



Amonté Martin, Florida A & M University- c/o 2014, Agriculture



Name : Amonté Martin

Your HBCU : Florida A & M University

Graduation Year : 2014

Major : Agriculture

1. Where are you from? Who introduced you to HBCUs?*

I was born and raised in Tallahassee, Florida. My entire family, at one point, went to FAMU. My dad played football, my granddad was in the band and was a principal at FAMU High, and my mom was on the basketball team.



2. Why did you choose an HBCU over a pwi?*

I didn't have a choice! I was born into a family of Rattlers, so I was born to be a Rattler.

3. What is the story of your "experience" at Your HBCU given its heralded status as a stellar and prestigious institution?*

I have two experiences that stick out to me. 1) During my final summer as an undergraduate agribusiness student, I was granted the opportunity to study agrarian land reform policy abroad in Cape Town, South Africa for two weeks. During the first week of the immersion in South Africa, I met with officials from the Western Cape Ministry of Agriculture, policymakers from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, professors from the University of Fort Hare and the University of Stellenbosch, and farmers who had been positively or negatively affected by the policies that we were there to study. Our main objective for the first week was to essentially assess the effectiveness of South Africa's land reform policies and programs geared toward reducing poverty, promoting sustainable agriculture, natural resource management and food security. The aim of the second week was to partner with Saron Primary school to engage in participatory learning, community engagement activities, and an experiential learning project through teaching. The overarching goal for our interaction with the students at Saron Primary school was to try to spark an interest in agriculture and entrepreneurship because they would eventually become the future beneficiaries of the policies that we were there to study. I had the privilege of learning firsthand in South Africa how the power of agricultural education is more than just remembering and regurgitating information. It is a tool that individuals use to emancipate themselves from the threshold of ignorance, and it also helps communities emerge from the shadows of poverty. My trip abroad ignited my passion for garden-based learning and food justice. It also showed me how the implementation and manifestation of policies can impact schools and communities. Once I returned to the United States, I was certain that a career involving school gardens and garden-based learning focusing on issues related to food access,

justice, and policy would be perfect for me, so I applied to graduate school. Thanks to FAMU and my College - the College of Agriculture and Food Sciences for that experience abroad, it is the reason why I am pursuing a PhD today in food access and justice. 2) Due to various reasons, I wasn't able to walk across the stage and graduate from high school, instead I obtained a GED. During that time in my life, obtaining a GED was equivalent to obtaining self-doubt, failure, and purposelessness. Looking back, aside from marrying my queen - the woman of my dreams and witnessing my son's birth, the day I graduated from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University was one of the best days of my life. That day, not only did I walk across the stage to receive my diploma, I also walked across the stage of faith, triumph, perseverance, and of purpose for myself and for anyone that ever contemplated giving up. By no means was it easy, but it was definitely worth it. My message has and will always be that no matter what obstacles are in someone's way, no matter how hard or tough something may seem, remember to keep God first, keep the faith, and continue to relentlessly pursue your dreams until you walk across your "stage" and achieve the unimaginable. I am forever grateful to FAMU for giving me the opportunity to further my education and for setting the foundation to my academic career.

4. "First time" experiences at your HBCU?*

Because I grew up in Tallahassee, my first time experiences were when I was in elementary and middle school and I remember attending all of the homecoming events, graduation ceremonies, and black history convocations. Most of all, I remember witnessing black love, not the romanticized love, but one of admiration students had for their school, for their classmates, and unapologetically of themselves.

5. Who are the professors that have impacted your life in and out of the classroom? How did they do that?*

Professor Darius Young. He was my Intro to African American History teachers. He introduced me to this story: Betty Jean Owens is an African American woman who was brutally raped by four white men in Tallahassee, Florida in 1959. Her trial was significant in Florida, and the South as a whole, because the white men were given life sentences for their crimes. This severe of a sentencing had not occurred for white men in the South accused of raping black women previous to Owens' case. The first time I heard the story of Betty Jean Owens it changed my life and it really hit home. I heard her story for the first time my freshmen year during my African-America History class. My professor was giving a lecture on the civil rights movement, and how we weren't far-removed from that era. He said most of the people who fought for our rights are still living amongst us. He began to tell the story of Betty Jean Owens. After telling her story, my professor told us about how recently during a commencement ceremony, the President of Florida A&M called Betty Owens out of the audience to render homage. Being from Tallahassee this story was interesting to me because I had never heard of Betty Jean Owens. At the time, I was living with my grandparents, so when I got home I asked my grandmother (who's also from Tallahassee) if she had ever heard the story of Betty Jean Owens. Before I could tell her what I learned that day in class she began to cry. I asked, "Grandma, what's wrong?" She said, "I am Betty Jean Owens." That day changed my life and gave my life purpose in knowing what she went through. I truly felt

that I was standing on the shoulders of a giant at FAMU, and the legacy that I would leave would not be just for me, but for my family who came before me, and to those who would come after.



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