The Southern University Law Center’s Journal of Race, Gender & Poverty held its second annual symposium

By Nicholas Giles

On March 17, 2011, the Southern University Law Center’s Journal of Race, Gender & Poverty held its second annual symposium, “We’re Taking Your Property: Expropriation and Property Rights,” on its campus in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Journal’s purpose of hosting an annual Symposium is to provoke critical discussions on subjects that remain extremely relevant to society, but fail to receive adequate coverage in mainstream law journals. The Journal achieved this purpose when they brought speakers from across the United States to contribute to diverse discussions on property rights and land loss by minority property owners.

This year’s symposium covered a wide-range of topics. Those topics included: environmental justice, expropriation, the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act, and other significant issues related to property ownership and civil rights. With the economic recession, and the vast economic gap between minorities and the majority, panelist Savi Horne, the Executive Director of the Land Loss Prevention Project, noted, “this symposium came at a critical time and not a moment too soon.”

The symposium began with discussions on expropriation. Opening panels measured the impact of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Kelo vs. City of New London, which granted the government the constitutional discretion to allow private companies to “take” property for economic development. Chancellor Emeritus John Costinios of the LSU Law Center and David A. Marcello, Director of the Louisiana Center for the Public Interest, detailed how this decision affected the property rights of millions of African American residents in southern Louisiana who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Historian and University of Alabama Professor, David T. Beito, further noted how Kelo’s expansion of the “taking clause” has negatively impacted Alabama residents as the state attempted to take the homes of impoverished minorities under the guise that their property was “blighted.”

The second panel examined a case currently in progress, a way the government has taken the property of minority homeowners. Professor Thomas W. Mitchell and Professor Malcolm Meyer Sr., agreed that two of the most critical means the state has stripped minority property owners of their land was by partitioning property through expropriation laws. Professor Mitchell, who is also the Reporter of the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act for the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, compared the partitioning of property sales to a “private taking without just compensation.” Tulane Law School Professor Malcolm Meyers Sr., explained how complex expropriation laws make it difficult for impoverished minorities to gain a good title on to their property.

Chris Brook, an attorney from the Southern Coalition of Social Justice in North Carolina, added an additional perspective to the symposium by speaking from an environmental justice perspective. He engaged the audience of law students and faculty as he lectured on how minority neighborhoods were targeted for unwanted land uses. These land uses include: toxic dumping sites, chemical plants, and waste fields. Gary Bleidsoe, the President of the Texas Chapter of the NAACP, had the audience on the edge of their seats as he related stories of expropriation abuse cases he litigated in Texas. He commented, “this symposium headed to a close, Savi Horne gained an interesting, yet disturbing breakdown on the discriminatory loan practices that Black farmers experienced at the hands of the United States Department of Agriculture. After the conference joined us for our forth business session of the year. Mr. Woodward introduced us to a Biblicalized Based Ministry that was birthed from a conversation regarding food waste and the millions of people who are living at risk of hunger in America. There are more than 36 million Americans, including 12 million children who are at risk of going hungry in a country who is the richest in the world. Yet, in the United States of America, nearly 100 billion pounds of food is thrown away each year before it even gets to market.

The Society of St. Andrew began its 30th year in 1979 in a converted sheep shed for offices and a dream of a world without hunger. They strategically targeted two main points of food waste in this country, 1) Fields and archers where produce is produced by chemical harvesting equipment, and 2) Produce is the wrong size or not pretty enough and is left behind by pickers. The crops usually wound up in land fields due to size and a few blemishes. To help counteract the waste, the Society of St. Andrew started a Gleaning Network. Gleaning is the traditional practice of gathering crops that would otherwise be left in the fields to rot or be plowed under after harvest. The gleaning network coordinates volunteers, growers, and distribution agencies to salvage this food for the needy. Tens of thousands of volunteers from churches, synagogues, scouts, troop senior citizens and groups interested in helping their community each year in the gleaning activities. The Society of St. Andrew’s Produce and Potato project has distributed well

