

Call for Abstracts – Special Issue on Heirs’ Property
Journal of Rural Social Sciences

Since the height of African American land ownership as recorded in the 1910 Census of Agriculture at around 16 million acres, most succeeding census counts have registered a steep decline. And even with recent modest up-ticks in African American owned land, the overall result is a 75% decline over 100 years later as recorded in the 2017 agricultural census. While there are many reasons for this decline, including the push of being forced off the land through Jim Crow laws, violence, intimidation, and discriminatory practices by state and federal governments, as well as the pull to the North in the Great Migration, another major cause is the intergenerational transfer of land without a will, resulting in heirs’ property. And while this affects predominantly African Americans in the rural South, other ethnic and economic minorities are negatively affected by heirs’ property as well, including rural whites in Appalachia, Latinx communities in the Colonias of Texas, Spanish land grant grants in the Southwest, and Native Americans near reservation communities.

Heirs’ property is land passed down informally from one generation to the next without the benefit of a will. In this case, the descendants of the original owner do not own a specific acreage, but rather an undivided interest in the whole, and are called co-tenants in common. If this land continues to be passed down as heirs’ property, after several generation, tens, if not hundreds, of heirs all have varying interests in the land. Because all the co-tenants must agree on any kind of change to land use management, heirs’ property cannot be used as collateral for mortgages, and there is difficulty in harvesting timber or accessing mineral rights, as well as accessing certain USDA programs. Due to the lack of secured title of heirs’ property, it is also the target for partition sales, tax sales, adverse possession, and eminent domain.

Land, as a major factor in terms of individual wealth and community asset building, is at risk as heirs’ property, with economic, political, and social implications. To direct more attention towards this important topic, this special issue of the *Journal of Rural Social Sciences* will focus on heirs’ property in the rural South. With the guest editorial team consisting of leaders from research, Extension/outreach, and community-based organizations, manuscripts drawing from multiple disciplines and using a range of methodological and analytical approaches are welcome. Manuscripts on general topics related to heirs’ property are invited, and particular attention will be given to those addressing: 1) original research on the social, economic, political impacts of heirs’ property; 2) practices that address heirs’ property at the personal, family, and communities levels; and 3) issues related to heirs’ property that need to be and can be addressed through legislation and policy, from the local to the national levels and including impacts of past and current policies.

Authors are asked to submit abstracts (not to exceed 150 words) by March 18, 2022 for consideration. Following initial desk-review by the special issue editorial team, authors of selected abstracts will be invited to submit full-length papers (not to exceed 9,000 words) by June 1, 2022. After a second desk-review, selected manuscripts will be sent out for the journal’s regular double-blind peer review process.

Each abstract should be submitted as a Word document in an email attachment to Special Issue Co-Guest Editor Robert Zabawa (rzabawa@tuskegee.edu), with JRSS Editor in Chief John J. Green (john.green@msstate.edu) and JRSS Managing Editor Elizabeth Sweeney (eyoung@go.olemiss.edu) copied.

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