did not receive agents.[49] The compilers of the 1917-1918 Annual Report recognized this to some extent and predicted an addition of five more agents for the following year.[50]

Funding for black extension work was far from standardized nationwide. Some states, including Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, received funding specifically for their Black population directly from Smith-Lever allotments in 1915, ranging anywhere from $1,500 to $13,900.[51] In Oklahoma however, as stated previously, monies came from a combination of the state Extension Service and the State Board of Education and for the 1917-1918 school year constituted $5,901 – all of it intended for salary – with unspecified travel expenses also paid for.[52] The publishers of the *Negro Yearbook,* based out of the Tuskegee Institute, estimated that

[48] Ibid., 32.
[49] "Census of Population and Housing," 1910, *U.S. Census Bureau.*
[50] "Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1917-1918," 10.
[51] Work, ed., *The Negro Yearbook: An Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1916-1917* (Tuskegee Institute, AL: The Negro Yearbook Publishing Company), 309.
[52] "Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1917-1918," 10.

during this school year $8,325 should be expended for Black extension work in Oklahoma based on the state's percent rural "negro" population.[53]

By 1917, the state service met its goal of increasing its black agency by five members and the institution overall benefited from an infusion of money as the United States geared up for the "War to End All Wars" in Europe. County agency spread to Creek, Lincoln, McCurtain, and McIntosh counties, with home demonstration expanding into Marshall and McIntosh counties.[54] Nearly all of the money spent on African-American Extension work in Oklahoma during the year of 1918-1919 came out of the "war emergency appropriation" of $91,799, freeing up traditional funds for white agency.[55] All of the money expended on black agency at this time went toward salary, $8,587.64 and $3,784 for men's and women's work, respectively. This represents a tiny fraction of the year's expenditures for salaries in Oklahoma, a total of $282,335.84, or 4.8 percent. All employees, both temporary and administrative, totaled 215, making the black workers 7.5 percent of the workforce. They received less funding for salary proportionally, but additionally, none of the remaining $45,653.35 went toward black extension work – not for travel, stationery, printing, state fair expenses, labor, or furniture.[56] In fact, the USDA estimated that costs for Oklahoma's black county and Home Demonstration Agents would be $9,798 and $4,664, respectively, with the state falling a thousand dollars short on both accounts.[57] Despite these deficiencies, the service tried to put a positive spin on its "Negro Work," proclaiming of the increased staff and

[53] Work, ed., *The Negro Yearbook: An Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1916-1917*, 310.
[54] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1918-19," *Extension Circular No. 114*, 10-11.
[55] Ibid., 5.
[56] Ibid., 6.
[57] Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 28.

change in administrative organization: "We are sure that better and more effective work under this arrangement is being done."[58] Overall, the state service lamented its inability to give even white agents appropriate salaries, noting a decrease in staff among home demonstration agents and constant turnover due to more lucrative opportunities elsewhere.[59]

The new decade of the "Roaring Twenties" marked a steady downward spiral for the American farmer of all races. In early 1920, the Hampton Institute – previously noted for originating black extension work in cooperation with Tuskegee – played host to a "Conference of White and Negro Extension Workers on Negro Extension Work." The conference, presided over by USDA official J. A. Evans, gave its blessing to the sorts of cooperative agreements being arranged between white and black land grant colleges, pushed for continued expansion of the program, emphasized the importance of work with boys and girls, and advocated for black district agent and white county agent collusion in counties without black agency.[60]

As the overall population increased, Oklahoma's African Americans became a smaller percentage of the state's population during the first six years of Smith-Lever. By 1920, only nine counties in Oklahoma had a black population that comprised between 12 and 38 percent of the total demographic.[61] This did not drastically affect the size of the state's black extension force, although the number of home demonstration agents fell

[58] Ibid., 32.
[59] Ibid., 40
[60] Editorials, "Negro Extension Work." *The Southern Workman* 5 (May 1920), 196.
[61] "Census of Population and Housing, 1920," *U.S. Census Bureau.*

from five to four.[62] The USDA estimated that even with this reduction, costs for Oklahoma's black extension service should rise to $17,701 for men's work and $6,317 for women. There would be no emergency war funds in this year and as a result the state's black agents were underfunded by roughly $6,000 for men and $1,000 for women, even by the USDA's race- and gender-biased calculations.[63] Administratively, women suffered as well. While the county agents received streamlining of supervision, removing them from the purview of the white agents in their counties and placing them under a black district agent, home demonstration among black farm women continued under the supervision of the white female district agents. At this time also, the service began a categorizing and de facto ranking of its work. Starting in 1920 and continuing over the next several years, "Extension Work for Negro Men and Boys" was known as "Project No. 7" and "Extension Work for Negro Women and Girls" as "Project No. 8" This put them after "Rural Sanitation," but before "Poultry Clubs."[64]

The nature of black farming underwent changes during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Tenancy in the Sooner state was on the rise and by 1920 had achieved near equity with ownership among the state's "colored farmers." This was also the case in the South as a whole, but regionally, the rate of tenancy increased much more sharply. The discrepancy in composition between Oklahoma and the region remained – tenancy and ownership in the state at a one-to-one ratio, in the South at a three-to-one ratio. The appearance here is that black farmers in Oklahoma were much more likely to own the

[62] "Report of the Extension Division, Oklahoma A. & M. College, Year of 1919-1920," *Extension Circular No. 118,* 34-36.

[63] Ibid., 10-11; and Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924, 28.

[64] "Report of the Extension Division, Oklahoma A. & M. College, Year of 1919-1920, 34-36.

property on which they farmed compared to their compatriots in the region.[65] However, as we shall see, this was not necessarily the case. This will remain a pertinent fact in squaring Earl Crosby's assertion that one of the main causes of the service's failure among black constituents was due to a lack of capital, especially in the form of property, since Oklahoma's service also failed in its goals, despite the initial appearance of greater numbers of owned black farms[66]

As the number of agents increased, the nature of their work started to solidify. County agents organized farmers' clubs which participated in cooperative buying and selling of goods. They orchestrated numerous demonstration plantings and harvests and helped farmers acquire livestock and horses, advised farmers on numerous sanitation, transportation, and even conservation issues, and helped schools develop agricultural curriculum. Home demonstration agents were also busy organizing clubs, and the bulk of their early work involved gardening, canning, sewing, and poultry work – raising chickens and harvesting eggs. [67]

In the 1920s, funding continued to be an issue. The Board of Regents for Langston – of which the OAMC Director of Extension was a member – made efforts to contribute to the cost of black agency, but by the 1920s, most of the money came from Smith-Lever allotments. Even so, Oklahoma's expenditures inched closer to meeting the USDA's estimated costs of operation. Funding for "Colored Women and Girls" was only

[65] "Census of Agriculture," 1920, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *United States Department of Agriculture.*

[66] Crosby, "Building the Country Home: The Black County Agent System, 1906-1940," o-i.

[67] "Report of the Extension Division, Oklahoma A. & M. College, Year of 1919-1920," 35-36.

deficient by a few hundred dollars and for "Colored Men and Boys" work by three thousand.[68] From 1915 to 1924, the state's service would not be able to meet even the USDA's internal need estimates. They would come close – within a few hundred dollars for women and a few thousand for men. This by no means indicates that there was adequate funding, since the USDA valued women's extension work lower than that of men's and outreach to black farm families in general lower than that to their white counterparts.[69]

Looking at the regional funding and staffing amount gives a better picture of the situation in Oklahoma at this time. States spent anything from $715 per agent (Florida) to $1,981 (Kentucky). Oklahoma was at the higher end of the scale at $1,866, putting it among the ranks of Arkansas, Kentucky, and Maryland. Overall, including funds from Smith-Lever, USDA, and local sources, by 1923, $385,085 nationwide went toward extension work with Black farm families, financing 294 agents for an average of $1,309 per agent.[70] In many cases, county funds exceeded USDA funds, but Smith-Lever was by far the greatest contributor. In Oklahoma in 1923, the counties provided no funding for outreach to rural African Americans. J. A. Evans, assistant chief of the cooperative extension work, identified the source, in his opinion, of the underfunding: "the lack of adequate financial support within the counties has been chiefly responsible for the low

[68] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1920-21," *Extension Circular No. 130*, (January, 1922), 10 and 52; and Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 28.

[69] "Report of the Extension Division, Year 1921-1922," *Circular No. 169, General Series No. 20* (1923), 9; "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1922-1923," *Extension Circular No. 195, General Series No. 32* (January, 1924), 6; "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1923-1924," *Extension Circular No. 213, General Series No. 51* (January, 1925), 6; and Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 28.

[70] Evans, "Extension Work Among Negroes: Conducted by Negro Agents, 1923," 5-6. Missouri spent the least amount of money per agent. According to this USDA report, the state's one agent received $1.00 of USDA funds and none from the other listed sources. However, the report did note that funds for the agent came from a "negro farm bureau."

salaries paid Negro agents, as well as the meager equipment and insufficient travel facilities with which most of them are supplied."[71]

Regional figures for staffing also help to put Oklahoma's agency in perspective. The number of agents in 1923 ranged from Missouri's single agent to Texas's thirty-six. More pertinent is the number of rural Blacks in each state compared to the number of agents assigned to this constituency. Here the discrepancy is large ranging from 5,781 rural African-Americans per agent (Maryland) to 53,445 (South Carolina). Of the sixteen Southern and Border states, Oklahoma had the second best ratio at 7,250 rural Blacks per agent. This represents a continuation of the superior – if insufficient – staffing of Oklahoma relative to the regional norm, an average of 24,214 constituents per agent. [72] Any number of factors help to explain these discrepancies. Consider the service's tendency, by the 1920s, to give an agent purview of one county where the rural black population was "sufficient." In a state where African-American farm families were concentrated in just a few counties at high levels a more proportionate number of agents per family would be present. If the rural Blacks were scattered throughout the state in numerous counties where their population was below the service's "sufficient" standard, these constituents would be catered to by the white county agent. As such, the calculations used to determine entitlement to outreach precluded the equal half of the *Plessy v. Fergusson* ruling. Oklahoma's own extension service noted the inadequacy of such arrangements, stating, "It is not generally satisfactory, however, for White agents to

[71] Ibid., 6 and 24.

[72] "Census of Population and Housing," 1920, *U.S. Census Bureau*; and Evans, "Extension Work Among Negroes: Conducted by Negro Agents, 1923," 5-6.

carry on all phases of extension work with negro farmers."[73] The service did not elaborate on its reasoning, but later studies by black agricultural leaders concluded that services provided by white agents to black farmers were inadequate.

By the 1920s as well, the federal government had time to stop and evaluate the progress – and lack thereof – being made in African-American extension work. It was the belief of the USDA, as put forward in their reports, that the benefits imparted to black constituents included inculcating values such as thrift, property ownership, and investment in land. Officer Martin, author of a report examining the first ten years of Extension Work among rural Blacks, predicted that by the 1950s, there would be a perceptible shift toward ownership of land among Black farmers.[74] But, the trajectory during the first ten years of a loss of farm owners, in Oklahoma and the region, did not bode well for such projections of increased ownership.[75] Even more optimistic was Martin's hope that a perceived temporary dip in what historians have termed the First Great Migration (1910-1940) of African Americans to cities in the North for industrial jobs – most likely due to a post-World War One economic slump – would herald a return to farming in the South by these individuals, once the service was able to explain how profitable it was to grow cash crops like peanuts, tobacco, and especially cotton, given the right instruction. [76] Reports noted that "the better class of Negro leaders" saw eye-to-eye with the agency in its assessment that "the average Negro, dependent on his daily

[73] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1924-25," *Circular No. 221, General Series No. 59*, 22.

[74] Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 1-2.

[75] "Census of Agriculture," 1920, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *United States Department of Agriculture.*

[76] Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 2.

labor, is better off there [on the farm] than in the crowded city."[77] If this seems backwards, it is because it is – in several ways. Why would blacks leave comparatively high-wage jobs to return to growing the crops their recent ancestors and some living relatives had been compelled to grow for the profit of whites? Why, in fact, would the service, which often emphasized the value of ownership and self-sustenance, want to encourage the growing of crops that seemed to reinforce the opposite? As the Depression and the Dust Bowl would prove, reliance on cash crops – especially those which have a deleterious effect on the soil – was seeming folly. But that realization was years away.