The Society of St. Andrew gives

Winston County Self Help Cooperative Walking in Wellness Program was begun 10:00 A.M. Saturday, February 5, 2011 at Ivy Park located in the heart of Louisville, MS. WCSHC Walking in Wellness is in conjunction with the Winston County Diabetes Coalition and working together to establish a healthier lifestyle for the community and its surrounding areas. Marjorie Coburn, a Louisville, MS resident who is the Miss Mississippi Gleaning Coordinator at WSCSH’s Walking in Wellness Model who walks on average (5) miles a day. “Walking helps you! It helps your blood pressure, your heart rate, and diabetes, motivate yourself!” said Marjorie Coburn who will soon be 70 years old. Energy levels are increasing, stress levels decreasing and walkers desire to walk for longer periods of time. Thanks Winston County Self Help Cooperative for making a phenomenal difference in the community and establishing a healthy habit of physical activity for all to embrace’. Winston County Self Help Cooperative invites everyone to come out and begin Walking in Wellness 10:00 A.M. every Saturday at Ivy, Dean & Molly Eistein Parks. For more information please contact WCSHC Walking in Wellness at 662-779-2400.

WCSHC’s Wellness Walking Program

Farm transferred to 2nd Generation

By Andrew Williams

WCSHC’s Agribusiness Farm Management Specialist

Kimberly F. Cosby is a resident of Marion, Alabama which is located in Perry County of West Alabama. Ms. Cosby is an educator at Unontown Elementary School in Unontown, Alabama. She graduated from Francis Marion High School and holds several advanced degrees. She decided early in her career that she would stay home and help her parents manage their family businesses. One of the businesses that her family owns is a small farm where cattle were produced in a cow-calf operation. When the farm was transferred to Ms. Cosby, she contacted Andrew Williams of the Winston County Self Help Cooperative for technical assistance. She indicated to Mr. Williams that she wanted to continue operating this farm, but wanted to add more to her operation to include wildlife habitat management. At this point, Ms. Williams directed her to visit the USDA/NRCS office for cost share assistance in the 2010 program year. The USDA/NRCS office referred her to the Perry County Soil and Water Conservation District where she received cost share assistance and the Farm Conservation Development Cost-Share Program (AACDCP). Under this direction the following were provided:

• A Forestry Regeneration plan developed by the Alabama Forestry Service
• Cost share assistance was approved by the Perry County Soil and Water Conservation District
• Andrew Williams provided the USDA/NRCS office referred her to the Perry County Soil and Water Conservation District
• Andrew Williams provided Farm transferred to 2nd gen.
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WCSHC: a family affair.

The story of how she would operate one end of the cross cut saw and the two eldest boys would be on the other end, sometimes fighting over the logs. Mr. George realized the problem when the other barn hand, who was spite of the bickering and arguing, the load of logs was always ready for their father to take to sale when he got home from work. Mrs. Montro was a woman of many duties. She was able to do what one would call “break back working” and still find the energy and time to can and put up the vegetables they grew and to care and nurture her family as well as the best of mothers.

At ages 84 and 76 respectfully, George and Montro Miller are still farming. Things have been quite different for them since Mr. George became a member of Winston County Self Help Cooperative around 1991. Because of WCSHC’s affiliation with the International Heifer Program, Mr. George was one of the many members who received 5 bred heifers from the program. To help secure his pastures, he also received metal fence posts and barbed wire from WCSHC in addition to feeding troughs for his cattle. Government services have allowed them to see results in the long time for something to materialize (in the area).  While in Detroit, George A. (now, Elder Miller) plans to return to a life of farming in Winston County.  George became a member of Winston County Self Help Cooperative. When Alonzo and his brother, and mom Equilla joined the cooperative in 1998, they were members and his wife Equilla joined the cooperative in 2000.  He says that farming in his blood and his heart, it wasn’t long before Alonzo decided to move back home and try farming on his own. One of the main reasons was to feed his cattle. Government services have afforded him the opportunity to receive fertilizer.  Representatives from the NRCS helps them to move forward with their goals. With the economy the way it is, this program creates opportunities that can help you take care of your family and also educate your children about the kind of Agriculture which may inspire them to become Producers.  With the economy the way it is, this program creates opportunities that can help you take care of your family and also educate your children about the kind of Agriculture which may inspire them to become Producers.

