

**ISSUE 4: STORIES OF BLACK ECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP**

# **BIODIVERSITY ZINE**



**Featuring: Fannie Lou  
Hamer, Detroit Hives,  
Leah Penniman, Booker  
T. Whatley, and  
Charles Henry Turner**

**Illustrations by:  
Neil Singroy &  
Joy Ngenda**

**Design & text by:  
Zoe-Blue Coates**



# INTRODUCTION

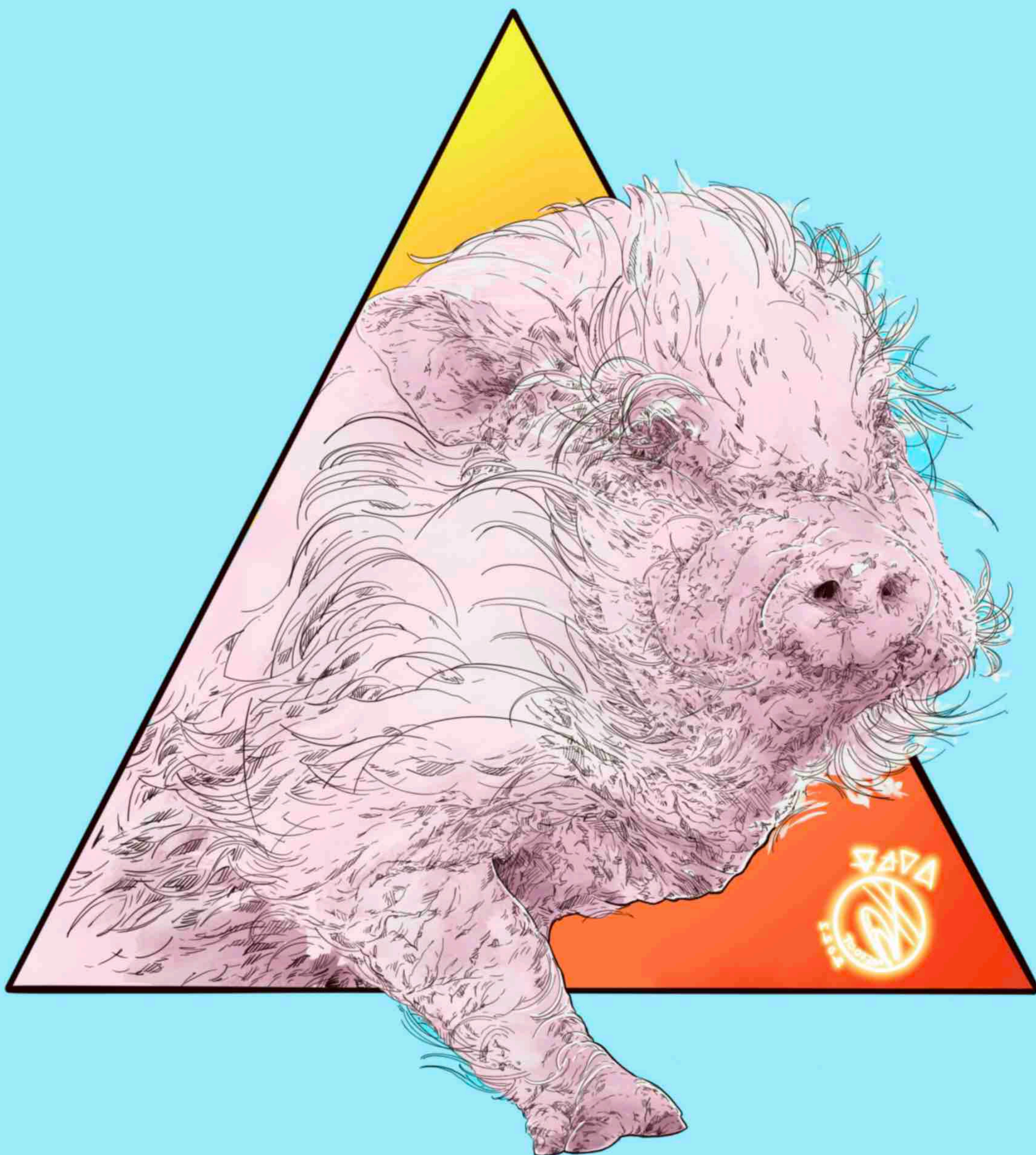
BioDiversity 4 is about Black ecological stewardship in the United States. Many don't believe that Black people on Turtle Island have connections to land due to our enslavement, the theft of our land, and our movement into urban areas.

In 'BioDiversity 3: Seed Savers, I wrote about how West African agricultural knowledge was the key to creating a strong economy in North America. Although Europeans owned the land and the people who worked it, Black folks were the brains behind the work being done. We were stolen from our homelands because we were the best farmers Europeans could think of. Our traditional farming practices are the foundation of agriculture in North America.

Upon emancipation from slavery in the 1860s, many Black families bought land to farm. By 1910, Black folks owned 41.4 million acres across the United States. This number has since declined, as of 2020 Black folks own just 4.7 million acres. There are many reasons for Black land loss.

I recommend looking up Leah Penniman and reading *Farming While Black*.

*Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land* to learn more. Our land loss has led to the removal of Black families from land and land based practices. Many of us have moved to urban areas and forgotten how to grow food for ourselves and our communities. This has led to increased health risks.