The USDA's poster child was Booker T. Washington of the Tuskegee Institute, who believed that black uplift would not come from advocating for immediate increase in civil rights, but rather from internal improvement. However, the department could not help but credit whites. They admired Washington's accomodationist policies and stated of the man, "His was a spirit of service… his experience and his observations constitute a great inspiration for negro extension agents and educators generally."[78] However, USDA circulars also credit the all-white demonstration agents of the early years of the twentieth century with inspiring African-American demonstrators and stated that programs for both genders were "developed through the interest and aid of white agents."[79] Furthermore, they held to a policy of not sending black agents to black constituencies even if the population warranted until "public sentiment can be educated to appreciate and receive them."[80] White residents would accept black agency only once they were ready and the

[77] W. B. Mercier, "Extension Work Among Negroes, 1920," *United States Department of Agriculture Department Circular 190*, (1921), 4.
[78] Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 3.
[79] Ibid., 4.
[80] Mercier, "Extension Work Among Negroes, 1920," 4.

condition of too much resistance was seen as a legitimate excuse for underrepresentation. Scholar Earl Crosby's previously-mentioned notion of gradual acceptance of black agency by whites coming to fruition in the 1920s due to concerns over outmigration was of course mitigated by the ever-present specter of racism.[81]

One area of early USDA concern was that of leadership. As late as 1920, the department echoed Senator Vardaman's previously noted distrust of the capability of blacks to lead within the extension division. Officials lamented what they saw as an absence of leaders who were "capable and trained" and who possessed "judgment and discretion." The department did not quantify these attributes. However, they did note that resistance to black leadership occurred because of white concern for the lack of qualifications by Black agents and their inability to adequately serve Black farmers.[82] The present work does not mean to downplay these concerns, especially given the fact that by 1924 only 26.75 percent of male African-American agents and 13.50 percent of female African-American agents possessed college degrees, more than half of them from either the Tuskegee or Hampton Institutes.[83] Oklahoma's division, as shown previously, was ahead of the curve in perfecting an arrangement for black leadership of male agents as early as 1918, even if female agents still operated under the disjointed supervision of individual black agents by multiple white district agents.[84]

The subject of leadership and education of African-American agents warrants a discussion of their training. Early training for agents consisted of attending the Farmer's

[81] Crosby, "Limited Success Against Long Odds: The Black County Agent," 277 and 288.
[82] Mercier, "Extension Work Among Negroes, 1920," 19.
[83] Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 4.
[84] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1918-19," 10-11; and "Report of the Extension Division, Oklahoma A. & M. College, Year of 1919-1920," 36.

Short Course at the OAMC.[85] In later years, Langston hosted agents meetings where the white district agents, OAMC specialists, and Langston faculty gave instruction.[86] Moreover, the "district agent for negro work" held "frequent conferences" with the state Director at OAMC to coordinate the activities of the black and white divisions[87]

The size of the African-American extension service changed during the rest of the 1920s, and it began to take a definite shape. Since the 1924/1925 school year there ceased to be black agency in McCurtain and Creek counties. Home demonstration agents no longer worked in Marshall County, either.[88] The state service took note of requests for black agents from additional counties but judged its overall budget insufficient to address these needs. The setup had evolved so that white agents and black agents operating in the same counties utilized separate offices. However, the service expected the two to "work freely and frequently" together and to "harmonize their programs." These black agents reported to the black district agent at Langston who reported to the director at OAMC. [89]

Another interesting and important consequence of the structure of Black agency emerged in the 1920s. It became apparent that the constituency of the state's African-American service represented a minority of the state's black farmers. First, within the counties serviced by agents, there were some 7,000 black farmers. This was slightly over one-third of the total number of African-American farmers in the Sooner state in 1927,

[85] "Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1917-1918," 32.
[86] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1918-19," 32.
[87] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1922-1923," 46.
[88] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1923-1924," 11-12.
[89]"Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1924-25," 22.

the year the agency made this estimation. Moreover, only about 30 percent of these farmers were owners of their land.[90]

Despite statistics pointing to a positive ratio of tenancy to owned farms in Oklahoma, the state had been predominately tenanted all along. The Census Bureau had not differentiated "Negroes" from other minorities in its data, going all the way back to 1890. While the editors of the *Negro Yearbook* published out of Tuskegee ascertained that slightly over a third of what the Census Bureau designated as "colored farms" were operated by Native American, they did not possess data on the breakdown of farms within the black community.[91] In 1930, as concern over the Great Migration prompted the Census Bureau to issue a special report attached to the census, the bureau offered historic figures for "Owned and Tenant Farms Operated by Negroes." They confirmed that Oklahoma's black farmers had been more likely than their fellow Southerners to own, rather than tenant, their land – but not by much and not by 1930. Whereas in 1910 and 1920, the regional average had been tenants to owners three-to-one, in Oklahoma it had been two-to-one (for just "Negro" and not "Colored" farmers). Over the next ten years, the state would rank among the nation's top tier in terms of loss of black farm owners. This loss at the national level would constitute a land area the size of Delaware and reduce Oklahoma's owned black farms to one-third of the state's total, bringing it into equity with the region as a whole, as rural African-American migrated North to take industrial jobs and escape the institutionalized persecution of the South.[92]

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[90] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1927," *Circular No. 251, General Series No. 90,* 52.

[91] Work, ed., *Negro Year Book: An Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1916-1917,* 315.

[92] "Census of Population and Housing, 1930," *U.S. Census Bureau.*

Despite this concern over outmigration, the state service would not create additional positions or expand to new counties for the rest of the decade and into the 1930s – not until the New Deal. The "Annual Reports" stated that "the centers for colored population have remained in about the same counties for a period of years."[93] Another explanation is of course the funding situation of the 1920s. For county agents the annual expenditures hovered in the low $20,000 range and for home demonstration agents at around $6,000, but the overall budget grew by hundreds of thousands of dollars to reach approximately $554,000. Counties by 1926 contributed $6,000 and $2,000 to Black men's and women's work, respectively.[94]

Before leaving the "Roaring Twenties" and entering the "Great Depression," it is important to examine public perception of Oklahoma's African-American extension work. Most of the information utilized up to this point comes from reports of the USDA and the state extension division, and while they are grouped with educational circulars, the reports' intended use was likely internal consumption and assessment. Public perception was very important to the USDA cooperative extension bureaucracy. With respect to news articles and published stories, agency officials noted that "much of the value of extension might not be observed without this form of publicity." The purpose of these stories was to report "successful extension work." Additionally, such publications helped keep city residents abreast of the work done by the agents.[95] Thus, this examination of the first sixteen years of cooperative extension among Oklahoma's rural

[93] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1924-25," 21.

[94] "Report of the Extension Division, Year of 1927," *Circular No. 275, General Series 210*, 11.

[95] Erwin Shinn, "A Study of Trends in the Use of Means and Agencies in Conducting Extension Work with Negroes," *Extension Service Circular 340* (December 1940), 7.

African Americans concludes with an analysis of two portrayals of black extension work found in the *Oklahoma Extension News* and the *OAMC General Catalog.*

The compilers of the *OAMC General Catalog* had a particular audience in mind, mainly the close-knit university community – current and prospective students, faculty and staff, parents and alumni. Over the years the Annual Reports shifted focus from merely describing the relationship between the OAMC, Langston, and the black agents to increasingly detailed accounts enumerating demonstrations and even addressing issues of funding. Such was never the case with the *General Catalog.* Early presentations of the work done by black agents did not make reference to their relationship with the director of extension in Stillwater. The general catalog for the 1920/1921 school year begins its two paragraph description of "Negro Work" – reserved for the last page of the section pertaining to the Extension Division – by simply stating that work done by black agents "in cooperation with [Langston]… is under the immediate supervision of a colored district agent with headquarters at Langston" and then mentions that "the Director of Extension is a member of the Board of Regents at Langston."[96] The language of the extension division's coverage of "Negro Work" in the general catalog evolved over time, always updated to track the number of county and home demonstration agents. One year after the aforementioned description in 1922, the language changed. Condensed to a single paragraph, there was no longer any mention of the relation of the director to the work of black agents, perhaps due to the attitude of the director(s) toward black extension work.[97] This description would remain unaltered until the 1932/1933 school year.[98]

[96] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1920/1921*, 197.
[97] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1921/1922*, 124.

To reiterate, in the *General Catalog* – a public face for both the OAMC and the Extension Service – the relationship between the college and the African-American workers received short shrift and sometimes no mention at all. However, the catalog's description of the work of these agents reflected trends reported in national publications, specifically a new focus on women and children. Early catalog descriptions noted success with women and children in Black demonstration work. From the 1920/1921 school year until the 1936/1937 school year, the following sentence appeared unaltered in every issue of the catalog, somewhere in the paragraph(s) describing "Negro Work": "Negro farmers, especially the women and boys and girls, take great interest in demonstration work and have done very commendable work."[99] The early USDA circular surveying the first decade of extension work among African Americans noted that "work among negro boys and girls has been a secondary development."[100] However, the report went on to say that such work enjoyed increasing success and to brag about the increased enrollment of black children in 4-H clubs, a sentiment echoed in the 1917 USDA report.[101] The 1923 USDA circular began its assessment of the work done in junior clubs thusly: "Agents find boys and girls more receptive, more willing to follow instructions, and, on the whole, better demonstrators than their parents. Often the best way, or the only way, to get the father or

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[98] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog,* 1921/1922 to 1932/1933.

[99] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1920/1921* to *1936/1937*

[100] Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 14.

[101] Ibid., 14; *Annual Reports of the U. S. Department of Agriculture for the Year Ended June 30, 1917,* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 344.

mother interested in the programs of extension work is first to get their consent to enlist the boy or girl in some form of junior extension work."[102]

The nature of the work done with 4-H Clubs requires explanation. This work served to enforce gender roles. A 1926 USDA circular noted that prior to 1916, 4-H clubs "did not have such different classification as to make their work standout and receive proper emphasis and recognition." What was most effective in doing so was the organization of boys into "farm-makers" clubs and girls into "home-makers" clubs.[103] Assistant Chief for the Office of Cooperative Extension J. A. Evans generalized that boys' work consisted of field crop and livestock activities, while girls' work was horticultural, household, and nutritional.[104] Agents working with boys reported the most work done with pigs, cotton, corn, and poultry clubs. Poultry, garden, dairy, and food clubs as well as fairs, rallies, contests, keeping project records, and increasing crop yields by implementing new methods of farming and savings constituted most of the work done by girls' clubs.[105]

The concern of the USDA that work with youth was "secondary," was legitimate given the paucity of coverage of these activities in the first few years of the "Annual Reports" and *Oklahoma Extension News* coverage. There exists one piece of news concerning black farm youth during the early years – a notice of a scholarship for twenty-

[102] Evans, "Extension Work among Negroes in the South, 1923," 18.

[103] Martin, "A Decade of Negro Extension Work, 1914-1924," 14. See above (page 5) for the perceived need to keep a nominal distinction between white and black boys' and girls' clubs.

[104] Evans, "Extension Work among Negroes in the South, 1923," 18.

[105] Shinn, "A Survey of the Manner of Procedure Followed in Developing County Programs of Negro Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics," *Miscellaneous Extension Publication No. 11* (March 1933), 15.

five boys to attend Langston free of charge.[106] This lack of coverage of youth work in the *Oklahoma Extension News* would be nearly reversed in later years. The first few years of "Annual Reports" offer sparse details of all activities relating to agents' work with children.[107]

Later years begin to show reports of youth club work and figures confirming the assertions made in the *General Catalog.* Enrollment in these groups was higher than that for men's and women's clubs, often twice as high.[108] The 1921/1922 "Annual Report" asserted "Club work has received a very liberal share of the agents' time and activities. So much of the present hearty cooperation we have is primarily due to the influences club work has had on parents, teachers, clubs and communities."[109] This devotion to work with boys' and girls' clubs in Oklahoma continued into the 1930s amid a growing concern by the USDA that in the region in general agents were shirking their responsibilities toward these organizations.

The remaining *Oklahoma Extension News* coverage of the 1920s is fairly uniform. All of the reports on work with black men and women came in the form of short reports from county and home demonstration agents. They follow the USDA line of reporting "successful extension work."[110] These reports emphasized how much money a farmer could make selling products such as hogs and turnips using the proper demonstrated methods. Female reports noted how choices influenced by home demonstration agents

[106] *The Extension Division,* June 1919, Folder 1, Box 1, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

[107] "Annual Reports of the Extension Division," 1914/1915-1917/1918.

[108] "Annual Reports of the Extension Division," 1918/1919-1929/1930.

[109] "Report of the Extension Division, Year 1921-1922," 20.

[110] Shinn, "A Study of Trends in the Use of Means and Agencies in Conducting Extension Work with Negroes," 7.

recommendations – such as purchasing a Ford coupe to increase efficiency or replacing the superstitious mite-control method of hanging a cow's jaw bone in the chicken coup with cleaning and the application of chemicals – yielded satisfactory results.[111] In a sense, they were advertisements for the agency.

