



Gary Grant (1943-Present)

Executive Director

Concerned Citizens of Tillery

“Do not be swallowed up by the institutions that continue to create policies and laws that allow destruction to continue to happen to citizens of this country.” Gary Grant, 2009.

Overview

Grant, the Executive Director of the internationally acclaimed Concerned Citizens of Tillery (CCT) for the past twenty-four years, is also founding president of the national Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association (BFAA - 1997), director of the National Land Loss Fund (LLF), and co-director of the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network (NCEJN). Mr. Grant was reared on a family farm in the New Deal Community of Tillery Farms, located in Halifax County, North Carolina. Holder of a BA degree from North Carolina College (now NC Central University, Durham, NC), Mr. Grant was a teacher in the Tillery community, Halifax County School System for 12 years and has also worked with the New York City Department of Human Services. Grant appeared on CBS' 60 Minutes (“Pork Power”) in 1996, has appeared several times on North Carolina Public Television Now, and has received coverage in numerous other media. He has authored and co-authored several papers on the destruction of the environment by corporate hog growing facilities and the decline of the Black farmers in America.

This interview was conducted in 2010.

Early Life and Education

Gary R. Grant was born on August 19th, 1943, the middle child to Mathew and Florenza Moore Grant. Grant describes his parents as, “farmers, visionaries, entrepreneurs, and freedom fighters. In that order.” Grant’s hometown was the largest influence for his career in the environmental justice field. Grant grew up in the historic community of Tillery in eastern North Carolina. Tillery is a New Deal Resettlement. Tillery’s population is 98 percent African-American. Further, Halifax County, where Tillery is located, is the poorest county in the state of North Carolina. Grant remembers reading the local newspaper in 1991 advertising for increased economic development efforts for Tillery. The advertisement brought about discussion about establishing an industrial-sized animal facility within the small farming community. Gary Grant, from the very beginning, knew that the decision would contaminate the residents’ private well-water source, and a plethora of other environmental health hazards. At an early age, Grant learned of the racial discriminations his parents were exposed to in Tillery and Halifax County NC. These stories,

along with the unsustainable development efforts being introduced to Tillery, were the impetus for him to begin and continue a career in the environmental justice field.

Career

Grant has been offering leadership in Tillery, NC for the past 29 years. In 1975-1977, Grant held his first job as an eighth grade language arts, geography, math and social sciences teacher. He is currently the Executive Director of Concerned Citizen of Tillery. The Concerned Citizens of Tillery (CCT), established in 1978, was built upon the prior work by other organizations striving for social justice for African Americans in Tillery, North Carolina. In 1981, CCT became the first grassroots organization in Tillery to gain a 501(c)(3) standing. CCT provides educational resources, voter registration drives, transportation, and healthcare. Workshops are also provided based on issues such as land ownership, debt control, and African American culture and heritage. Grant asserts his current goals as Executive Director of CCT are to ensure that Tillery, NC does not build any other industrial scale animal growing or slaughtering facilities within Halifax County, provide access to decision-making processes to the entire community of Tillery, and provide resources and jobs for the citizens of Tillery. In 1991, Grant helped establish a health clinic for the Tillery community to ensure access to healthcare to many of its uninsured citizens.

Highlights

A highlight of Grant's career was the day Halifax County became the first state in North Carolina to institute a moratorium on industrial hog operations. Halifax County was also the first county to adopt an ordinance establishing regulations on intensive livestock operations. After these landmark policies were instituted within the county, the state of North Carolina also established a state-wide moratorium on new and expanded hog factories. Conversely, Grant asserts that the lowest point of his career was, "The day I had to take two gallons of pig waste to NC governor, Mike Easley to get our message across. He did not come out of his office to receive it."

Gary Grant considers his most significant achievement to be his role in the Pigford vs. Glickman, a class action lawsuit against the United States Department of Agriculture alleging racial discrimination in the allocation of farm loans and assistance between 1981 and 1996. The landmark case resulted with the U.S. government agreeing to pay African American farmers \$50,000 each if they attempted to get USDA help but failed. Grant, working with the Black Farmers and Agriculturists Association, believes that the success of the case helped to prove, with documentation, the continuing racial discrimination by the U.S. government.

Importance of Mentoring to Career

Grant believes that a number of people have a lot to do with his success as a community leader and organizer. His mentors include his mother and father, Steve Wing, a professor at UNC-CH School of Public Health, Don Webb, a community environmental activist, A. Nan Freeland, an attorney that became an environmental activist, and Reverend Dr. Judson King, who held interracial summer work camps in the 1950s. These mentors provided Grant with leadership and organizing skills that helped his effectiveness in his fight against environmental injustices in Tillery, NC. Gary Grant has also mentored a number of

students from UNC-Chapel Hill, Brown University, University of Massachusetts, University of South Carolina, University of Portland, and Southern Illinois University whose commitment to EJ have impacted him.

Advice to Young Professionals

Although Grant credits education as an important factor for achieving one's goals, he also believes that everyone should challenge educational institutions. When asked to give advice to anyone seeking a career in the environmental field he states, "Go to school and get your education. Do not be swallowed up by the institutions that continue to create policies and laws that allow destruction to continue to happen to vulnerable citizens of this country. You have to maintain and hold onto your moral principles. We should challenge the institutions to change as well."