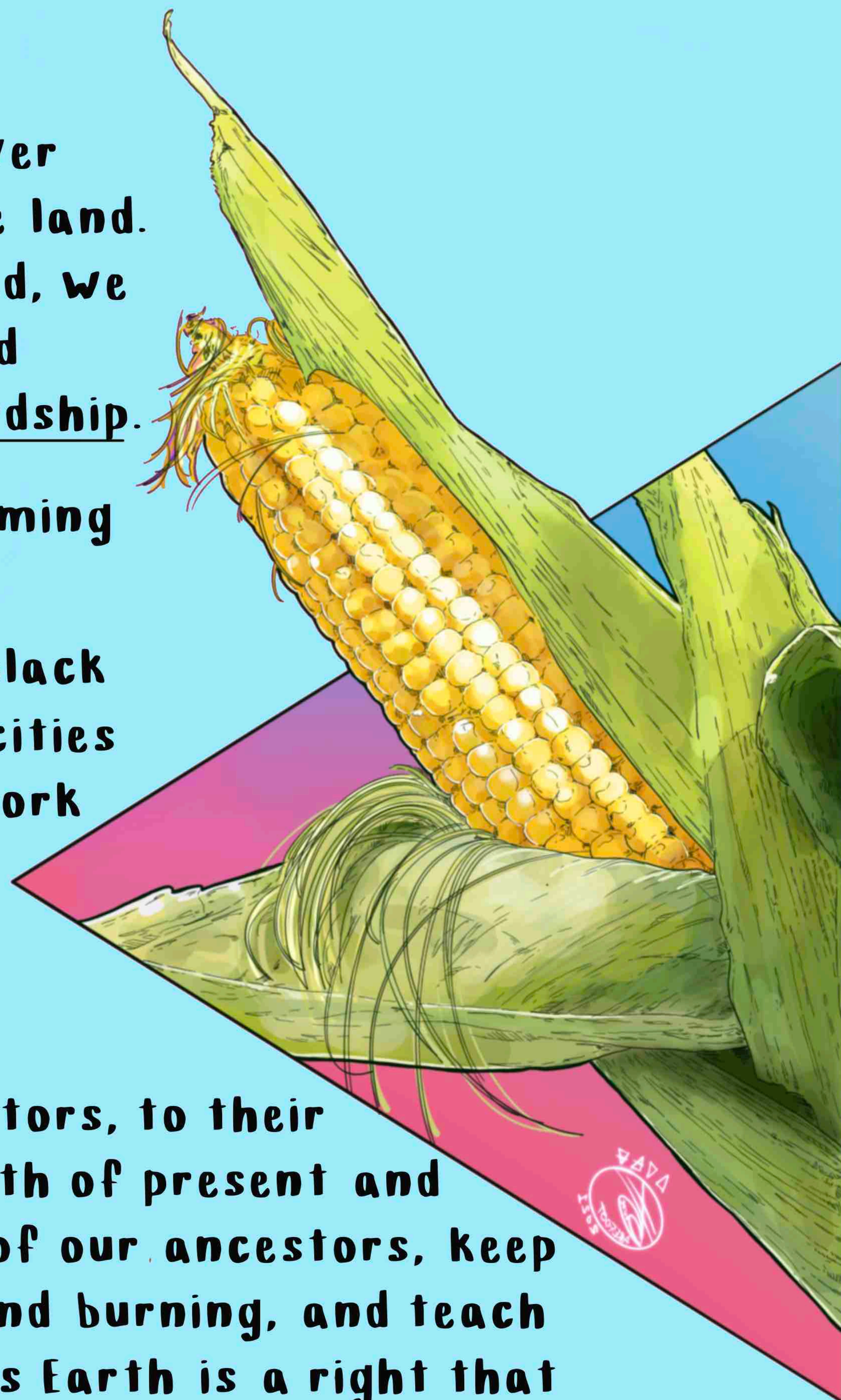


However, there are many who never forgot about our connection to the land. Despite everything we have endured, we have been creative and have found ways to practice ecological stewardship.

The subjects in this zine built farming collectives, created economic structures to support small-scale Black farmers, and carved out space in cities for ecological stewardship. Their work and legacies show us how land stewardship can be used to build strong and resilient communities.

This zine is dedicated to my ancestors, to their work on the land, and to Black youth of present and future. May you walk in the paths of our ancestors, keep the fire that is our love for the land burning, and teach our children that their love for this Earth is a right that we have had since time immemorial.

**Zoe-Blue Coates, Creator of the Biodiversity series**



This project was made possible through collaboration with the Compost Education Centre and with funding from the City of Victoria's Everyday Creativity Grant



# KEY TERMS

**Animal Behavior**

The study of how animals interact with other living beings and their environments.

**Apiary**

A place where beehives are kept.

**Carbon Sequestration**

The process of capturing carbon dioxide from the sky and storing it in the ground.

**Community Supported Agriculture**

A type of agriculture, where the consumers buy shares of a farmer's crops before the growing season and receive produce from that farm throughout the season.

**Ecological Stewardship**

The act of caring for all land with respect and reciprocity for other living beings.

**Food Desert**

An area that has limited access to affordable and nutritious food.

**Food System**

A complex web made up of every person and action that is needed to produce, consume, and dispose of food.

**No-till Agriculture**

An agricultural technique where crops are grown with little or no disruption of the soil. This prevents soil erosion and strengthens the soil's health.

**Share-cropping**

A farming system where a landowner lets you grow crops on their land for a share of the crops grown.