A final issue of the 1920s was cotton. USDA bureaucrats had thought of the money to be made by growing crash crops as an incentive not to migrate to the North. In Oklahoma, where cotton had been the primary crop of the state's African-American farmers, the *Oklahoma Extension News* moved in the opposite direction. This is because the national bureaucracy was more concerned with the big picture of outmigration, while state agency, operating in the field, saw more directly the ravages of the cotton culture and its contribution to a cycle of poverty. Money to be made by switching from cotton production to sustenance crops like tomatoes, how such changes had insulated one farmer from a severe drop in cotton prices, and the general scarcity of cotton pickers, were subjects of the reports made by men during the decade.[112]

An economic crisis would propel the federal government into the lives of American citizens in the coming decade, but the first years of cooperative extension among Oklahoma's Black farmers showed a slow progression. After the retooling of the system in terms of administration and size during the first five years following the

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[111] *Oklahoma Extension News and Boys and Girls Club Letter*, December, 1922, Folder 2, Box 1, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries; and *Oklahoma Extension News,* August 1926, Folder 3, Box 1, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

[112] *Oklahoma Extension News,* November and December 1926, Folder 4, Box 1, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, the state's African-American agency remained largely unchanged in terms of staffing and funding. Even though Oklahoma's "colored farmers" count initially included Native Americans, the early numbers for the state still showed more farm owners as a percentage of the rural black population than elsewhere in the region. However, the Great Migration would shave off this difference. Oklahoma continued to have a greater number of agents relative to its black rural population than was the regional norm – and this was largely due to the concentration of that population within a specific area. Coverage in publicly consumed materials was minimal. Much of this would change in the 1930s – especially the size of the Black agents' contingent and constituency.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR TWO

> "It is definite and clear that the Negro Extension Service is likely to take the color and direction of the traditions and customs of its particular state. This is not without precedent and parallel, for it is going to definitely follow and fit into the pattern and tradition of those states where the dual system of education is practiced. In the administration of extension service, it is going to be done by the State Director of Extension Service on the same principle that public education is handled. It is going to be influenced by the director's training, social outlook, and, his attitude towards Negroes and this attitude is going to be mindful and thoughtful of the prevailing local and state sentiment."[113]

As the 1930's began, the economic situation in Oklahoma was not good. The extension service worried both about "the severe drouth [*sic*] in the state" and "the general economic depression which seriously affected agriculture."[114] Many Americans and most Westerners have an ingrained cultural memory regarding the Dust Bowl. Oklahomans are certainly not an exception. The worst of the dust storms and drought in the state were confined to the Panhandle, with affected areas almost entirely west of the counties with black agency and a large rural black population. The service was quick to note this, saying that "there are not many cases of actual need among negro farmers in counties

[113] W. R. Banks, President, Prairie View State College, Prairie View, Texas, in an address contained in *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges*, November 11, 12, 13, 1941 (Chicago, IL), 40.

[114] "Report of the Extension Division of the Oklahoma A. and M. College and the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperating," *Circular No. 285, General Series 218* (1930), 5.

which have county agents. All these counties are in the area of medium drouth [*sic.*] severity."[115] Nonetheless, the budget for overall operations continued to grow and in 1930 the "negro division" benefited as well. Like the service as a whole, the counties made up the difference, steadily contributing larger and larger amounts to extension in general and black agency specifically.[116]

There was another development in 1930 that needs examining – a concerted effort on behalf of the USDA to provide the training and education for Black agents that it deemed lacking. In this year, the national service issued a report discussing the state of these efforts. The report's author was Erwin Shinn. Since Shinn authored numerous reports utilized in the present work, he deserves some examination. He was himself a graduate of OAMC, earning a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.[117] Shinn authored six studies of "negro extension" on his own and numerous others as part of reports by various committees.[118] Although his memoirs feature little discussion of his work with Black agents, his appended material contained letters from two of them congratulating Shinn for his good work on the occasion of his retirement. One is from Thomas Monroe Campbell, field agent in charge of "Negro Extension Work" nationwide and as previously noted, one of the nation's first black agents, lauding Shinn for "the sustained effort that is required to achieve a performance such as yours [Shinn's]."[119] The other

[115] Ibid., 99.
[116] Ibid., 18.
[117] Shinn, *Memoirs*, 1964, 14.
[118] Ibid., 20-21, 44.
[119] Ibid., 63.

letter came from Agent Cypress of Mississippi who offered commendation for Shinn's work in encouraging the development of black 4-H Clubs.[120]

The training schools that Shinn ran appear to have been a larger version of the short courses for Black agents run out Langston and the OAMC. Instructors included both black and white agents and classes covered the basic components of Extension work previously discussed, as well as a healthy dose of Christianity in the form of chapel twice a week. This training took place at three locations – Orangeburg, South Carolina; Nashville, Tennessee; and Prairie View, Texas. Oklahoma's black agents attended the Nashville conference. Two members of Oklahoma's extension division taught courses there, one of them acting director Ernest Scholl, who will receive treatment later.[121]

The inspiration for these summer schools came from several concerns. Campbell and J. B. Pierce conducted studies of the black agents' training. Overall, a majority of African-American agents were college graduates. However, Shinn was quick to point out that aside from Hampton and Tuskegee, "the standards at these colleges… were comparatively low, and the teaching personnel and laboratory equipment essential for teaching agriculture and home economics were not adequate for effective work."[122] Shinn noted that OAMC was ahead of the curve in organizing local training schools. He stated that even 95 percent of white agents felt their training was inadequate and reiterated his

[120] Ibid., 71.
[121] Shinn, *Report of Summer Schools for Negro Extension Agents.* United States: Division of Cooperative Extension, 1930, 12-13 and 31.
[122] Ibid., 6.

lack of faith in the Negro land grant colleges, stating that up until the 1930s they "were very little better, if at all, than high schools."[123]

The nature of education in the black land grant colleges was an area of concern for Shinn for several reasons. In a report issued to almost every member of Black agency, he noted that only 26 percent of the instructors at these colleges possessed graduate degrees, 61 percent held undergraduate degrees, and 13 percent had no degree at all. The report was also concerned with the type of studies required at these intuitions. For instance, at Langston in Oklahoma, agriculture comprised 34.9 percent of the required course work and professional and technical training 13.1 percent. Another issue was enrollment. Arts and sciences comprised 52.1 percent of enrollment in the Black land grant schools, while the "trinity of vocational units" – agriculture, mechanic arts, and home economics – combined only added up to 27.1 percent. [124] While Shinn believed that "you [African Americans] need your normal training schools and your academic courses for those who want to prepare to be doctors, lawyers, and preachers," he also iterated that "at least parallel with any of them, should go that program of training that reaches the larger percentage of your people who earn their livelihood from agriculture and other common pursuits of life."[125] While the summer schools were intended to help make up for the perceived inequities in the education of agents coming out of the land grant colleges, the USDA also wanted to tackle the problem from what they saw as its root.

[123] Ibid., 59.

[124] Shinn, "Status of Organization and Administration of Agricultural Education Among Negroes," *Extension Service Circular 173* (January 1932), 5-7.

[125] Ibid., 8-9.

These summer schools were a hallmark of black extension work in the 1930s. Agents attended two additonal summer training institutes in 1931 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and Petersburg, Virignia; at Tuskegee in 1934 and 1935; and then again in Prairie View, Texas, in 1936.[126] Oklahoma's extension service believed these schools, combined with its own state-wide conferences, resulted in "a better organized extension activity," which they believed was needed because organization of units and subcommittees in the extension service was "new with colored people."[127] By 1932, the state agency concluded that efficiency in black agency offices noticeably increased, though they did not provide criteria for measuring these improvements.[128]

The issue of training extension workers was not one that escaped the eyes of the land grant institutions or their administrators. Curricula were the main concern at the Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges in 1935. During a presentation there, Shinn noted that while agents should have a minimum of four years of educational training in agriculture or home economics, many black agents could not meet these standards, but still "rendered notable service through extension teaching."[129] There were no funds specifically allotted from the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 for agent training, nor were there ever any specific requirements for agent education.[130] A letter sent by conference committee members to deans and directors of agriculture asked them to outline courses which their institutions should offer to help train agents. In Oklahoma, the

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[126] Shinn, *Memoirs*, 22-23.

[127] "Eighteenth Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1931," *Circular Number 295, General Series Number 228,* 112.

[128] "Nineteen Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1932," *Circular Number 301, General Series Number 234,* 110.

[129] *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges*, November 18-20, 1935 (Washington, D.C.), 27.

[130] Ibid., 30.

suggestion was to add courses in psychology, methods of teaching, group organization, and rural sociology.[131]

There were other changes in 1932. Home demonstration among black farm families saw an increase in funding and staff. An approximately $2,000 increase in funds helped to pay foa, but more significant was the creation of a district agent position for this line of work.[132] This represented a significant step, considering that the prior arrangement caused much confusion regarding authority and chain of command, a reason that county agents received their own supervisor several years before. Some of the additional funds resulted from the Capper-Ketchum Act, passed by the United States Congress in 1928, which was meant increase resources for 4-H work.[133]

In 1933 as the New Deal got underway, agricultural conditions in Oklahoma and nationwide continued to deteriorate. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration initiated a "draft" of Extension agents to help carry out its policies and programs – an event that required a significant amount of additional work by the county agents to facilitate adjusting the supply and demand of crops and livestock.[134] All sectors hurt at this time, but the service identified "conditions of low farm prices, limited operating capital and credit, uncertain market outlook, high production costs, heavy tax burdens, and low morale," combined with "the problem of supplementing their [farm families']

[131] Ibid., 35.
[132] "Nineteenth Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1932," 4.
[133] Ibid., 13.
[134] "Twentieth Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1933," *Circular Number 313, General Series Number 88,* 9.

income, of reducing expenditures and at the same time maintaining the highest possible standard of living" as the chief concern of black agents in Oklahoma.[135]

There were some bright spots amidst all of this and they occurred in the area of work with children. In the 1920s, reports had lamented a dearth of work with the Black boys' clubs, while at the same time noting that when agents did conduct this work, it was the most successful of all their endeavors. Lack of devotion to work among African-American 4-H clubs was of great concern to the USDA as late as the 1930s. Shinn showed special concern for the subject. In an extension publication in March of 1933, Shinn chided black agents for not devoting enough of their time to work with boys and girls. By his calculus, the appropriate temporal allotment of agent's efforts toward children should have been a quarter to a third. In 1933, county agents reported spending an average of 21.5 percent of their time on enrollment and organization of such clubs, while home demonstration agents reported 17.2 percent. [136]

Undoubtedly it was this concern that in July 1938 led Shinn, by then Senior Agriculturalist for the Extension Studies and Teaching Section of the Division of Cooperative Extension, to issue a circular entitled "Statistical Analysis of Negro 4-H Club Work: With Special Reference to 1936." In this case, Oklahoma fared better than its segregated cohorts. The average number of African-American boys and girls in the state between the ages of ten and twenty per extension worker was 1,848. This was the

[135] Ibid.,69 and 72.

[136] Shinn, "A Survey of the Manner of Procedure Followed in Developing County Programs of Negro Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics," *Miscellaneous Extension Publication No. 11*(March 1933), 14.

best ratio in the region, where the average number per worker was 4,012. [137] Shinn also noted that Oklahoma had the highest percentage of its eligible black children enrolled in 4-H Clubs – 20.8 percent. The worst situations were again in Kentucky and Louisiana, with 4.0 and 4.02 percent of eligible children enrolled in clubs.[138] However, during the period of 1935 to 1936, the Sooner state's agents enrolled an average of 373 boys and girls in clubs per worker. While this number was lower than that in Arkansas, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, and Tennessee, it is not indicative of quality or quantity of work done by the agents.[139] In fact, Oklahoma had the highest rate of re-enrollment for girls, 75.5 percent, compared to the regional reenrollment rate of 62.7 percent. In the area of re-enrollment for boys, the state came in third with 77.2 percent, still above the regional average of 64.6 percent.[140]

There were other areas where Oklahoma's agency excelled during the 1930s. Public perception was very important to the USDA Cooperative Extension bureaucracy. In the area of published stories and articles, Oklahoma's agents exceeded regional trends. In 1938, lack male agents in the South published an average of twenty stories, while in Oklahoma the average was thirty-seven. Similarly, the 1938 average for female agents was fifteen stories, in contrast to twenty-six stories in Oklahoma.[141]

In Oklahoma, the most common form of public consumption of materials related to Cooperative Extension was the *Oklahoma Extension News*, published in Stillwater.

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[137] Shinn, "Statistical Analysis of Negro 4-H Club Work with Special Reference to 1936," *Extension Service Circular 288* (July 1938), 13.