Mr. George worked so hard in addition to his will to provide for his family is that he also had a strong desire for each one of his children to receive a college education. And they did (all five of them). Mr. George funded his children’s college education by hauling logs on the back of his 1956 GMC pick-up truck that he claims “could out run a car.”

The same daughter that gave her father the nickname wanted nothing to do with going to college.  But she is a gifted educator of 30 years.  She went to college, but she is a gifted educator of 30 years.  To return to a life of farming in Winston County.  Mrs. Montro was a woman of many duties. She was able to do what one would call “break back working” and still find the energy and time to can and put up the vegetables they grew and to care and nurture her family as well as the best of mothers.

WCSHC has given them a “jump start.” “It has actually put us ahead in the game of farming”, they both agree. Being from the city, Peggy is accustomed to having things almost instantly. Life being on a fast pace, it doesn’t seem as though it takes a long time for something to materialize (in the city). She too realises that the advantages and opportunities available through the Self Help Cooperative have allowed them to see results much sooner than if they had been on their own. Being only on their farm for two years, they are off to a great start thanks to WCSHC. They already have 12 head of cattle and 3 more bred heifers on the farm.  They have over 30 chickens and 3 donkeys. The Cooperative have also provided fruit trees, vegetables to plant, workshops and valuable information that helps them to move forward with their goals. Their membership has brought them face to face with numerous organizations, programs, and individuals such as Cattlemen’s Assn., USDA, NRCS, MS Forestry Commission, MSU Extension Service, Farm Service Agency, Grazing Land Specialist, and many more. Through these agencies they have received help with purchasing barb wire and fence posts for fencing, soil testing, lime and fertilizer. Representatives from the NRCS have made visits to the farm just to provide advice on how to set things up and help you plan your next step.

Peggy is especially grateful for the canning workshops that allow her to process and preserve the food that is grown on the farm. She likes the fact that she can now have fresh produce whether it’s in or out of season, year round. Living on a farm is presenting her with new challenges every day. Things like making jellies and preserves are tasks she never thought of herself doing before. Growing her own food and putting the torque together to look new recipes and ways to prepare them. Field trips taken with the Cooperative provide her the opportunity to see things up close that she has never seen before. Knowledge obtained from workshops, seminars, and field trips make it possible for her to be a contributing partner with Alonzo instead of being totally in the dark about everything. She even gets her hands dirty from time to time helping Alonzo with the fencing, and building things such as the chicken house and dog pen.  What lies ahead for Alonzo and Peggy? Future plans include getting ponds cleared out and repaired, wiring in another 52 acres of land, and putting in some cross fencing. Also on the list are plans to clear off some timber to create another 20 acres of grazing land. Purchasing hay processing equipment is another priority as well as constructing barns, stores house for feed and hay, and holding ramps for cattle. Alonzo says that the Winston County Self Help Cooperative program brings about the same concept that his ancestors had. He is surprised that more people are not participating in the program. With the economy the way it is, this program creates opportunities that can help you take care of your family and also educate your children about the kind of Agriculture which may inspire them to become Producers.  Mr. George never expected his 2 eldest sons to return to a life of farming in Winston County, but he is certainly glad they did. As he gets older, he considers it a blessing to have them around to help. However, from time to time he has to show them that he can still carry his own weight. Five members and I associate member from the same family are reaping the benefits offered by a great program. Obviously, the Millers have made Winston County Self Help Cooperative a “Family Affair.” Hopefully their story will inspire others to do the same.