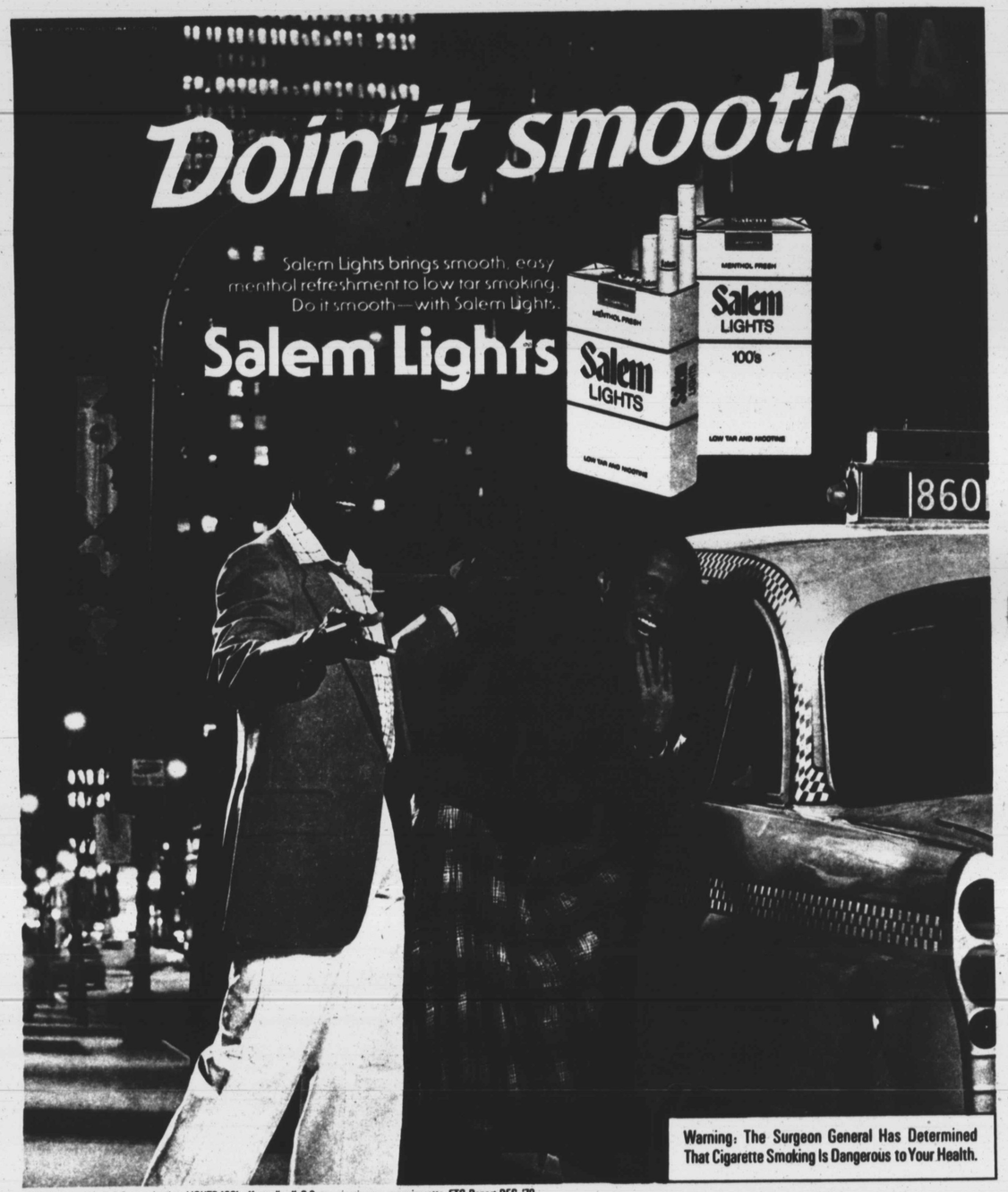

LIGHTS: 11 mg. "tar", 0.8 mg. nicotine, LIGHTS 100's: 11 mg. "tar", 0.9 mg. nicotine, av. per cigarette, FTC Report DEC. '79.

40 Acres and a Mule:

Rape of Black-Owned Land

Following the Civil War, blacks owned sizeable amounts of rural land in Southeastern states. As blacks migrated north, land ownership diminished at an alarming rate, helped in many instances by a systematic takeover by white and large corporations. Here's how it was done.