[138] Ibid., 23.

[139] Ibid., 14.

[140] Ibid., 17.

[141] Shinn, "A Study of Trends in the Use of Means and Agencies in Conducting Extension Work with Negroes," *Extension Service Circular 340* (December 1940), 8.

The *Oklahoma Extension News* closely followed national bureaucratic trends such as the focus on work done by junior clubs. Moreover, the publication strictly adhered to Shinn's insistence that "the function of news articles or stories is to bring to the attention of the public the results of *successful extension work*" (author's emphasis).[142] The Cooperative Extension Service was quite good at suppressing negative developments within its bureaucracy. An examination of one particular incident occurring in Oklahoma demonstrates that the service dealt with internal affairs internally and the *Oklahoma Extension News* was the last place where one could ascertain the actual goings on within the bureaucracy.

The behind-the-scenes issue was the retirement of Agent Clarence Eugene Johnson. The agent for Okfuskee County, Johnson had a long career with the Extension Service. After receiving his Bachelor of Science from Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Mississippi, he joined the organization during the 1925/1926 school year, and worked there until bureaucratic and institutional politics caught up with him. [143] In June 1933, Thomas Monroe Campbell, the country's first African-American Extension agent and by then overseer of all such agents, telegraphed state Director D. P. Trent, who was on leave. In this rather ominous communiqué, Campbell voiced his displeasure with events surrounding Johnson: "Hope you can save negro setup I look upon institutional entanglements with disfavor if present encumbent [sic] has outlived usefulness would suggest change by either moving up competent county agent or employing outside man will gladly assist in selection am asking Washington for travel

[142] Ibid., 7.

[143] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1928/1929,* XXII; *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1925/1926*, XXI.

supplement to visit before july first."[144] Someone apparently listened to Campbell, because Johnson was no longer listed as the agent from Okfuskee County in the catalog for the 1933/1934 school year. Instead, District Agent J. E. Taylor was now the agent for that county.[145] While Trent was on leave the following school year, Acting Director Ernest Scholl received a similar telegram from Campbell in March 1934.[146] Two days later, Trent wrote to Scholl in response to a letter from Taylor and stated that he was "requesting delay of change in negro organization" and recommended "change only as a last resort."[147] One day later, Scholl notified Campbell that the state Extension service intended to hold its action on the matter until it received advice from Washington, D.C.[148] This advice came in the form of a letter from USDA official C. W. Warburton, who told Scholl he desired "competent and continuous supervision of negro extension work by negro district agents" or that such activity be "conserved by assigning supervision to white district agents."[149] Trent swiftly followed up by emphasizing his and Campbell's approval of Warburton's recommendations.[150]

Despite the official guidance from Washington, D.C., the controversy continued into the summer. In May 1934, County Agent W. B. Gernert wrote to Scholl, notifying

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[144] Thomas Monroe Campbell to D. P. Trent, 18 June 1933, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984. Oklahoma State University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Stillwater, OK.

[145] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1933/1934*, XXIV.

[146] Campbell to Ernest Scholl, 10 March 1934, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[147] Trent to Scholl, 12 March 1934, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[148] Scholl to Campbell, 13 March 1934, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[149] C. W. Warburton to Scholl, 19 March 1934, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[150] Trent to Scholl, 19 March 1934, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

him of the status of an investigation into charges of Johnson's inability to fulfill his duties. While the county's black farmers strongly supported Johnson, Gernert iterated that "a good cooperator with the College and a graduate as well, who lives in the neighborhood and is dependable, tells me the agent is 'a woman chaser' (lush)." However, Gernert was suspicious that the controversy surrounding Johnson resulted from upcoming county elections as well as the machinations of those who were in line to replace him, should he need removal.[151]

For his own part, Johnson did not stand by on the sidelines while the powers that be decided his fate. He wrote to the State Board of Agriculture in an attempt to defend his record. He expressed no knowledge of any troubles prior to dismissal and requested reinstatement.[152] As Gernert mentioned, Johnson enjoyed strong support from black farmers in Okfuskee County. In a letter with over four pages of signatures, mostly from residents of Boley, they protested the agent's dismissal, vouched for his character, and volunteered to testify to his abilities.[153]

Ultimately, Johnson and his constituents got their wish. In late May, Okfuskee County Agent H. L. Blankenhead wrote to OAMC President Henry Garland Bennett, recommending Johnson's reinstatement.[154] His removal from office had occurred in April 1934 and his reinstatement came in July of that year. Johnson took a leave of

[151] W. B. Gernert to Scholl, 2 May 1934, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[152] C. E. Johnson to State Board of Agriculture, 4 May 1934, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[153] Okmulgee County Farmers to Oklahoma Board of Agriculture, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[154] H. L. Bankhead to H. G. Bennett, 22 May 1934, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

absence from May to July 1935, and then served until his retirement at the end of 1946.[155] He died three years later.[156]

The *Oklahoma Extension News* did not report any of the complications surrounding Johnson's dismissal and reinstatement, clearly wishing to adhere to Shinn's policy to focus on "successful extension work." Johnson's retirement, however, did receive coverage. Noting that Johnson was the first black agent to retire under the Oklahoma Extension Workers' Retirement Plan, the paper quoted him as saying, "We have nothing to worry about now." Johnson went on to say that the two most enriching moments of his life were when he taught high school in Mississippi with his wife and when he found out he "would receive a monthly income for life on the retirement plan of the Oklahoma Extension service."[157]

It was previously noted that Black Extension work in counties without the "sufficient" African-American population was the purview of the white agents. There were a number of counties where this demographic necessitated special attention but did not suffice for black agency. In these counties – which included Hughes, Wagoner, McIntosh, McCurtain, Choctaw, McClain, Garvin, Carter, Coal, Atoka, Sequoyah, LeFlore, Cleveland, and Pottowatomie – outreach to Black farmers resulted from Extension schools and volunteer leadership.[158] Black farm women in counties without

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[155] C. S. Tenley to C. G Bauman, 20 May 1946, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[156] C. E. Johnson, Extension Service Employee Card, Folder 56, Box 1, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[157] *Oklahoma Extension News*, November 1947, Box 3, OAMC/OSU Oklahoma Extension News Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

[158] "Twenty-first Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1934," *Circular Number 322, General Series Number 98*, 37.

their own black home demonstration agent – Pottawatomie, Sequoyah, Carter, Atoka, McCurtain, Logan, Payne, Tulsa, Garvin, Coal, Choctaw, McIntosh, LeFlore, Seminole, Hughes, Wagoner, and Oklahoma - received service from the white district agent.[159] In 1935, Logan County received its own agent.[160]

It was also in the 1930s that Oklahoma's position in terms of funding changed. Despite prior failure to meet USDA expectations during the first two decades of black extension work, by 1937 the situation was somewhat better. While expenditures for county agent work continued to hover just below $20,000, home demonstration budgets continued to grow, reaching nearly $15,000 by 1937.[161] While some of this growth was an attempt to catch up to the needs of the new district and county agents, a look at regional figures helps put the situation in perspective. It was the opinion of the editors of the *Negro Yearbook*, reiterated by R. B. Atwood, President of Kentucky State Industrial College, at the Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges, that "while the Negro group as a whole is not receiving its equitable share of extension funds, there are several instances where the expenditure in the Negro group seems to have been unusually liberal for their numbers."[162] The over-funded states were Texas, Alabama, Oklahoma, and Florida, at $37,441; $27,161; $20,006; and $3,890, extra monies respectively. Oklahoma was the most overfunded in terms of its excess expenditures as a percentage of the *Yearbook*'s calculus of total funds needed – 136.5 percent, compared

[159] Ibid., 83.

[160] "Twenty-second Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1935," *Circular Number 337, General Series 284,* 84.

[161] "Helping Farm Families Help Themselves: Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1937," *Circular No. 359, General Series 300* (1938), 125.

[162] *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges*, November 15,16,17, 1937 (Washington, D.C.), 69.

with 50.06 percent for Texas 26.05 for Alabama (birthplace of Black extension), and 14.12 percent in Florida. The worst situation happened to be in Kentucky, helping to explain Atwood's frustration, followed closely by Maryland, West Virginia, South Carolina, and Louisiana.[163] Again, one explanation for these discrepancies is the cultural geography of rural African Americans. The clustering effect in Oklahoma was such that the agency estimated 85 percent of the black farm operators lived in twenty counties (roughly 25 percent of the state's 77 counties).[164] This certainly helped facilitate the administration of funds to these constituents.

Oklahoma's black farm families were not without their problems in the 1930s. While the service had stated that those families applying for relief programs were mainly those "who do not take advantage of the information brought by Extension agents," other causes of rural poverty existed.[165] Of the roughly 17,824 black farm operators in the state, the service estimated that "practically all are more or less heavily involved in debt."[166] The main problem, as far as the state service was concerned, was cotton culture. Readers will remember the ebullient words of the USDA in the early 1920s, emphasizing all of the money to be made by black farmers producing cash crops. By 1937, the state agency was lamenting this cash crop culture as creating a lack of balance and security, insufficient home supply of food, and a non-marketable surplus. Moreover, cotton was

[163] Statistics based on author's calculations using data provided in *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges*, 69. The situation in Texas is consistent with Debra Reid's assertions of a higher performance rate among that state's African-American agents.

[164] "Taking the College to the Farm and Home, 1936: 23rd Annual Report, Extension Division, Oklahoma A & M College," *Circular Number 351, General Series 292*, 122.

[165] "Twenty-second Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1935," 90.

[166] "Taking the College to the Farm and Home, 1936: 23rd Annual Report, Extension Division, Oklahoma A & M College," 121.

deleterious to the soil in a time when conservation became the norm and was compounded by the undesirable rolling upland upon which most of these crops grew. The assessment of the service was that "this large section of Oklahoma's farm population unless given sufficient aid through Extension influence to understand and meet their problems, will remain a retarding factor against the general agricultural progress of the state."[167] It is hard to determine if this was meant as an indictment, warning, or just an expression of general frustration on behalf of the state division. Since the division assumed commodity readjustment responsibilities – limiting supply in order to increase demand and thus raise agricultural prices - its work load increased significantly and the cotton growing sections required an even greater amount of adjustment work.[168]

Funding could not have been a good situation during the last few years of the 1930s. In 1938, the state division issued an extremely brief annual report, with no figures of expenditures or any information on black agency.[169] The report for 1939 also omits funding figures, but it indicates that outreach to rural African Americans increased with the addition of one county agent and one home demonstration agent, both operating out of McCurtain County, but both also responsible for Choctaw County.[170]

By the end of the 1930s, African-Americans made up 6.4 percent of the state's rural-farm population.[171] The Census Bureau classified 58,877 Black Oklahomans as part of this population in 1940 – a decrease of 20,637 from the total of 79,514 in 1930 – a

[167] "Taking the College to the Farm and Home, 1936: 23rd Annual Report, Extension Division, Oklahoma A & M College," 121.

[168] "Serving the Farm and Home, Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1939," *Circular No. 372*, 66.

[169] "A Better Rural Life: Twenty-fifth Annual Report," *Circular No. 365.*

[170] "Serving the Farm and Home, Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1939," 81.

[171] "Census of Population and Housing, 1940," *U.S. Census Bureau.*

staggering loss of slightly over 25 percent. The white rural-farm population also decreased over the decade, but at a much smaller rate of 6.5 percent.[172] It was previously noted that the state division claimed 17,824 African-American farm operators in the state. They based this number on data from 1935. By 1940, that number had sunk to 13,572, a loss of 4,252 or nearly 24 percent compared to a drop in white farm operators of roughly 15 percent.[173] The problems of poverty and racism faced by the state's black farmers help to explain this differential. The state service believed that 13,200 of these operators lived in twenty-two counties and 10,265 of those resided in thirteen counties previously noted to receive Black County agents, although McCurtain and Choctaw dropped from this list for a lack of finance. Of the population in the twenty-two counties, 32 percent were owners of some sort. In the thirteen counties where the farmers were of "the old class of all-cotton farmers," the number was lower – 27 percent.[174]

The federal government in 1940 reflected on the work done with rural Black families. From a report issued by Shinn, it is possible once again to judge the work of Oklahoma's agents against that of their regional colleagues. From 1934 to 1938, Oklahoma's agents performed as many and sometimes more demonstrations per county as their counterparts in Deep South states like Georgia, South Carolina and Mississippi. Oklahoma echoed an overall regional trend that saw the number of these demonstrations per county drop, but the state also saw an increase in average attendance when the trend

[172] "Census of Population and Housing, 1940," *U.S. Census Bureau.*

[173] "Census of Agriculture," 1940, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *United States Department of Agriculture.*

[174] "Extension – Its Aims and Accomplishments: Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1940," *Circular No. 376*, 1.

in the region was a decrease.[175] By 1938 the average number of meetings per county and the average attendance at these meetings in Oklahoma was greater than the regional average per county and Oklahoma's agents participated in far more office and telephone calls relating to extension work on average per county than any other agents in the other Southern states. This tendency of more work and more meetings per county in Oklahoma than the regional average extended to articles and letters written and circulars and bulletins distributed. [176] Another issue was community cooperation and in this area of need versus accomplishment Oklahoma's communities exceeded the regional norm in terms of need for cooperation versus the materialization of these efforts, the state service proclaimed without providing an explanation of how they measured this.[177] Once again, this can be attributed to the cluster effect of Oklahoma's Black farm families.

