



**Meredith Coleman McGee** is the author of *James Meredith: Warrior and the America that Created Him*, a biography of her uncle, Civil Rights icon, James H. Meredith. She is also the co-author of *Married to Sin*, a memoir about one rural family's secrets, redemption, and personal achievement, and the author of *Odyssey*, a collection of her poems and other writings. McGee was born in Los Angeles, California, and raised in Jackson, Mississippi. She has worked on the staff of the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, a nonprofit organization that serves farmers, their families and communities and Southern Echo. A professional writer for Typing Solutions Résumés & Etc., McGee also serves as the acquisition editor of Meredith Etc. She founded Heirs United Investment Club, co-founded Mose Dantzler, holds membership in the Clinton Ink Slings and

Women for Progress. McGee, a fellow with the Rural Development Leadership Network since 1998, earned her master's degree from Antioch University Midwest through an innovative program with RDLN.



**Shirley Sherrod** was born in Baker County, Georgia during Jim Crow times. Her plan to leave the South following graduation from high school changed when, during her senior year, her father was killed by a white man who was never brought to justice. Shirley vowed then to stay in the South and work for change. Soon after, she met future husband, Charles Sherrod, the first field secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

With other community people, the Sherrods co-founded a communal farm project called, New Communities, Inc. which included the largest contiguous tract of black-owned land in the country. Governor Lester Maddox blocked federal funds from coming into the state, and eventually the land was lost. New Communities recently received a substantial award through the Minority Farmers lawsuit, enabling the group to buy a former

plantation as a center for racial healing and the preservation and advancement of African-American agriculture in the area.

Ms. Sherrod graduated from Albany State University and earned a master's degree from Antioch University through the Rural Development Leadership Network. She is a member of the Board of Directors of RDLN. As an RDLN Leader, she was sponsored by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, and her RDLN Field Project was her early work to establish a resource center for small farmers in Southwest Georgia. She continued to work for the Federation, and she also became Georgia Lead for the Southern Rural Black Women's Southern Initiative (SRBWI).

In July 2009, Ms. Sherrod was appointed Georgia Director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She was forced to resign a year later when a distorted video tape was circulated accusing her of discriminating against a white farm family. It was soon revealed that she had actually worked diligently to save the white family's farm. Her exemplary history was widely recognized. In fact, she has been in demand as a speaker and advisor ever since. Her story is detailed in her book *The Courage to Hope: How I Stood Up to the Politics of Fear*.

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