All Land Is Not Creating Equal: Unleashing Family And Community Wealth Through Landownership

Virtual Event
Wednesday, November 18, 2020
1:00 pm to 7:00 pm Eastern Time
Objectives

*What is heirs’ property?*
Learn about the role of land in wealth inequality, about heirs’ property and fractionated land, and its impact on underserved vulnerable landowners throughout the country – especially women, indigenous people, Black Americans and the poor.

**Building Understanding**
Deepen participant understanding of heirs’ property, and the equity issues of involuntary land loss through contested claims, unaffordable high transaction costs, forced sales to speculators, and outright fraud.

**Families at the Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation:**
Explore how the Center’s legal and forestry education and services have assisted landowners and families in stabilizing ownership and building productive land for generational wealth.

**Taking Action**
Learn about new strategies and policies that are addressing heirs’ property and about organizations and groups who are helping to build stronger rural regions and urban communities that are more inclusive and resilient.

**Putting it Together:**
Gain ideas for how to craft effective partnerships among private, government and philanthropic sectors by focusing on natural resources to build family and community wealth and ecological restoration in marginalized communities.

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**Event Description**

When it comes to the roots of wealth inequality in the United States, what is “the worst problem you never heard of?” For many, that answer is a confounding phenomenon called *heirs’ property* or *fractionated land.*

Heirs’ property is land that has been passed down through generations without a will – creating shared ownership among many descendants. Over time, unless title to the land is cleared and land rights secured, the opportunity for those owners to use their land for economic benefit is limited. As a result, underserved vulnerable landowners throughout the country – especially, women, indigenous people, Black Americans and the poor – have involuntarily lost their family property through contested claims, unaffordable high transaction costs, forced sales to speculators, and outright fraud. Black families alone, researchers estimate, have lost hundreds of billions of dollars in such land value over the last century. And the U.S. Department of Agriculture considers Heirs’ Property the “leading cause of Black involuntary land loss.”

Fifteen years ago, most considered this complex problem intractable. In contrast, the Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation saw opportunity. The Center’s process has since helped families clear more than 275 titles, and its partnerships have fostered a landowner movement that is unleashing cultural and natural resources to build family and community wealth and ecological restoration in marginalized communities. Efforts alongside the Center – work in Native nations, among investors and researchers, and in state legislatures – are now likewise growing to secure family land ownership rights, stimulate economic growth and increase regional resilience.

In celebration of the Center’s 15th anniversary – and the 35th anniversary of the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group, which helped spark the Center’s start-up – we invite you to learn about the role of land in wealth inequality, about heirs’ property and fractionated land, and about strategies and policies that can address this issue to build rural regions and urban communities that are more inclusive and resilient. Join us for any or all these insightful-and-action-provoking sessions!
### All Land is not Creating Equal: Unleashing Family and Community Wealth through Landownership

### Plenary Session link: [https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/99592884047](https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/99592884047)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Plenary Session Segment</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 1:00 PM EST</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Our Session Moderator, Melvin Oliver, will launch the discussion on how the Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation (Center) has helped families clear more than 275 titles, and its partnerships have fostered a landowner movement that is unleashing cultural and natural resources to build family and community wealth and ecological restoration in marginalized communities.</td>
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<td>#2 1:15 PM</td>
<td>William Mackey Shares His Story</td>
<td>Watch as Center client William Mackey, who is legally blind, and his brother, Gerald, share their story on how the legal work of resolving heirs’ property is key to stabilizing ownership and allowing them to claim all the tax exemptions and benefits for William’s disability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#3 1:20 PM</td>
<td>The Power, Problems, and Promise of Land Ownership</td>
<td>Part 1: Learn the history and context of heirs’ property and the current status of black land loss and home ownership. Part 2: Understand the breadth of the heirs’ property issue, the systematic obstacles and the scope of urban-rural, race, and regional circumstances.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#4 2:00 PM</td>
<td>Landowner Story of Impact</td>
<td>See how the Center is providing technical assistance to landowners through the eyes of Ronald Richards. Hear the story of how his family’s land has been transformed into a productive and managed sustainable forest.</td>
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<td>#5 2:05 PM</td>
<td>15 Years at the Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation: Vision and Impact</td>
<td>Hear about the origin, growth, and data-driven impact of the Center to racial justice, rural development, and conservation. Find out about the connection of the Center to Community Strategies Group (CSG) and the importance of doing rural economic development differently.</td>
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<th>#6</th>
<th>2:30 PM</th>
<th>Landowner Story of Impact</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Inez Miller</td>
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<td>Experience Inez Miller’s passion about the Center’s Woodlands Community Advocate program. Learn how this grassroots landowner is preventing the sale of heirs’ property at tax sales and rallying other family and community members to sustainably manage their forested land.</td>
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<th>#7</th>
<th>2:35 PM</th>
<th>We’re All in This Together: Partnering to Create Sustainable Wealth Creation</th>
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<td></td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
<td>Melvin Oliver, Facilitating</td>
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<td>Ann English, SC Natural Resources Conservation State Conservationist</td>
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<td>Kellie Terry, Senior Program Officer, Surdna Foundation</td>
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<td>Jim Porter, President, Business Development and Latin America, WestRock</td>
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<td>Kristopher Pickler, Board Member, Land Trust Alliance, In-House Attorney, Legal Real Estate Team at Lowe’s Companies, Inc.</td>
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<td>See how potential and existing partnerships among private, government and philanthropic sectors focus on natural resources to build family and community wealth and ecological restoration in marginalized communities.</td>
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<th>#8</th>
<th>3:00 PM</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Melvin Oliver, Facilitating</td>
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<td>Janet Topolsky</td>
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<td>Jennie L. Stephens</td>
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<td>Dan Porterfield, President and CEO Aspen Institute</td>
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<td>Join in for summary comments, big-picture takeaways and practical solutions, as Janet, Jennie, Melvin and Aspen Institute president Dan Porterfield give thanks for a productive afternoon.</td>
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35-minute break before breakout sessions begin
### Breakout Session Title and Description