In 1940 the extension service began to emerge from the chaos of the early New Deal programs. The annual report stated that it was "passing from the period of emergency adjustments and organization to that of aiding farm people towards a better living on their farms," an indication that the "draft" of agents to help with new programs detracted from their original mission under Smith-Lever.[178] The service also reiterated its commitment to black farmers, calling its work among this constituency "an integral part of the general State Extension program."[179] However, it continued to have a pessimistic view of the outlook for this group, saying of prospects for their increasing success, "there

[175] Shinn, "A Study of Trends in the Use of Means and Agencies in Conducting Extension Work with Negroes," 4.

[176] "Extension – Its Aims and Accomplishments: Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Extension Division, Year 1940," 6-9.

[177] Ibid., 14.

[178] Ibid., 5.

[179] Ibid., 10.

is apparently a long struggle ahead. The need for, and problems of adjustment are still grave. The need for wise counsel is still urgent." In fact, the primary concern of the agency was that these families have adequate food and clothing for themselves and feed for their livestock.[180]

The service was about to switch from one emergency footing to another as the United States entered the Second World War. The effect on the agency was a decrease in the number and frequency of reports. The situation for all farmers became demanding with the Agricultural Defense Program of 1941 and the Lend-Lease Act. Not only were American farmers receiving production goals at national, state, and farm level; the government expected the United States to supply a quarter of Great Britain's protein needs in 1942.[181] At the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges, the USDA's Director of Extension Work, M. L. Wilson, echoed the sentiments of the state agency – the primary concern of the farmer during the Second World War was not production, but rather nutrition. Here again was an assertion regarding the cotton culture of black farmers – that they would have to be more self-sufficient in order to provide for their dietary needs and this would require a change in their methods of farming and choice of crops.[182] The final summation was not good: "In the present agricultural distress, the Negro rural people have been the hardest hit; they

[180] Ibid., 61.
[181] *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges*, November 11, 12, 13, 1941 (Chicago, IL), 29.
[182] Ibid., 29.

represent the lowest income group; and, consequently, are victims of inadequate housing, improper clothing, mal-nutrition, and poor health."[183]

There was one other important development to arise out of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges. This was a report known as "Agricultural Extension Among Negroes in the South," and its intent was to refute the seemingly glowing picture painted by a statement issued by the Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard earlier in 1941. His statement, among other things, estimated that when time spent by White specialists and agents working with Black farm families was factored in, the situation was fairly rosy. In fact, using this calculus, the USDA statement implied that while African Americans farmed 9.47 percent of all land in the South, they received 14.1 percent of appropriations for extensions.[184] It was previously noted that Oklahoma's extension service was quick to emphasize that white agents assumed responsibility for black constituents in the absence of black agency. The study found that black agents generally felt this was not the case. In the view of the study's author, white agents had little time for African-American farm families and the same was true for specialists – extension service employees focused on specific research areas.[185]

This report provided valuable information about Oklahoma's black agents. The authors came up with a need calculus based on the rural African-American population to estimate whether or not states were achieving equity with regards to agency. Oklahoma was the only state not found lacking. The estimation was that Oklahoma's black farm

[183] Ibid., 41.
[184] Wilkerson, Doxey A., *Agricultural Extension Services among Negroes in the South*. (Washington, DC: The Conference of Negro Land Grant Colleges, 1942), 56.
[185] Ibid., 10-11.

families were in fact over-served. Oklahoma's twenty agents exceeded the need calculus of fourteen agents. Thus the actual number as a percent of the equitable number for Oklahoma was 143 percent. The next closest state was Texas, with 91 percent equity and a deficit of nine agents, followed by South Carolina at 73 percent, Alabama at 60 percent, and on down to Louisiana at 24 percent equity.[186] The report concluded, with regard to agency, that "the approximate 50 per cent *relative* shortage of Negro extension personnel reflects gross and unjustifiable neglect of the Negro rural population. There is no escape from the conclusion that, very definitely, the Negro people of the South do *not* participate equitably in the cooperative extension program."[187] The report's author laughed off the USDA's assertion that work with Black farm families was never intended "as a parallel service along racial lines," because the author's study showed that African-American agents were "the only medium through which Negro rural farm families receive substantial extension services."[188]

Another area highlighted was funding. Funding was an issue in Oklahoma as it was elsewhere. But here again, the situation in Oklahoma was better. No state achieved equity with regards to funding, but Oklahoma spent the largest percentage in proportion to the amount the study estimated should have been spent – 65 percent equity, followed by Alabama at 55 percent and Texas at 52 percent. Once again, Louisiana was the worst in this category at only 15 percent equity.[189] Another statistic brought forth in the study was a comparison of the black percentage of the rural population relative to the percentage of funds allocated for extension work with African Americans. Oklahoma

[186] Ibid., 22.
[187] Ibid., 30.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid., 36.

showed 4 percent of funds going to services for a demographic representing 7 percent of the constituents. This deficit of 3 percent was the best in the region, where the demographic representing 24 percent of the population received just 6.7 percent of the funds.[190] When the *Negro Yearbook* referenced the study its editors tended to agree with the USDA that there was "but one extension service and even though there should be a more equitable distribution of funds there has been an increase in the percentage of funds appropriated for Negro work." They also argued that since schools like Langston were "subsidiaries" of schools like the OAMC, and that cost estimations based on racial percentages should be reduced because duplication of administration was not necessary for equity.[191]

An examination of the *Oklahoma Extension News* and the *General Catalog* during this period reveals other trends in funding and service levels. The language in the catalog continued to make clear the authority of the Director of Extension with regards to African-American workers. During the 1932/1933 school year, the statement of authority was clear: "In Oklahoma, extension work in agriculture and home economics for negroes is part of the extension organization of the State directly under the Director of Extension at Stillwater to whom all colored agents are responsible."[192] By this time, the Director was D. P. Trent, who began his service in the 1926/1927 school year, but who went on leave before the 1933/1934 school year, leaving Ernest Scholl as acting director during

[190] Ibid., 33.

[191] Jessie Parkhurst Guzman, ed., *Negro Yearbook: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life, 1941-1946* (Tuskegee Institute, AL: The Department of Records and Research, 1947), 166-167.

[192] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1932/1933*, 91.

the crisis involving Agent Johnson - a most inopportune time.[193] Once Scholl became director in his own right, the section on "Negro Work" changed again. First, it was no longer the final mention in the extension section of the catalog, rising above "Farmer's Week and the State 4-H Club Round-Up," to sit at second-to-last. Moreover, the relationship between Black workers and the OAMC was now described as, "Negro district and field agents are responsible to the Director of Extension at Stillwater."[194] However, it was also under Scholl's tenure that the section on extension became a short narrative of its history and work, credited to the Director himself and reducing the description of the Black workers to say only that "two negro district agents whose headquarters are at Langston also work under the Director of Extension."[195] This description remained unchanged until the general catalog's compilers removed the section on the Extension Service beginning with the 1951/1952 school year.[196]

The *Oklahoma Extension News* is a valuable gauge of how Oklahoma's cooperative extension service adhered to trends and recommendations from the national bureaucracy. It is possible then to trace the focus of the publication's reporting on sources regarding county agents, home demonstration agents, and work with boys' and girls' clubs. Among the extant issues (almost all of them) of the *Oklahoma Extension News*, quantitative analysis reveals an increasing focus of the newspaper on work done with women and children, a direct reflection of the trends which led Shinn to write his reports in 1933 and 1938, urging a concerted effort to step up work done with boys' and

[193] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1926.1927* to *1933/1934.*
[194] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1936/1937,* 100.
[195] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1936/1937,* 305.
[196] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1951/1952.*

girls' clubs. Until 1940, the breakdown of stories concentrating on work done by black county agents, boys and girls, and home demonstration agents was 46.5 percent, 15.5 percent, and 38 percent, respectively.[197] At this point, trends began to shift. During the 1940s, 24.25 percent of articles pertained to county agents and adult black males, 45.50 to work done with boys and girls, and 30.25 percent to home demonstration work.[198] Even into the early 1940s, cotton was still a matter of concern among the state's home demonstration agents' reports. Creek County's agent, Hazel O. King, applauded Mrs. Lula Jackson for converting some cotton land to food production with positive results.[199] Two years later, King again reported approvingly of Mrs. Ester Mayes's decision to wait to help her husband pick cotton until she finished her canning for the winter.[200]

One must be careful not to equate correlation with causation, but an examination of administration of the state bureaucracy of the Cooperative Extension Service helps frame the developments in the *Oklahoma Extension News* during the period in question. The advent of the New Deal brought an infusion of new funds to the service, allowing the agency to increase their staff.[201] Prior to the 1933/1934 school year the news service had no special officer designated as an editor. The first person to fill such a position was Duncan Wall, who had a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of

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[197] Figures derived from an analysis of thirteen articles pertaining to black extension work appearing in the *Oklahoma Extension News*, 1914-1939, Box 3, OAMC/OSU Oklahoma Extension News Collection; Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

[198] Statistics derived from an analysis of thirty-three articles pertaining to black extension work appearing in the *Oklahoma Extension News*, 1940-1949, Box 3, OAMC/OSU Oklahoma Extension News Collection.

[199] *Oklahoma Extension News,* October 1940, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications.

[200] *Oklahoma Extension News,* November 1942, Box 3, OAMC/OSU Oklahoma Extension News Collection.

[201] Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 231.

Missouri.[202] Wall had experience at the *Tulsa Tribune* as Farm Editor.[203] He served until the 1937/1938 school year, when Sam Coleman - also with a B. A. in Journalism from the University of Missouri – replaced him as acting Editor for one year.[204] These two presided over a period characterized by a paucity of coverage related to Black Extension work.

From the 1941/1942 school year until 1956, the director of extension was Shawnee Brown.[205] Brown had experience as a county agent prior to his appointment and went on to work for the federal government after leaving the OAMC.[206] Past experiences may help explain why the focus the *Oklahoma Extension News* shifted under his tenure. Brown was the county agent for McCurtain County from 1924 to 1934 when he became assistant director for the state.[207] Just prior to Brown's arrival, from 1918 to 1923, enough black-operated farms existed in McCurtain County for it to qualify for its own African-American agent.[208] From 1923 onward, the white county agent for McCurtain was responsible for both its white and Black farmers. This would have been Brown's position during his ten-year stint there. An analysis of census data helps to illuminate Brown's potential constituents. In 1920, African-Americans made up 22.1 percent of the population of McCurtain County, compared to 8.3 percent of the state's

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[202] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1933/1934*.

[203] Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 231.

[204] Ibid., 231; *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1937/1938*.

[205] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1941/1942* to *1950/1951;* Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 325.

[206] Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 256 and 325.

[207] Ibid., 256.

[208] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1918/1919* to *1922/1923*.

total population.[209] By 1930, both the county and the state's Black population's were in decline as a percentage of the total populace at 17.2 percent for McCurtain County and 7.2 percent for Oklahoma as a whole.[210] Throughout the 1930s, the percentage of African-American residents of McCurtain County actually increased to 19.5 percent by 1940, while the state total held steady at 7.2 percent.[211] In fact, from 1938 onward, McCurtain County once again had a black extension agent of its own.[212]

The late 1940s and the 1950s showed a continuation of these trends, as the following chapter demonstrates, but conclusions about the service during the New Deal and the Second World War are numerous. Despite inequity in funding, Oklahoma's Black agency was financially better off than the region as a whole and most other state agencies, not by USDA estimates, but by those compiled for the Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges. There were more agents based upon this group's calculations than the state's black rural population warranted. Agents in the state outperformed those in other states by the reckoning of Shinn and his surveys. Coverage of African-American extension work increased during the tenure of Shawnee Brown as Director. The increasing coverage coupled with an expansion of Black agency was a defining factor in the last twenty years of the state's segregated agency.