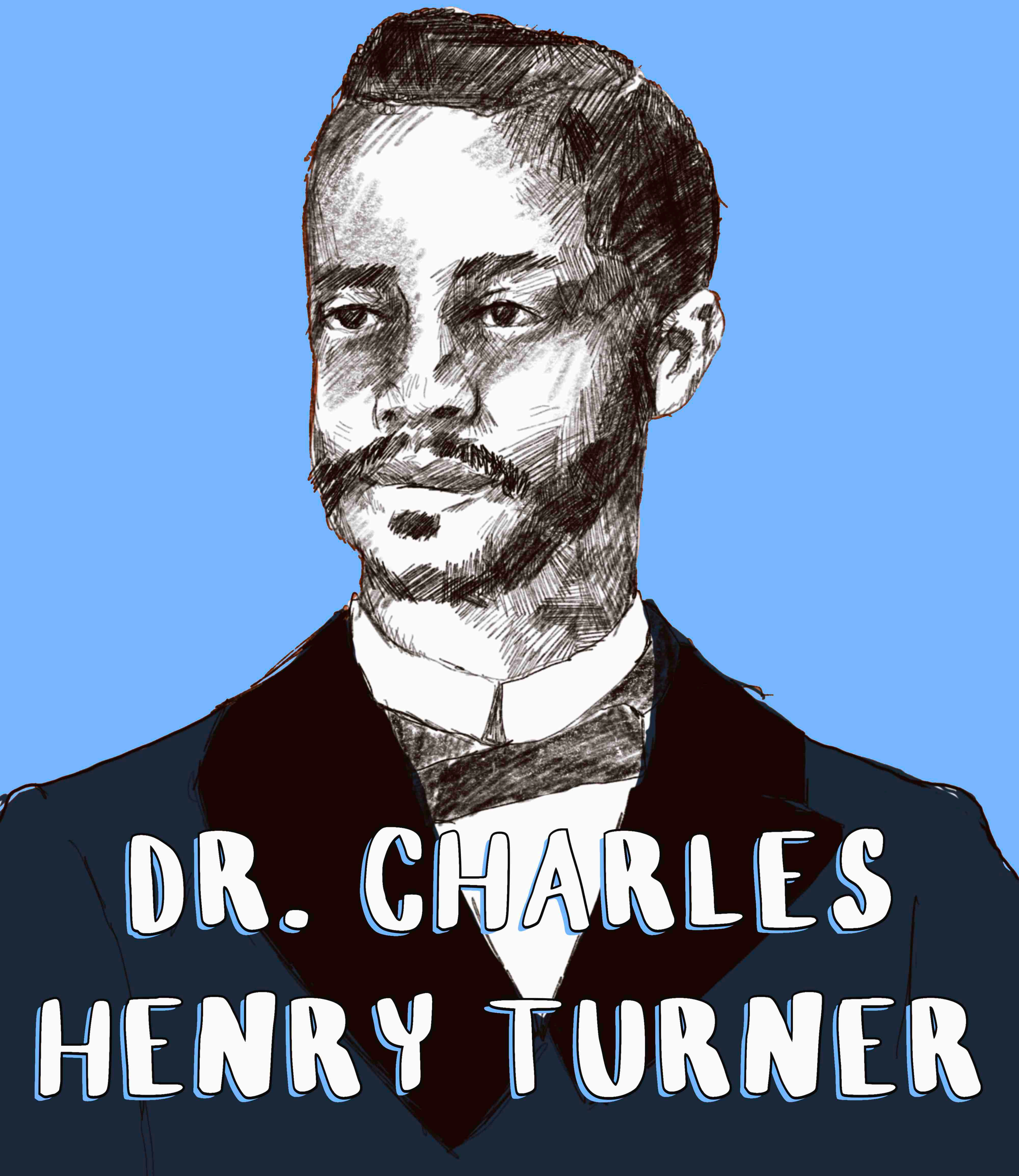
**Turtle Island**

A term for North America.



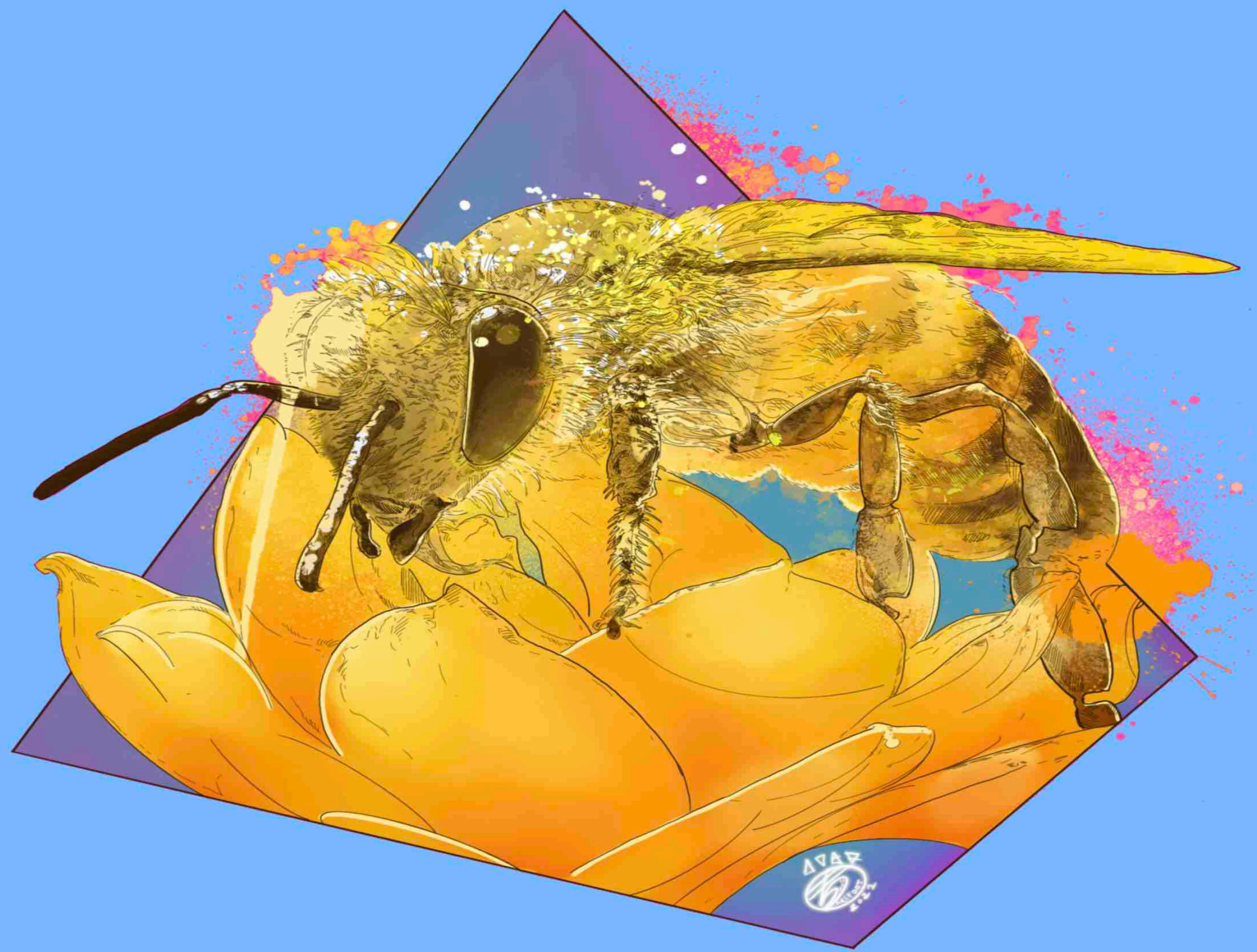
## Notes





DR. CHARLES  
HENRY TURNER





**Dr. Charles Henry Turner was born February 3rd, 1867, in Cincinnati, Ohio. He studied animal behaviour, how animals move in their environments and how they interact with one another.**

**He was the first Black man to graduate with a PhD from the University of Chicago and the first Black man elected to the St. Louis Academy of Science. Dr. Turner applied to many universities to conduct his research, but all of them rejected him. He eventually found a job teaching science at Sumner Highschool, an all-Black high school in St. Louis, Missouri.**