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Presenters</th>
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| 3:45 pm and 4:45 pm | **Legal and Policy Approaches to Resolving Heirs’ Property**                     | **Description:** The impact of direct legal services on resolving heirs’ property. Learn how the Uniform Partition Act, state policy focus, and national legislative possibilities may affect working families trying to resolve heirs’ property and fractionalized land issues. | Alan McGregor, Facilitator, Consultant to Social Justice Philanthropy  
Josh Walden, Chief Operating Officer & Lawyer, Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation  
Thomas Mitchell, Professor, Texas A & M Law School |
| 3:45 pm and 4:45 pm | **The Opportunity for the Conservation Sector: Engaging People of Color and Their Land** | **Description:** Black-owned family land presents an opportunity in the preservation of conservation areas and habitats. Emerging landowner networks and support organizations help build inclusive and equity-focused conservation initiatives. | Melanie Allen, Facilitator, Co-Director, Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice  
Ebonie Alexander, Executive Director, Black Family Land Trust and SFLR Network Co-Chair  
Tom Martin, President & CEO, American Forest Foundation  
Dale Threatt-Taylor, Executive Director, The Nature Conservancy, SC Chapter |
| 3:45 pm and 4:45 pm | **Building a Movement of Landowner Advocates**                                   | **Description:** Find out how this power of landowner organizing can be a grassroots effort to enact legislation and unleash the cultural and natural resources of lands in marginalized communities, creating intergenerational family wealth and ecological restoration. | Faith Rivers James, J.D., Facilitator, Professor, The Citadel  
Karama Neal, PhD, President, Southern Bancorp Community Partners & Founder, Heirs of Arkansas  
Bernie Mazyczk, President & CEO, SCACED, Center Board Member, SC Landowner, Woodlands Community Advocate |
| 3:45 pm and 4:45 pm | **Heirs’ Property Across Race and Place**                                       | **Description:** Learn the breadth and depth of the problem of Heirs’ Property, and see how it impacts wealth creation opportunities in urban, Appalachian and Native American communities. | Cassandra Johnson Gaither, Facilitator/Speaker, Research Social Scientist and Project Leader, US Forest Service, Southern Research Station  
Octavia Howell, Associate Manager, The Pew Charitable Trusts  
Betsey Taylor, Executive Director, Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network  
Toni Stanger-McLaughlin, Regional Director, Federal Liaison, Native American Agriculture Fund |
| 3:45 pm and 4:45 pm | **Forestry and Wealth Creation in the American Black Belt**                     | **Description:** The Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program (SFLR) has been a shining example of the success of private and public partnerships. See how the SFLR program is assisting landowners in restoring the ecological health and productivity of family forests and has been a catalytic strategy for wealth creation. | Mavis Gragg, Facilitator/Speaker, Director of SFLR Program, American Forest Foundation  
Alton Perry, Director, Roanoke Electric Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention, SFLR Network Co-Chair  
John Littles, Executive Director, McIntosh S.E.E.D.  
Henry English, PhD, Head of the Small Farm Program, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff |

Legal & Policy Link: [https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/95220786914](https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/95220786914)  
Conservation Sector Link: [https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/98151615599](https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/98151615599)  
Landowner Advocates Link: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86557268637?pwd=YmgzdElOa2dmcDAzaGFuNTdmNS1tdz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86557268637?pwd=YmgzdElOa2dmcDAzaGFuNTdmNS1tdz09)  
Heirs’ Property Link: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81906706553?pwd=eHFrOEtWN01pdnk2ckZqQnpPczNzuZz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81906706553?pwd=eHFrOEtWN01pdnk2ckZqQnpPczNzuZz09)  
Forestry & Wealth Creation Link: [https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/95057456998?pwd=MGC1eHJxYXZaamE0Jjc0elQuTIZEQ0T09](https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/95057456998?pwd=MGC1eHJxYXZaamE0Jjc0elQuTIZEQ0T09)
**SPECIAL EVENT**

6:00 PM

**Special Event: America’s Forests with Chuck Leavell**

**Description:** Experience the life-changing stories of three landowners aided by the Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation and their success found in the Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program in this episode of *America’s Forests with Chuck Leavell*. You’ll see the hard work and determination of these landowners as told by Chuck Leavell, a family forester and keyboardist for the Rolling Stones! Following this video, you will have the opportunity to ask questions and hear behind the scenes stories from Chuck, and others featured in the program.

**Presenters**

Janet Topolsky, Facilitator, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group

Chuck Leavell, Tree farm conservationist, Musician, Host: American Forests with Chuck Leavell

Jennie L. Stephens, CEO, Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation

Yvonne Knight-Carter, SC Landowner, Center Board Chair & Center Woodland Community Advocate

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Chuck Leavell working with the next generation of foresters on how to plant seedlings

Chuck Leavell with landowner Mary Hill

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For more information and to support the Center’s work, visit: [www.heirsproperty.org](http://www.heirsproperty.org)

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**Community Strategies Group**

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Orangeburg, SC 29115
803.987.4481

For more information, visit: [www.aspencsg.org](http://www.aspencsg.org)

Special Event link: https://aspeninst.zoom.us/j/97291101627