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[209] "Census of Population and Housing: 1920 Census," *U. S. Census Bureau*.
[210] "Census of Population and Housing: 1930 Census," *U. S. Census Bureau*.
[211] "Census of Population and Housing: 1940 Census," *U. S. Census Bureau*.
[212] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1938/1939* to *1950/1951*.

CHAPTER IV

FROM WORLD WAR TWO TO DESEGREGATION

> "The future of the Negro farmer in our area looks good. His only drawback can be himself. Negroes are now buying more farms and improving them. With the help of the young, educated farmers, colored farmers in Okmulgee are set for a better farm life… The doors are wide open for Negroes to share in farm assistance that is coming from the Federal government. They have the same opportunities that anyone else has to get assistance from these agencies."[213]

During the last years of segregated extension work in Oklahoma, the tendency was to focus on uplift by citing accomplishments of the state's black agents and their constituents. Thus, there continued to be an increase in reporting on their activities in the *Oklahoma Extension News*, even as treatment in internal circulations declined or disappeared. Coverage of men and women focused mostly on meetings and awards. All extant articles pertaining to the work of home demonstrations agents from 1952 to 1960 either report the doings at the annual "Negro State Home Demonstration Council" meetings, Farm Home Conferences, election of officers to the council, etc.[214] After the mid 1940s, all coverage from male agents consists of reports of meetings and contests and honors bestowed on agents and farmers. Examples include a report from the annual Oklahoma Pecan Growers association in Pauls Valley, where black farmer L. D.

[213] D. P. Lilly in "County Agents," *Ebony* (April 1949), 41.
[214] *Oklahoma Extension News*, February 1953 to November 1959.

Newport received the award for best seedling, presented by the head of the OAMC Horticulture Department; the annual meeting at Langston; the elections of Thomas Black and D. P. Lilly to the presidency of the "National Negro County Agents Association" in 1952 and 1960, respectively.[215] Lilly especially brought notice to Oklahoma, including an expose written about him in the magazine *Ebony* in 1949. Adhering to Shinn's policy of reporting "successful extension work," Lilly put a positive spin on Oklahoma's extension service. "Under Lilly's keen eye, things are looking up for Negro farmers in Okmulgee's farm country," *Ebony* reported. "As the brown-skin agent sees it, 'The future of the Negro farmer in our area looks good. His only drawback can be himself.'"[216]

Within the *Oklahoma Extension News,* the type of reporting seen during the 1940s continued during the 1950s, when reports of county agents comprised 14.5 percent of coverage, those of boys and girls 54.25 percent, and those of home demonstration work 31.25 percent.[217] Luther Brannon, who served until 1964, replaced Shawnee Brown as director in 1957.[218] Brannon's career prior to his appointment is of special interest. From 1952 to 1957 he was head of the Ethiopian Imperial College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts and the Agricultural Technical School at Jimma in Ethiopia.[219] Without drawing too many conclusions regarding their thought processes, it is still not difficult to see that Brown's work as an agent for McCurtain County and Brannon's agricultural work with Africans influenced their view of black extension work, perhaps accounting

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[215] *Oklahoma Extension News*, January 1955, August 1952, September 1952 and September 1960.

[216] "County Agents," *Ebony* (April 1949), 41.

[217] Figures derived from an analysis of forty-eight articles pertaining to black extension work appearing in the *Oklahoma Extension News*, 1950-1960, Box 3, OAMC/OSU Oklahoma Extension News Collection.

[218] Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture,* 401.

[219] Ibid., 301.

for the increase in stories in the *Oklahoma Extension News* pertaining not just to African-American children, but also blacks in general during their tenures. Discrimination and stereotypes still existed in the *Oklahoma Extension News.* In the March 1951 issue of the news service a picture of a local club in blackface after their performance of a play entitled, "It's The Co'tin' That Counts" (see Image 1).[220]

We know considerably less about the two editors during the 1940s and 1950s. Of H. A. Graham, who was editor from 1938 to 1947, it is known only that he possessed a Bachelor's and Master's of Science from OAMC.[221] In 1947, Edd Lemons replaced Graham and served in various informational and public relations capacities with the service until his retirement in 1967.[222] Aside from his background in radio, Lemons's past is as obscure as that of Graham.[223]

The "Annual Reports" became briefer, as did their coverage of Black Extension work. They ceased to put their employee information or budgetary figures on display. There were no longer any lamentations about the poor state of affairs with regards to African-American farmers. Instead, there was the familiar listing of accomplishments – number of demonstrations held, clubs organized, health examinations administered, farm ponds built, and amounts of agricultural goods produced and sold.[224] Reports insisted that

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[220] *Oklahoma Extension News,* March 1951, Box 3, OAMC/OSU Oklahoma Extension News Collection.

[221] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1938/1939* to *1946/1947.*

[222] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1947/1948* to *1950/1951*; Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 343.

[223] Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 258.

[224] "Oklahoma Farmers in War and Peace: Thirty-second Annual Report, Oklahoma Extension Service, June, 1946," *Circular Number 433*, 24.

"Negro families participated in all phases of the extension program"[225] and that "Negro extension personnel, working with both adult and 4-H members, was influential in improving the living conditions and health of Oklahoma's negroes."[226]

As previously mentioned, the federal government insisted that there was no such thing as segregation in agricultural Extension. In response to requests for greater access to experiment stations and a more equitable distribution of funds, the USDA told the Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges in 1946 that these issues were the purview of the Office of Education of the Federal Security Administration, and insisted that "apart from any restrictions imposed on the distribution of funds, the Department is interested in rendering services to all rural groups of the Nation through agricultural research."[227] Furthermore, the national service's stance was that "in accepting the funds authorized by the several acts of Congress for use in conducting extension work, the State legislatures in these 17 States ['where rural Negro families are found to be in substantial numbers'] designated the State Land Grant colleges for whites to represent the States in the conduct of Cooperative Extension work."[228] So, because the Smith-Lever Act required each state to designate one land grant college to administer Extension, this created a unified program that was the opposite of what the service saw as segregation. And in a sense this was partially true. In theory, white and black agents shared overlapping constituencies and attended some of the same meetings. Nevertheless,

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[225] "Farming for Peace: Thirty-third Annual Report, Oklahoma Extension Division, June 1947," *Circular Number 474*, 18.

[226] "Extension Points the Way (Toward a More Permanent and Prosperous Agriculture): Thirty-fourth Annual Report, Oklahoma Extension Service, 1948," *Circular 489*, 22.

[227] M. L. Wilson, in *Extending the Services of the Negro Land Grant Colleges: Twenty-fifth Annual Session*, October 21-23 1947 (Washington, D.C), 68.

[228] Ibid., 70.

in Oklahoma they possessed separate offices, operated out of different institutions, and received different funding and treatment in the service's publications. The fact that black agents worked out of the black land grant colleges and not the white institutions was, in the view of the federal government, "in the interest of closer relations with such institutions and with their facilities for training new Extension workers," and not because the white colleges had policies relating to black attendance and employment.[229] When it came to the unjustifiable inequities in salary and funding, the USDA feigned inability to act because "in some counties and in some states salaries and other financial provision for Negro workers is locally such that any radical change in the prevailing ratio of compensation between whites and Negroes is likely to subject the worker and the Extension Service to hurtful criticism and opposition."[230] Simply put, the USDA and state agencies did not have the stomach to guarantee equality, because they feared retaliation from whites – the same reason they were exceedingly slow in providing black farmers with agency during the first fourteen years after Smith-Lever.

While the Oklahoma service did its best to put a positive spin on black extension work and the USDA insisted its hands were tied with regards to equity, national leaders in African-American education continued to see numerous problems with the state of the service. Services rendered to black farm families were "woefully inequitable." States used funds meant for extension to pay for staffing and training at the white land grant colleges, but "none of these funds is spent at the Negro land grant institutions." Instructors and administrators at the highest levels were all white. In the eyes of those presenting at the conference, this constituted "discrimination by the States and the

[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid., 72.

Federal Government."[231] The USDA attempted to emphasize that problems with equity were at the state level, because, under the "Memorandum of Understanding" signed by USDA officials and representatives from all states receiving funds from the Smith-Lever Act, cooperative extension agents were "joint representatives of the State and Federal Government."[232] Top USDA lawyers had previously declared that service employees were not employees of the federal government, but conference participants pointed out the federal government retained control over federal funds for extension clear up to the time state agencies spent these funds.[233] In Oklahoma, state officials had it easy when it came to dodging the federal government, because it did not receive funds from the First Morill Act of 1862, and therefore clauses relating this act and equity or fair treatment could not be used against Oklahoma. However, even in the other states where this could have been the case, only four states allowed their black land grant colleges to receive any portion these funds.[234]

In 1946 the federal government still insisted that funding for black agent salaries was not representative of the service's financial commitment to black extension work. National Director Wilson continued to argue that white agents and specialists worked with African-American farm families. Moreover, he commended black home demonstration agents for staying out of racially sensitive issues. He saw the avoidance of such activities as a boon to the service and to rural African Americans as well. "One of the greatest single factors contributing to the success of Negro extension work has been

[231] *Proceedings of the Conference of Presidents of the Negro Land Grant Colleges: Twenty-sixth Annual Session*, October 19-21, 1948 (Washington, D.C.), 76.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid., 77.
[234] Ibid.

the tact with which Negro agents attack the problem of race. Possessed of an innate good judgment, the Negro Home Demonstration agent… has helped to give white people a new understanding of Negro problems," he wrote in a section of a USDA publication called "The Home Demonstration Agent."[235] In Oklahoma there is not any evidence for or against the role of black agents in "attacking the problem of race." Wilson's comments were in line with his concern that raising the issue of equity in pay would be "hurtful" to the service.

In addition to the "Annual Reports" and the *Oklahoma Extension News*, the *OAMC General Catalog* reveals important information about the service during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Staffing remained essentially stagnant during the periods most recently discussed, but in 1944 this changed. In that year there were nine county agents operating in Creek, Logan, Okmulgee, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Seminole, McCurtain, and Wagoner counties and eight home demonstration agents operating in Creek, Lincoln, Logan, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Okmulgee, and Seminole counties. There was also a district home demonstration Agent, a district county agent, and a newly created position of "Negro Farm Labor Supervisor."[236] In 1945 the agency added a county agent for Wagoner County.[237]

The greatest change came in 1946. It was at this point that the state service must have realized that its previous system of using white agents to cater to the needs ofblack

[235] "The Home Demonstration Agent," *United States Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Publication Number 602* (April 1946), 29-30, Folder 8, Box 3, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984.

[236] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1943/1944,* xxxviii.

[237] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1944/1945,* xxxvi.

farm families in counties with a significant population that was not sufficient for black agency was flawed. The Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges pointed this out in 1941 and Oklahoma's division took steps to correct the problem by 1946. They began placing assistant agents in these marginal counties. Wagoner County lost its county agent, but received a black assistant county agent. Lincoln County also received a county agent in this year. The service also added assistant county agent positions in Carter, Choctaw, and McIntosh counties, and assistant home demonstration agents in Carter, Choctaw, McCurtain, McIntosh, Tulsa, and Wagoner counties.[238] In 1947 McCurtain County once again received a black county agent and Wagoner County lost its assistant home demonstration agent.[239] This setup continued through the 1950s.

Another area of concern was once again training. Prior to the 1940s, most of Oklahoma's African-American agents were a mix when it came to education. In general, at any given time, about half of them had received some sort of college education – if not a degree – and most of this education took place out of state at institutions like Tuskegee, Alcorn, Hampton, and Mississippi A & M.[240] By 1940, every agent had some sort of college education. Most of them possessed Bachelor of Science degrees, but some also had Life Certificates and others were enrolled in programs.[241] During the 1940s, more and more agents possessed degrees from Langston, so that by 1944 these comprised over half of the county agents and by 1946 they were in the majority. New county agents and thus assistant county agents were almost exclusively Langston graduates, but since the

[238] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1945/1946*, xxxvi-xxxvii.

[239] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1946/1947*, xxxvii.

[240] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1919/1920* to *1938/1939*.

[241] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1939/1940*, xxxiv.

administrative posts went to older, more experienced personnel, no district agent of either gender was ever a Langston graduate. Home demonstration agents turned out to be a different sort and so Langston graduates never constituted more than a bare majority of these or the assistant home demonstration agents.[242]

When the USDA predicted in 1920 that farm ownership among African Americans would drastically increase by the 1950s, the notion seemed far-fetched. Yet, by 1950 in many places, this prediction had become a reality, but not for the reasons that the department and its extension division would have liked. Undoubtedly the dream of these bureaucracies was that a nineteenth-century Jeffersonian-agrarian system of self-sustaining, land-owning yeomen farmers would replace the debt-ridden tradition of tenancy among black farmers through internal uplift. The extension service and the USDA would be responsible for this uplift through their outreach and education.