**In his free time, he studied the behaviors of wasps, honey bees, cockroaches, termites, birds, and ants. Dr. Turner's research uncovered honey bees' ability to perceive color. In his lifetime, he published over 70 papers on animal behavior. Rather than working in a laboratory with research assistants, he used O'Fallon Park, a greenspace in his neighborhood, as his field laboratory.**

**He was a civil rights advocate and believed that education was a key piece in achieving racial equality. He often brought his research to Sumner Highschool so his students could learn about animal behavior.**

**He had no funding, and little support, but Dr. Turner's work was groundbreaking and ahead of its time. His legacy teaches us that we can work with animals and plants and make groundbreaking discoveries, no matter the obstacles we may face.**



# FANNIE LOU HAMER



**"You can give a man  
some food and he'll eat  
it... then he'll only get  
hungry again. But give  
a man some ground of  
his own and a hoe, and  
he'll never go hungry  
again."**



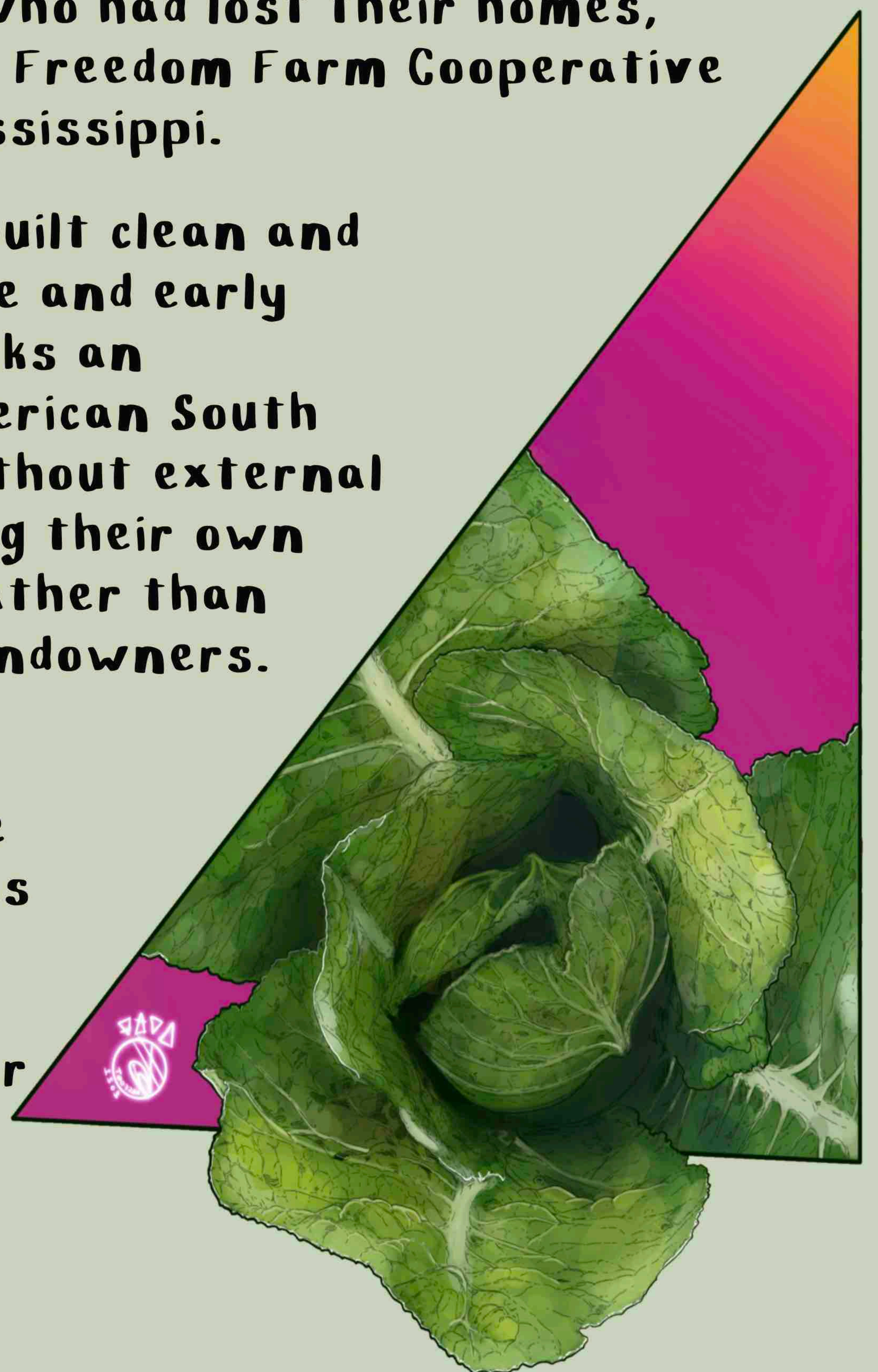
Fannie Lou Hamer was born 1917 in Ruleville, Mississippi. Her family lived and farmed cotton on land leased from a white landowner. Each year, the landowner would lend them food, seeds, and farming equipment. At the end of the season, the family would give him their harvest, but the value of their crops never outweighed their debt. This is a system of land leasing called sharecropping. Ms. Hamer began picking cotton at age 6 and eventually dropped out of school to work on the farm full time.

In 1962, Ms. Hamer registered to vote and was immediately kicked out of her home and off the land she leased. It was legal for a Black person to register to vote, but White Southerners feared racial equality and punished any Black person who dared to vote. Black farm owners who registered to vote had trouble getting loans to buy seed or pay their farm workers and many were forced to sell their land.

Alongside other poor Black farmers who had lost their homes, land, and jobs, Ms. Hamer created the Freedom Farm Cooperative (FFC) in 1969 in Sunflower County, Mississippi.

The FFC fed families fresh produce, built clean and affordable housing, offered healthcare and early education. They offered poor Black folks an alternative way to survive in the American South through taking care of themselves without external support. This means they were making their own money and growing their own food, rather than living year to year in debt to white landowners.

The FFC inspired many projects, including Soul Fire Farm, which I write about later in this zine. Ms. Hamer has taught us that to fight for Black liberation and an end to racism, we must build communities that and honor and uphold nutritious & fresh foods, shelter, and education as necessities for everyone.



