

**AN INQUIRY INTO THE CURRENT STATUS AND DECLINE OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN FARMING IN AMERICA**

An Abstract of
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ABSTRACT

The numbers of African-American farmers in the United States is in rapid decline. In some states such as Illinois, they have always been few and they are also in decline. The prospect of African-American farming dying out has become very real. Historically, Black farming has faced a large number of challenges and events that discourage both rural settlement and rural landownership. In Illinois, rural Black communities face some of the most staggering poverty levels in the nation, further encouraging urban migration trends. Despite recent attempts at compensation for past discrimination and rural economic stimuli, the outlook for African-American farming is bleak. I hypothesize that the reasons for their decline include the rising costs of land and machinery, urban migration trends, poverty, racism, unfavorable government policies, and discriminatory lending practices. When the rate of decline is compared between state and regional levels, I hypothesize that Black farmers have been declining nationwide at an equal rate. In order to test these hypotheses, quantitative methods will be used such as location quotients, shift-share analysis, and a comparison of percentages in order to examine where Black farmers are present in higher, as well as lower, than expected numbers, and to what extent characteristics of Black farmers differ from those of all farmers. To understand the nature of their decline, I will compare the proportion of all farmers that are Black in 1920 and again in 1997 to see how they have fared during the 20th Century. This thesis makes a contribution to our understanding of racial issues in America because unlike the bulk of previous studies on race which focus on the rural South or in urban areas, the focus of this thesis is on the origins, the rate of decline, and the current status of African American and minority farming when compared between Illinois and other states.