The ends were as predicted, but the means were not. In 1940, "nonwhite" tenants operated 72 percent of the "nonwhite"-operated farms in the United States, 74 percent of those in the South and 55 percent of those in Oklahoma. A mere five years later, the breakdown for the nation, region, and state was 70 percent, 71.5 percent, and 42 percent. By 1950, staggeringly, the pattern was 64 percent, 65 percent, and 34 percent for the United States, the South, and Oklahoma, respectively.[243] In fact, when the USDA and the Census Bureau looked at the data in 1950, they concluded that there no longer any counties in Oklahoma where tenants were in the majority. Furthermore, there was an

[242] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1939/1940* to *1948/1949.*

[243] "Census of Agriculture," 1950, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *United States Department of Agriculture.*

overall decrease in the black rural-farm population during this period. From 1930 to 1940, this number dropped from 79,514 to 58,877 and then dropped again to reach 29,316 in 1950.[244] Black farmers left Oklahoma and black farms began to disappear during what historians call the Second Great Migration, an exodus caused by poverty and racism from 1940 to 1970. While the USDA may have wanted to believe that the decrease was due to consolidation of farms and operators purchasing land instead of renting it, this was simply not the case. What had been a nightmare in 1920 was reality by 1950 – the constituents of the black agency were not "improving," they were changing and becoming something else – an urban working class. A report issued by the Tuskegee Institute in 1950 concluded that in the fifteen years from 1930 to 1945, black farmers constituted 35.8 percent of the decrease in tenant operators, but only 4.1 percent of the increase in ownership.[245]

Extension funding was still an issue in 1950. In terms of salary, the situation was not good. In Oklahoma, white county agents received an average salary of $4,436 while for black county agents, the total was $2,943. For home demonstration agents, it was $3,737 for white agents and $2,547 for black agents.[246] In terms of the region, the average salary for black county agents was $3,046. The outlier of Arkansas's agents' salaries at $4,713 greatly inflates this average, because the next closest salary was $3,732 in North Carolina. If Arkansas is removed from the calculation, the average was $2,917. Arkansas's home demonstration agents earned about as much Oklahoma's agents -

[244] "Census of Population and Housing, 1950," *U.S. Census Bureau.*

[245] Guzman, ed., *1952 Negro Yearbook: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life* (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., Inc., 1952), 102-103.

[246] Ibid., 107.

$2,563 – and so the average for the region including them was $2,643.[247] Allotment of funds was also insufficient. Oklahoma's twenty-nine black agents represented approximately 9.5 percent of the state service's workforce, but they only received 5 percent of the funding. In some states, the service allotted funding for African-American club Work and specialists, but not in Oklahoma. Regionally, 9.5 percent of all funds for extension services went to work with African Americans.[248] Whatever progress and good news had come out of the study conducted for the Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges in 1941, by the fiscal year 1950-51 it was no longer evident. Overall, Oklahoma's corps of workers of all races totaled 299 out of the South's 5,484 – about 5.5 percent and this is roughly how much the service expended in Oklahoma.[249] The amount of money spent in Oklahoma was equitable, but its distribution was not.

Historians of African-American Extension work lament the lack of scholarship on the subject after 1945. In Oklahoma, there is not much in the way of source material. "Annual Reports" after 1948 are non-existent.[250] As previously mentioned, the *General Catalog* no longer contained a section on Extension work after the 1949/1950 school

[247] Figures based on author's calculations using data from "USDA Extension Service Report on Average Annual Salaries, No. 1033," presented in Guzman, ed., *1952 Negro Yearbook: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life*, 107.

[248] Figures based on the author's calculation using data from "Division of Business Administration, Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture," presented in Guzman, ed., *1952 Negro Yearbook: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life*, 107-108.

[249] Statistics based on author's calculation using data from "Division of Business Administration, Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture," presented in Guzman, ed., *1952 Negro Yearbook: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life*, 108.

[250] Extension Service, *Circulars Nos. 474-601*; current staff of the extension division confirm that such "Annual Reports" are no longer issued to the public and assessment comes in the form of communication between the state agency and the USDA.

year.[251] Figures on funding are scarce. What little is known concerns the personnel positions.

The service began to terminate the work of black agents in the years leading up to 1965. From 1951 to 1955, there was no home demonstration agent for Carter County and there was a short-term vacancy in the county agent position in Carter County from 1953 to 1955. The service added a county agent in Choctaw County in 1951. In 1955, there were Black agents operating in Creek, Wagoner, Logan, Carter, Choctaw, Muskogee, Okmulgee, McCurtain, Oklahoma, Seminole, Okfuskee, and McIntosh counties. The shrinking agency was such that operations from 1957 to 1965 operations took place only in Okfuskee, Choctaw, McCurtain, Seminole, Oklahoma, Logan, and Muskogee counties.[252]

Integration of Oklahoma's schools brought an in end to the "Negro" extension service in the incarnation in which it had existed since 1910. The initial battle over desegregation in Oklahoma education began in 1946 when Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher applied to the University of Oklahoma (OU) Law School. After a lengthy court battle, which she won with the backing of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the representation of Thurgood Marshall, the university

[251] *Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College General Catalog, 1950/1951* to *1957/1958;* and *Oklahoma State University General Catalog, 1959/1960* to *1964/1965.*

[252] "History of Negro Involvement in Cooperative Extension at Langston University," report compiled from work of Zella Patterson, Paul O. Brooks, A. B. Murray, and the M. B. Tolson Black Heritage Center, Langston University, 241-242, Cooperative Extension, Langston University Archives.

admitted Sipuel.[253] Similarly, the Graduate College at OU denied admission to George McLaurin in 1948, until a federal district court forced his admission later that same year.[254] Readers should not equate the success of these civil rights cases with integration. They were the product of the "separate but equal" portion of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, because there were no institutions comparable to OU's Graduate College and Law School for African Americans and Sipuel and McLaurin suffered random separation from their fellow students at times. The OAMC administration was cognizant of these events and in 1949 they allowed the first black student, Nancy Randolph Davis, to enroll and shortly thereafter admitted a trickle of African Americans.[255] After the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, Oklahoma moved to desegregate its public schools. In 1955 it became the policy, as stated by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, that all institutes of higher education admit qualified African Americans.[256]

Before discussing the end of Black extension work in Oklahoma as it had existed for fifty-eight years, the situation with African-Americans and farmers needs addressing one final time. The state overall lost 21.1 percent of its farm population between 1950 and 1960. In that year there were 40,621 rural African Americans in Oklahoma and 35,583 of them resided in places with a population of less than 1,000. However, the

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[253] Baird and Goble, *Oklahoma: A History*, 296; Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 237-238; and Pauline W. Kopecky, *A History of Equal Opportunity at Oklahoma State University* (Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories Series, 1990), 268-269.

[254] Baird and Goble, *Oklahoma: A History*, 296; Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 238-239; Kopecky, *A History of Equal Opportunity at Oklahoma State University*, 269-270.

[255] Kopecky, *A History of Equal Opportunity at Oklahoma State University*, 275-276.

[256] Baird and Goble, *Oklahoma: A History*, 296; Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 239; and Kopecky, *A History of Equal Opportunity at Oklahoma State University*, 280.

demographic only represented 4.7 percent of the population.[257] Looking at the statistics at the county level, it is possible to understand the service's desire to condense its black agency in the last seven years of Extension work. All of the counties that retained their workers after 1958 had a black rural population of over 10 percent (aside from the anomaly of Oklahoma County's 0.36 percent) and all of those which lost their workers came in below this percentage (again there was an anomaly with Muskogee County at 12.60 percent). African Americans continued to make up a sizable portion of the rural population in both sets of counties – anywhere from 12.52 to 31.19 percent in the agency counties and from 7.9 to 21.13 in the losing counties.[258] But, with such a decrease in the overall rural population, the entire state agency would have been forced to justify the continuance of all programs in counties where the urban population rose drastically as the number of rural people declined.

Integration of the Extension service occurred in 1965. Even prior to that, it was apparent that the segregated Extension service was at its end. In 1960, when District Agent Paul O. Brooks retired, the state service did not appoint a replacement for him, because the era of separate administration was over.[259] In 1965 the Langston office closed and the integrated service moved to Stillwater.[260] Hazel King, who had been the District Agent for Home Demonstration became the Human Resources Development Specialist at

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[257] "Census of Population and Housing, 1960," *U. S. Census Bureau*.

[258] Figures based on author's calculations using data presented in "Census of Population and Housing, 1960," *U. S. Census Bureau*.

[259] "History of Negro Involvement in Cooperative Extension at Langston University," report compiled from work of Zella Patterson, Paul O. Brooks, A. B. Murray, and the M. B. Tolson Black Heritage Center, Langston University, 242, Cooperative Extension, Langston University Archives; and Donald E. Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture* (Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories Series, 1990), 354.

[260] Patterson, *Langston University: A History*, 212; and Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 354.

Oklahoma State University, as the OAMC was called from the 1958/1959 school year onward.[261] Oklahoma's black agents remained in the field after 1965, working in various capacities and many of them continued to work in agricultural education on into the late 1980s.[262] This continued employment occurred under the auspices of a "Community Development Program" targeting low-income rural areas, not necessarily based on race, begun in cooperation between Langston and OSU in 1972.[263]

In the last years of segregated extension work in Oklahoma, numerous factors came to a head. Under the directorship of Luther Brannon, the reporting in the *Oklahoma Extension News* continued to focus more on work done by Oklahoma's black agents, but mostly in the form of reports of awards and honors and a majority of coverage focused on work with children. This represented a continuation of the reporting in the 1940s. However, at the same time, the section of the Annual Reports relating to "Negro Extension" shrank, as did the overall depth and breadth of the reports. After expanding in the late 1940s to serve black farm families in marginal counties by assigning Assistant County and Home Demonstration Agents, the division contracted in the mid-1950s as the rural population of Oklahoma – both black and white – shrank. The service realized its dream of reducing tenancy, but there was no resultant increase of any significance in

[261] "Staff of the Division of Agriculture: Agricultural Experiment Station, College of Agriculture, and Cooperative Extension, Oklahoma State University, Sept. 1 1965," Folder 59, Box 4, Oklahoma State University Centennial Histories – Agriculture Collection, 1910-1984; and "History of Negro Involvement in Cooperative Extension at Langston University," report compiled from work of Zella Patterson, Paul O. Brooks, A. B. Murray, and the M. B. Tolson Black Heritage Center, Langston University, 242, Cooperative Extension, Langston University Archives.

[262] "Black Extension Home Economists," 1-2, Cooperative Extension, Langston University Archives, Melvin B. Tolson Black Heritage Center, Langston University.

[263] Patterson, *Langston University: A History*, 212; and Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture*, 354.

ownership among black farmers. While the 1930s and 1940s had marked a period of excess funding and staffing in the opinion of groups like the Conference of Negro Land Grant Colleges, the 1950s were a time when funds for black agency were scarce in Oklahoma. When Oklahoma's Black students knocked down the doors of segregation in 1949, they heralded an end to the segregated extension service, because the as it had existed since 1910 was unconstitutional.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

> "'Win the war now, smoke the peace pipe later,' is the slogan of a band of Indians out of Caddo county. They are 4-H Indians, members of the Riverside Indian 4-H Club which is located on the banks of the Washita River north of Anadarko. According to L.I. Bennett, county agent, they're the hardest fighting group of warriors anywhere in the country. They're fighting for democracy."[264]

This work began with a discussion about the relationship between Oklahoma's African Americans and the state's Native Americans. Many of the former came to the Sooner State in bondage to the latter. Yet, in the eyes of the federal government, at various times, they were both considered part of the same group of "Colored People." The extension service made efforts to reach out to Native Americans as well, but this occurred on a case-by-case basis, was piecemeal, and relied on the County or Home demonstration agent to take the initiative. The qualification of "Whiteness" was a hallmark of American racism as it evolved over time. The Omicron Chapter of OSU's extension fraternity, Epsilon Sigma Phi, did not include a discussion of work by black county and home demonstration agents or work with black farm families. However, they did relate the work of Associate County Agent Robert H. Wood of Blaine County,

[264] *Oklahoma Extension News*, February 1942, Box 2, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

who devoted his time to outreach with Cheyenne and Arapaho people.[265] Agents organized Native American boys' and girls' along the same lines as they did for Black and White children. However, county agents reported on the ways in which these club activities also diverged from their non-Indian cohorts: "Indian 4-H'ers make handicraft one of their main projects. They like to braid beads into belts, moccasins, and wrist bands. They tan belts and with the skins make tom-toms, tepees, and dance costumes… dancing is a major activity with these 4-H'ers… they earn most of the funds for their club by staging Indian dances and appearing on programs all over the state."[266] Many of these clubs were Pan-Indian. During the late 1930s, Washington County Home Demonstration Agent Letta Moore reported on the "'Ah-We-Na-Sa' (Indian's) Home Demonstration Club",[267] and in the early 1940s a report noted the success of a club organized by teachers from the Oak Hill Indian School in Rogers County where the club's president "conduct[ed] meetings in both English and Cherokee for the benefit of some of the older women."[268] By the 1970s, the new cooperative "Community Development Program" was continuing the work of the black extension agents, but because the program based its constituency on income, many of the families it serviced were Native American as well as Black.[269]

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[265] Roberts, ed., "History of Oklahoma State University Extension, 1902-1970," 151.