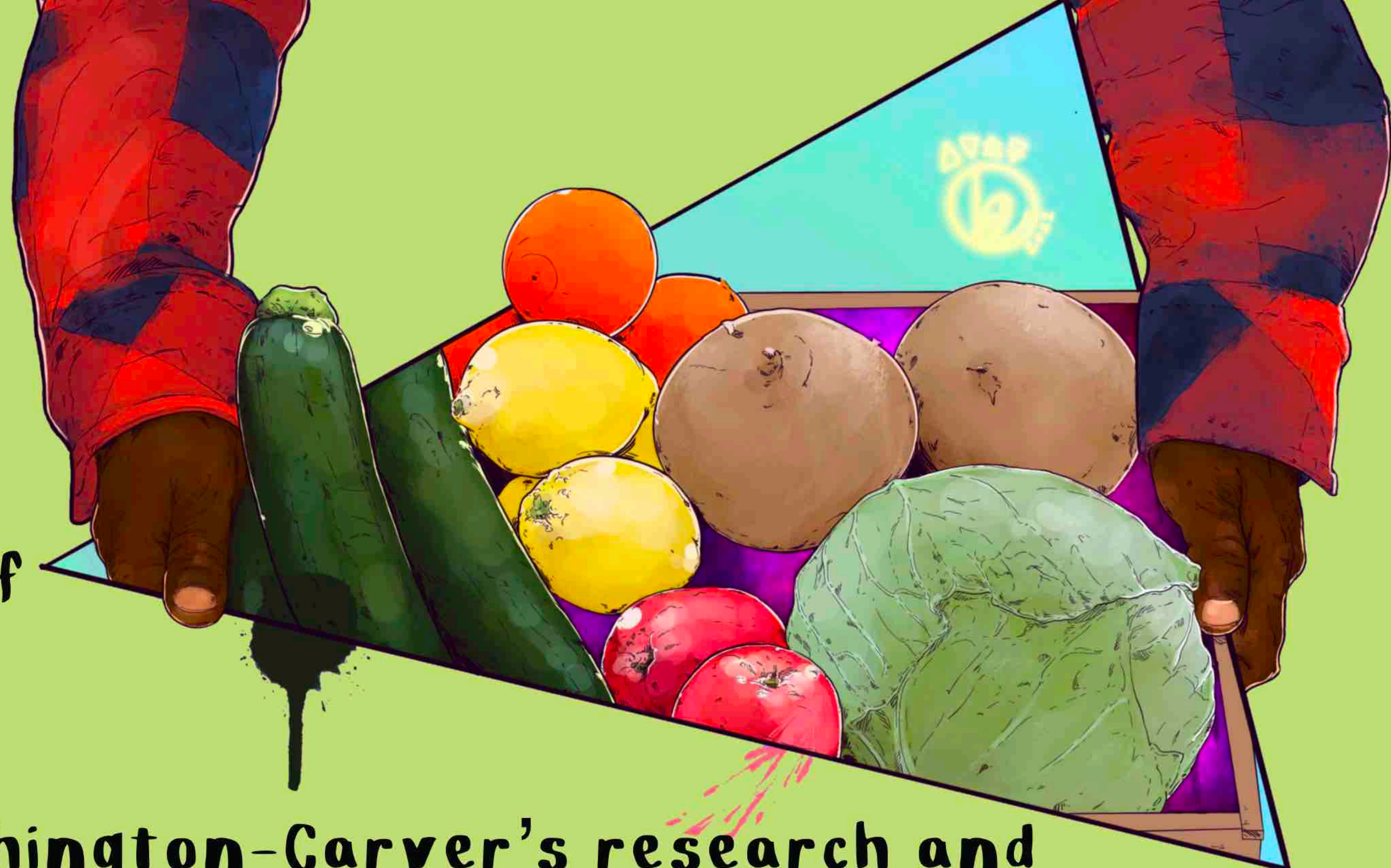


# BOOKER T. WHATLEY





**Booker T. Whatley graduated in 1957 with a PhD in horticulture from Rutgers University in New Jersey. He became a Professor of Agriculture at Tuskegee University.**



**There, he continued George Washington-Carver's research and goals of creating farming methods that would help small-scale Black farmers make money and not have to rely on white landowners (read 'BioDiversity #1: Faces of Ecological Stewardship' to learn more).**

**Over his lifetime, Dr. Whatley published 40 papers, developed 5 types of sweet potato, and 15 types of grapes. Dr. Whatley's greatest achievement was the creation of a Clientele Membership Club, now known as community supported agriculture(CSA). He invented this system to give small-scale Black farmers financial security. Farmers who used the Clientele Membership Club only grew what was requested from members. This allowed farmers to plan their growing season and know exactly how much money they would be making. Members of the Clientele Membership Club felt like they were a part of the farm, the produce they bought was cheaper than grocery stores and grown using organic methods.**

**Dr. Whatley's other invention was a 'You-Pick' program. Farmers would send out a newsletter with harvest dates that members could choose from and then come to the farm to harvest their own produce. 'You-Picks' were a great system because farmers didn't have to pay for pickers, and club members, who were mostly from the city, could experience the country for a day. It's hard to imagine a world without farms with produce boxes or pick-your-own pumpkin patches and we owe a big thanks to Booker T. Whatley for these innovations. Systems like the ones Dr. Whatley invented provides people with opportunities to build relationships with local farmers and food systems.**





LEAH

PENNIMAN



Leah Penniman is an educator who founded Soul Fire Farm in 2006. Soul Fire Farm is an Afro-Indigenous farm in Albany, New York. Penniman works with non-white folks to farm the land, offer agricultural training, and mend our food system.

Soul Fire Farm was inspired by Fannie Lou Hamer's Freedom Farm Cooperative and the Black Panther Breakfast Program in Oakland, California. Through the Black Panther Breakfast program, members of the community fed Black children every morning before school. Soul Fire Farm is following these legacies of providing fresh, nutritious foods for communities that have been living in food deserts and kept from land ownership through discriminatory policies.

Through their produce boxes, Soul Fire Farms grows food that is sold at a low price to residents in Upstate New York. Neighbors can buy extra produce boxes so that refugees and formerly incarcerated folks have access to free, fresh, and nutritious foods.

The farm uses Afro-Indigenous farming techniques like no-till agriculture that build healthy soils; healthy soils in turn grow delicious foods, fight climate change through carbon sequestration, build topsoil, and increase habitats for pollinators.