By Howard G. Bell and Leon W. Bonner

The black man and woman were important to our early, southern, rural farmlands. As long as human sweat was needed to build the farmlands in the southeastern United States, the black man and woman were important tools for this task.

It was after the Civil War and between 1867 to 1910 that blacks were awarded land by the Federal government. Blacks tilled the land as owners of small farms — as well as working sharecroppers and tenants.

During this period, there were approximately 175,000 black landowners controlling 15 million acres of southern rural land. By 1980, there are approximately 32,000 black landowners controlling about 4 million acres.

Blacks lost over 11 million acres of land since 1910. It can also be indicated that with the loss of land each year, blacks have less accumulated wealth to pass on to the succeeding generation.

Twenty - six percent of Alabama's total population is black; but, only 4 % of all available farmland ownership is held by blacks. However, in Mississippi, 36 % of that state's total population is black with 8.6% of all available farmland owned by blacks. Similar comparisons can be made for Louisiana, Georgia, Virginia, North and South Carolina.

During the industrial growth of the north, blacks left their land and moved to the larger, industrial cities of the north. Between 1910 to 1980, 5.3 million migrated from seven Southeastern states.

These black immigrants moved to the larger, industrial cities of the northern, northeastern and western parts of this country. Eleven major cities received 81 % of these immigrants. Many who migrated "North" became unskilled workers living in hostile and unfamiliar environments.

Since 1954, the value of land in the South has risen rapidly. For instance, rural land could be purchased in South Alabama for approximately $75 an acre.

By 1980, the average cost for the same type of land has reached a market value from $950 to $1,400 an acre. Even so, Southern farmland has increased more in value since 1975.

Farmland in Georgia that cost $1,000 an acre in 1975 is worth $1,910 an acre in 1980. Similar camparisions can be made for escalating land values in the six other states.

When land ownership became recognized as a source of power, influence and financial security, black - owned land became a desirable and covetous commodity. It was at this time that black - owned land began to be systematically and ruthlessly taken out of black hands.

Many black men and women in the south are not in position to enjoy this new found prosperity. Many blacks living in the south are financially unable to acquire added land lost by their forebearers a generation or two ago. Blacks, especially in the "North", no longer have their family farmlands and homesteads in which to return.

One major reason why black land ownership is vanishing is that blacks have failed to understand the legal implications required for securing their land.

One of many causes for this is many landowners fail to make out wills. The implication here is on the death of the original landowner, no heir is named to take title and legal ownership and the property is divided among dozens of descendants — or heirs of the original owner.

A problem with this type of land inheritance described above is when a group of heirs have some shares of interest, the property cannot be divided, built upon, mortgaged, developed, or assigned to others.

In 1974, approximately one third of the black - owned land in the southeastern United States was defined as "heir" property.

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There are several ways heir property can be lost to black ownership. One is through voluntary sale. This is a constitutional right of all property owners. So it is with heir property.

If all the heirs are known and all heirs agree to a common price for sale, then the property can be conveyed through a voluntary sale.

As with many landowners, some heirs often find it necessary to sell off all or bits and pieces of their land in order to raise capital, pay bills, educate their children, or to live more comfortably during retirement years. The heirs of the property would decide the sales price and the terms of the sale.

However, for those few heirs who did realize the fair market value of the land and established a reasonable sales price and subsequently controlled the terms of the sale, these heirs were the beneficiaries of good counsel and advice.

But the vast majority of heirs of the property would decide the sales price and the terms of the sale.

However, for those few heirs who did realize the fair market value of the land and established a reasonable sales price and subsequently controlled the terms of the sale, these heirs were the beneficiaries of good counsel and advice.

But the vast majority of heirs sold through ignorance of the land's value. These heirs were often unable to negotiate free of intimidation and economic pressures.

Many received little or no funds from the cash they received from the sale of property for the proceeds were often paid by white buyers to lawyers and local merchants to resolve inflated commissions and non - existent debts.

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Another form of systematic land takeover is the tax sale. A tax sale is scheduled when the landowner fails to pay his property taxes on the date due. This tax sale is a legal action enforced by county officials.

As an example of conditions leading to a tax sale, we will look at Bob and Ada Robinson's case. Bob and Ada were notified that their 125 - acre farm recently was sold at public auction for nonpayment of county land taxes. The sale took place in a rural Mississippi county on a day in April.

On that day, there were 19 bidders who showed up at the county courthouse to bid on 3,000

(Continued on Page 16)