[266] *Oklahoma Extension News*, February 1942, Box 2, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

[267] *Oklahoma Extension News,* October 1939, Box 2, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

[268] *Oklahoma Extension News,* November 1941, Box 2 Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Publications – Ellis County Publications, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries.

[269] Green, *A History of the Oklahoma State University Division of Agriculture,* 354.

Although it is now by far the consensus that integration was a positive good and the system of segregation led to inequity in almost every area, both tangible and intangible, for Extension some of the unforeseen consequences of integration were negative. Jeannie Whayne noted that, "When the agency was integrated in 1965, black agents lost all autonomy, became assistant agents to the white county agents, and over the next decades saw their ranks depleted even as black farmers continued to depart the South."[270] In 1977 the U.S. Congress enacted legislation, Public Law 95-113, that allowed the 1890 land grant institutions, the black colleges, to begin their own separate Extension work. Scholar Joel Schor demonstrated that as these institutions created such programs, White citizens complained of "reverse discrimination" and that the administration of Ronald Reagan was exceedingly slow in processing civil rights legal claims within cooperative extension.[271] Another complaint noted by Schor was the same as that issued by the editors of the *Negro Yearbook* in 1946 – that autonomous or separate Extension services with true equity would result in a "duplication of effort."[272] Because the "Community Development Program" in Oklahoma was a joint effort between Langston and OSU and because it focused on the problem of poverty instead of race explicitly, it managed to avoid similar charges.

It is certainly the case that the exodus of Black farmers from the South and from Oklahoma continued after 1965. In 1970, the year in which Oklahoma's urban population eclipsed that of its rural areas, there were 25,408 rural-farm African Americans in the

[270] Whayne, "'I Have Been Through Fire': Black Agricultural Extension Agents and the Politics of Negotiation," in Hurt, ed., *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950*, 188.

[271] Schor, "The Black Presence in the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service since 1945: An American Quest for Service and Equity," 148-151.

[272] Guzman, ed., *Negro Yearbook: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life, 1941-1946*, 166-167.

state, comprising slightly less than 1 percent of the state's total population.[273] Much of this decline was due to the Second Great Migration, but readers should not construe this to mean that all of these farm families left Oklahoma for the North. If one drives around cities and towns like Langston or Okmulgee, in Logan and Okmulgee counties, it is true that there are a number of white farms near these population centers. However, they have grown over the years and much of this growth is a result of internal migration within the counties and the state by African Americans from the farm to the town.

There is much work still to be done in the area of black extension research. Studies of the work of black agents in Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and West Virginia do not exist at this time. Comparative analysis between these states and Oklahoma and Kentucky should yield helpful findings. Moreover, extension work with Native Americans should be a primary concern of all scholars of state divisions where these communities existed. Until this occurs, scholars will not have a complete picture of this segregated quasi-federal organization.

One may draw several conclusions about the course of African-American extension work in Oklahoma, from its beginnings in 1910 with the appointment of Annie Peters of Boley as the nation's first female Demonstration Agent to its conclusion with the consolidation of the program in 1965. The most obvious is that Black agents faced enormous challenges with limited resources. The state agency recognized that Oklahoma's black farmers were often the worst-affected of all of the state's rural citizens by problems of debt, poverty, the cotton market, and nutrition. However, it continuously valued the work of black agents lower than it did of white agents, resulting in lower pay

[273] "Census of Population and Housing," 1970, *U.S. Bureau of the Census.*

and no funds for clerical or technical support. This was due in part to the attitudes of Oklahomans in general, evidenced by the lack of county contribution to the black extension division in the early years.

Black Oklahomans faced numerous instances of continued racial discrimination all through the years covered by the study. These ranged from lynching and riots to voter disenfranchisement and institutionalized segregation. In spite of this, the situation in Oklahoma was not as bad for black extension workers and their constituents as it was in the Deep and Upper South. In terms of funding and staffing, the "Negro Division" in the Sooner state resembled that of Texas in that they were better off than many of the other segregated states. This was a result of the state's cultural geography. Most rural black Oklahomans resided in the eastern part of the state and were concentrated in just a few counties. Most were in the east-central portion – Okfuskee, Okmulgee, McIntosh, Muskogee, Seminole, and Wagoner counties – but also in the southeast – Carter, Choctaw, and McCurtain counties. Once the state agency shifted to a policy of one county per agent, this concentration assured that a larger portion of Oklahoma's black farmers would have an agent of their own race. In other states where a similar policy was in place, the widespread distribution of the rural black population made this kind of representation much less possible.

Oklahoma's black farmers may have had a different beginning from most in the South, but the course of their history proceeded along similar lines. Despite the inclusion of Native Americans in earlier agricultural statistics for "Colored Farms," Oklahoma's Black farmers were still more likely to own their own farms than similar populations in the rest of the South. This ended due to the First Great Migration as many of the tenants

left Oklahoma. However, throughout the rest of the segregated history of the state the total population of Black farmers in Oklahoma rapidly declined so that by the time segregated extension ended, they had gone from slightly over 7 percent of the population to a mere 1 percent.

In spite of this, Oklahoma's agents performed above the regional norm. They published more reports and stories, devoted more of their time to work with children, held more demonstrations and meetings, and re-enrolled more club members, much to the satisfaction of USDA bureaucrats. They were ahead of the curve in terms of training – attending short courses and leadership conferences at a time when the national division lamented the absence of such programs. There is no explanation of this phenomenon except for hard work and determination – especially in the face of a white racism that undervalued their efforts.

Female agents bore the brunt of this undervaluing. Women's history in America relates the familiar tale of a gender-gap in terms of pay equity and the extension service was never an exception. The USDA consistently placed a lower value on the work of home demonstration agents and the figures for salaries in Oklahoma reflect this, while at the same time the division lauded work done with farm wives and daughters as the most successful. Until the late 1940s, the service did not have as many home demonstration agents as it did county agents. While the state division claimed the impetus for adding a male district agent was that the previous setup had been ineffective, it took them nearly a decade to provide the same administrative streamlining for women in the service.

Aside from periodic staffing excesses, there were two other seeming bright spots for black agency in Oklahoma, though they did not coincide. In the late 1930s and early 1940s estimates from Conference of the Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges showed Oklahoma's program was overfunded. This did not last for very long, because the Tuskegee Institute noted that by 1951 Oklahoma's to funding was just as poor as it was in the rest of the segregated service.

The second area was press coverage. While the USDA lauded black agents in Oklahoma for outperforming other state services in terms of reports and publications, the *Oklahoma Extension News* increased its coverage of work with black farm families in the late 1940s and early 1950s under the directorships of Shawnee Brown and Luther Brannon. They followed national trends as the focus of coverage shifted from work done with men to work done with women and children and finally to an overwhelming focus on the state's black 4-H clubs and their success at the local and national level. The news services focused on positive coverage of black extension work, as evidenced by the absence of the controversy surrounding Agent Johnson. However, they also seemingly had no problem featuring the above-mentioned blackface performance by a white county club and they did not report on the process of integration within the service.

In the end, the service failed in its mission. They did not create a stable, financially well-off, self-sustaining class of black farm-owners in Oklahoma or in the South. Despite periodic tendencies of better staffing and funding for work with black farm families, this group suffered the same fate as in other states. It could be argued that no amount of funding or service could have saved the small family farm, white or black, given the national trend to fewer, larger farms, and this was especially true of black

agents' constituents in Oklahoma. The simple answer is that these efforts were not enough, especially in the face of the debt-ridden tenancy and cash crop culture or view of the USDA that its constituents were of a "backward race." It could not succeed when the problems were worse than those of white constituents, but so was the funding. When the national division refused to acknowledge that segregation even existed and put responsibility for inequity squarely on state agencies and would not regulate even the funds coming from the treasury, such success was impossible. Poverty and racism as well as better paying jobs and a higher standard of living to be had in large, industrial cities lured so many of the state's black farmers away that the service was powerless to stop it, despite what can only be described as one of – if not the - best-performing black divisions in the country.

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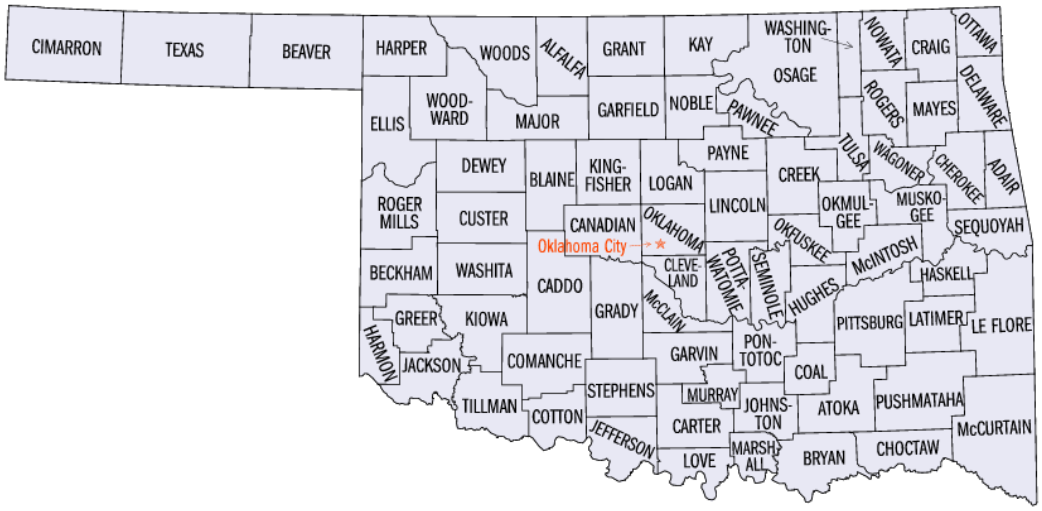
APPPENDICES

MAP 1: OKLAHOMA COUNTIES



SOURCE: "State and County Quick Facts," *U.S. Census Bureau.*

IMAGE 1: “IT’S THE CO’TIN’ THAT COUNTS”

SOURCE: *Oklahoma Extension News,* March 1951, Box 3, OAMC/OSU Oklahoma Extension News Collection.

VITA

Samuel Dester

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: HOW SOUTHERN IS OKLAHOMA? SEGREGATION IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION, 1914-1965

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in History at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2010.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in History and International Studies at Baker University, Baldwin City, Kansas in 2007.

Experience:

Graduate Teaching Assistant, History Department, Oklahoma State University, 2008-2010.

Research Assistant, National Parks Service and Organization of American Historians, 2009.

Professional Memberships:

Phi Kappa Phi, Honorary Society

Phi Alpha Theta, History Honorary Society

Phi Gamma Mu, Social Sciences Honorary Society

Phi Beta Delta, International Honorary Society

Name: Samuel Dunn Dester Date of Degree: July, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University Location Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: HOW SOUTHERN IS OKLAHOMA? SEGREGATION IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION, 1914-1965

Pages in Study: 95 Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: History

Scope and Method of Study: An examination of the segregated agricultural extension service at the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, now Oklahoma State University, in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Scope in main is from the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 to the end of the black extension division in 1965.

Findings and Conclusions: While Oklahoma's segregated extension service faced many of the problems that hampered similar divisions in the South and border states, at times the situation in the state was better than elsewhere in the region. Funding and staffing never achieved equity with that of the white division and for black female extension employees, the inequities were more severe. However, Oklahoma's black farm families frequently benefited from a higher ratio of agents to constituents (rural African-Americans). This more favorable ratio resulted from the state's cultural geography and the extension division's criteria for agency. The concentration of rural farming African-Americans in nine to thirteen counties and the division's policy of qualification for black agency based on a certain demographic threshold brought more agents per farm family to Oklahoma than in the rest of the South. However, just as in other states the extension division could not save the family farm - either black or white – from the grand sweep of American history that resulted in today's consolidated, mechanized farms.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Michael Logan