Leah and other members of Soul Fire Farm are working to heal our food systems through reconnecting Black communities to Afro-Indigenous practices of respect and reciprocity with the land. They do this through prayer, offerings, and ceremony. Each year they host a yam harvest festival, a rain festival, and make cornmeal offerings every Tuesday before harvesting crops. Soul Fire Farm is using lessons from history and teachings from our Afro-Indigenous ancestors to build up the community and soil in Upstate New York. Through their educational programs, Soul Fire Farm is teaching many non-white youth how to farm and steward the land and carry those teachings back to their communities across the United States and beyond.





# NICOLE LINDSEY & TIMOTHY PAULE





**Nicole Lindsey and Timothy Paule are a couple who were both born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. In 2016, Timothy got sick with an awful cough. The only remedy that worked was local, raw honey. This inspired him to learn about pollinators, and how they could help strengthen and keep his community healthy.**

**They later founded Detroit Hives, a project that works to create sustainable native and honeybee habitats in Detroit.**

**They encourage Detroiters to care for and protect pollinators in urban areas. The group has built collections of honey bee hives on vacant lots, in community gardens and school gardens. These collections of honey bee hives are called apiaries.**

**Detroit Hives hosts forty-seven beehives at seventeen locations, where they also plant native plant gardens to create ecological balance between introduced and native pollinators. Through their educational programs, Detroit Hives has taught twenty-five hundred youth about the power of caring for pollinators in their neighborhood.**

**Poorer neighborhoods in downtown Detroit are food deserts. Their residents don't have access to affordable, fresh, and nutritious foods. Residents in food deserts are more likely to have a diet full of processed foods that are high in sugar and lack nutrients. This challenge can lead to higher rates of diabetes, poor eyesight, learning disabilities, heart disease, and mental illness. Residents can fight this problem by growing their own produce, and this is where pollinators come in. Most of the food we eat wouldn't make it to our plates if not for pollinators like wasps, honey bees, and even houseflies. By increasing the number of pollinator habitats and educating the public on the importance of pollinators, Detroit Hives is enabling their community to invest in a healthier and more sustainable future.**





# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Joy Ngenda is a queer, mixed settler & West African transplant who lives on unceded x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Seíí'witulh (Tsleil-Waututh) lands. They are a multi-disciplinary artist and sometimes student. Their artistic practice is rooted in conceptualization of experiential emotion and individual moments both imagined and realized.

Find them on Instagram: @contr4ry, @joyngenda



Neil Aaron Singroy Bourne is an avid book reader, illustrator, film maker, and journalist living on unceded x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Seíí'witulh (Tsleil-Waututh) lands. He was born in South London to a family of Guyanese immigrants.

Find him on Instagram: @independentblackmedia





# ABOUT THE CREATOR

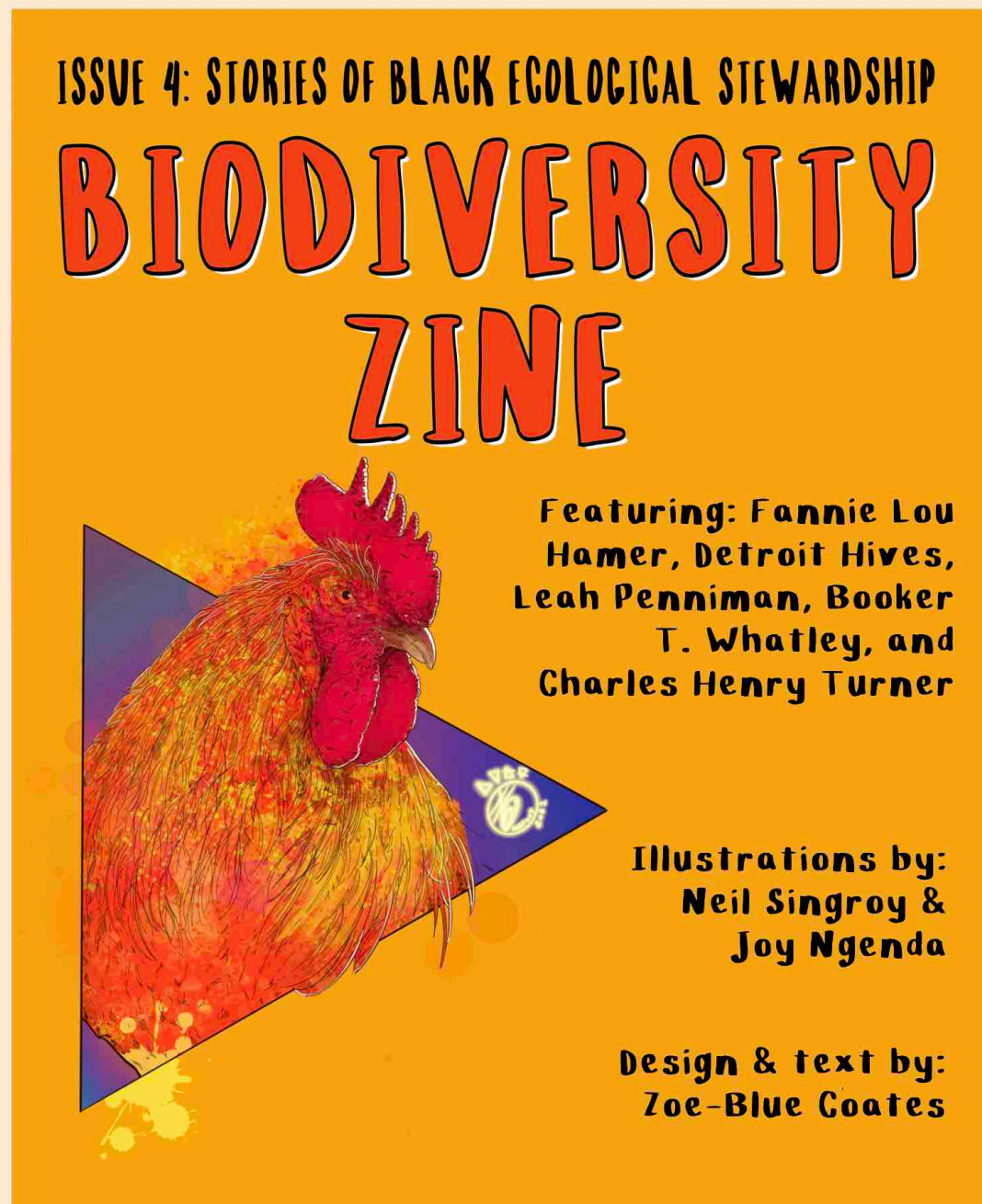
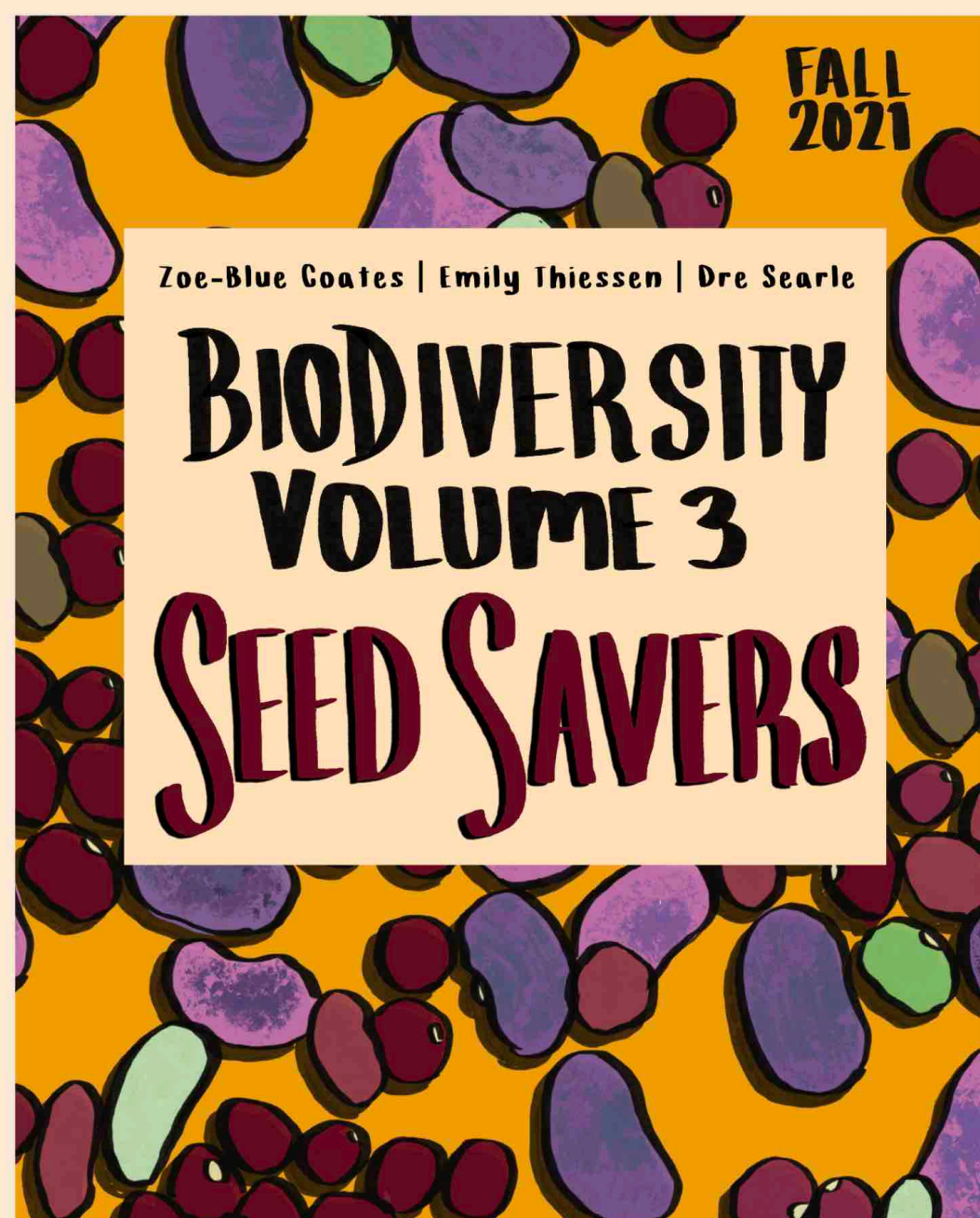
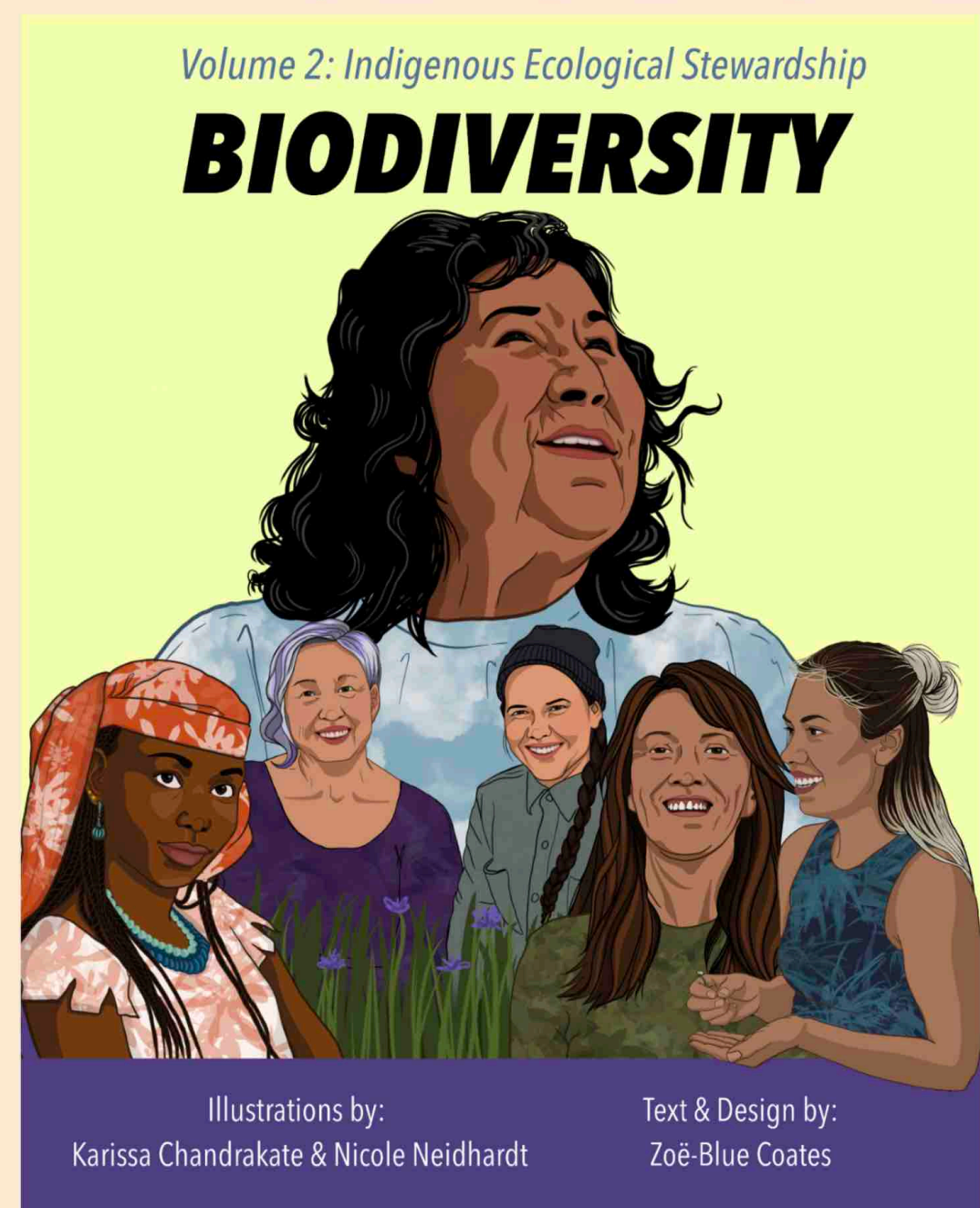
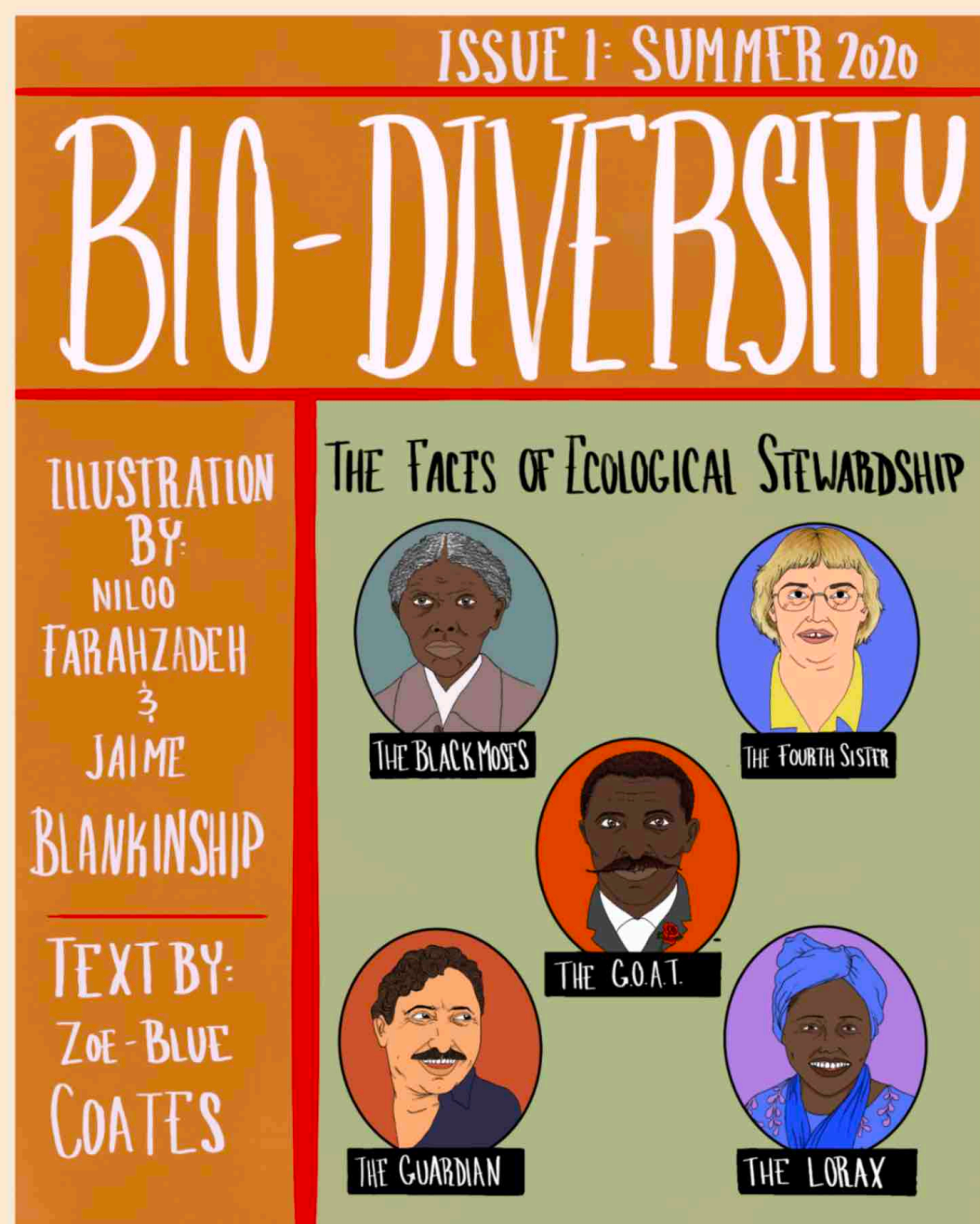
**Zoe-Blue Coates is a woman of Afro-Caribbean and African American ancestry. She studied Canadian History and Indigenous studies at the University of Victoria.**

**Zoe-Blue is passionate about how people learn about history and how they can take lessons from the past to build strong communities. She began the BioDiversity Zine series in the summer of 2020 with the hope of uplifting undertold stories of ecological stewardship. She hopes BIPOC youth will learn these stories and carry them as badges of honour of everything their ancestors achieved. In her free time, Zoe-Blue loves to ride her bike, go bird watching, and cook food for her loved ones.**

**Feedback, comments, or questions?  
Email Zoe-Blue at [office@compost.bc.ca](mailto:office@compost.bc.ca)**



# BIODIVERSITY ZINE SERIES



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