

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA  
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Whitewashing African American History in Oklahoma City's Deep  
Deuce District: Exploring Historical Preservation as a Problematic  
Tool for Tourism and Gentrification

A THESIS

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By

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# Project Format

This digital thesis project was completed and intended to be viewed as a website and can be viewed at [www.theOKspace.com](http://www.theOKspace.com). The following chapters provide documentation of the preliminary research, scholarship, interview transcripts and graphics from the website.

Scan the QR Code to view  
[TheOKspace.com](http://TheOKspace.com)



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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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TITLE: Whitewashing African American History in Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce District: Exploring Historical Preservation as a Problematic Tool for Tourism and Gentrification

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Historic preservation of African American neighborhoods in Oklahoma City values restoration of buildings and objects but fails to authentically preserve or respect the original culture by actively excluding the Black community from Deep Deuce. Oklahoma City's rhetoric surrounding Deep Deuce refers to urban change as "revitalization," yet it continues to repeat history by neglecting the Black community of Oklahoma City. Theory from rhetoricians, Kenneth Burke and Michel Foucault, are used to create a rhetorical lens that centers power, influence, and discourse. For gentrification scholarship, several scholarly articles are used for the survey of scholarship. The books, *Color of Law* and *Root Shock*, are heavily referenced in the project and interviews completed with community members of Oklahoma City are used as primary sources. Oklahoma City states they have historically preserved Deep Deuce, a traditionally African American neighborhood; the rhetoric of their preservation methods, however, reveal that the city has weaponized the land in the past and present to dismantle the local Black community and whitewashes their history to attract tourists and residents to the gentrified neighborhood. These findings are significant in challenging the fact that the city officials state that they are historically preserving an area and challenging their profit-driven motives. It shows the disconnect between preserving the physical environment and preserving the community itself. By cutting off the Black community from the preservation process, failing to include them in the new community, and failing to take responsibility for large contributions to the past destruction of the original community, the city is not authentically and respectfully preserving the space. Suggestions for future research includes

further exploring this topic through the lens of Rhetoric of Choice which challenges how those with power and influence, such as the local, state, and federal government shed responsibility for their racist actions, policies, and laws by using rhetoric that states that these things are the cause of individual citizens making choices that do not involve the government or those in power.

*Whitewashing African American History in  
Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce District:  
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Survey of Scholarship

As gentrification has moved into its third wave since the 1990s, scholars have attempted to define it within various scopes, though it still remains subjective in nature. Scholarship around gentrification extends far in different directions, with much of it focused on large cities like New York and Los Angeles, yet, it is far reaching across all of the United States, including the Midwest and Southern states. Steve Holland provides a basic foundation for defining gentrification when stating it is a “process of demographic shifts...not categorically good or bad” (1). Though this may be true to an extent, examining the discourse of how gentrified areas are created, maintained, and advertised for tourism and real estate purposes, shows patterns of racialized exploitation around the United States. Some existing scholarship connects race to gentrification discourse and areas that have been categorized as historic for the purposes of furthering gentrification. Overall, though, gentrification research regarding racialized rhetoric and gentrification in smaller cities is sparse.

In understanding the problematic and racialized motives behind gentrification in American cities, it is important to first recognize its definition as subjective and the challenges that arise from differing opinions on the topic. The main characteristics attributed to gentrification include migration, wealth and class, social change, and social justice. In, *Gentrification: Causes and Consequences*, Steve Holland describes it as, “difficult to define, to identify and measure its effects, and to reach a judgement about whether it is good or bad...because gentrification is not categorically good or bad” (1). While some solely see it as displacement caused by wealthier community members, Holland prefers to view it as a process of demographic shifts, avoiding “assumptions about the nature of its effects” (5). Looking at gentrification involves examining its effects as well as its root causes, which are generally seen as supply-side factors, demand-side factors, and the decision making of urban policymakers. Holland’s explanation of supply-side and demand-side factors expresses how housing prices, property values, and workplace proximity affect people’s desire to leave or move back to the city, but fails to express the direct effect of historically racialized housing policies, white flight, urban renewal practices, and segregation on location decision-making. Instead, Holland argues, “race is clearly an element of gentrification, but, at this point, is still

poorly understood.” This research will use race as the focal point when examining historic preservation and gentrification in Oklahoma City’s Deep Deuce district due to its foundation in segregation. While Holland sees race as one poorly understood factor of gentrification, this work will show it to be one of the largest components in the language used and decisions made regarding the district.

In chapter three of, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, Neil Smith tackles the complexity of the space around us as it is understood in the context of nature, science, society, and geography. Human understanding of space has evolved through time, and Smith states that the type of society one lives in directly affects how space is viewed. Though Smith writes that space should be viewed as more than a means of production, “Production of Space” is a way of thinking that unifies the relationship between space and human practice at the conceptual level, rather than seeing them as two separate entities that interact with each other. Smith writes, “production of space also implies the production of the meaning, concepts, and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production...Space is no longer an ‘accident of matter’ but a direct result of material production” (14). Smith discusses the large role capitalism plays in creating space, and states that it can no longer be thought of as a container, but,

rather, it is created through the actions of humans. Though Smith notes that Karl Marx didn't directly discuss space, he believes it can fit easily into Marxist theory. Smith writes that capitalism has created, "a remarkable historical creation of absolute space. As capital extends its sway, the entire globe is partitioned into legally distinct parcels, divided by great white fences, real or imaginary" (25). Though space is less absolute and restricted than modern Western society believes, capitalism changes how space is viewed and understood. Regarding areas of space with historic designation status, this argument reveals how the culture of a space from the past is used for economic advantage in the present. The current culture creates the space, not the other way around. This is relevant when looking at the changes in Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce neighborhood. When capitalism affects a space, it influences how it is perceived and interacted with. This research will break down how capitalism is used to exploit the past cultural discourse of Deep Deuce, and how the space of the neighborhood reflects the interests of those in power and those seeking to make money. This research aims to show how the current space created in Deep Deuce does not place value on its past connections to the African American community but, rather, gives more meaning to profit, thus exploiting its original history for gain. This misunderstanding of how space

works shows in how this historic neighborhood has been used to gentrify the area with a largely White, affluent population—catering to their needs through housing and businesses, yet still leaning on the narrative of the past space to further their interests.

While many sociologists of the 1990s categorized the patterns of consumption by the desires and needs of those who consumed them (specifically the new middle class), Sharon Zukin argues in, “Socio-spatial Prototypes of a New Organization of Consumption: The Role of Real Cultural Capital,” that the consumer realm is more than symbolic, but, rather, cultural capital plays a material role in investment and production, which has a direct relationship with gentrification (18). Zukin refers to cultural capital as an individual and collective resource, as well as an “accessory to social power,” arguing that there needs to be an understanding of the engagement between the external (political, economic, spatial) and internal motivations of consumption (3). Gentrification’s consumption markers favor a specific type of space—mainly areas from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that can be given the historical preservation label. Gentrifiers are known for an obsession with the past, and “Their willingness to research such details and painstakingly restore, re-create, or reproduce them in their homes...expresses a striving toward the monumental, elitist, essentially cultural power that some

central urban spaces have always retained” (5). While gentrifiers seek authentication through historical connection, consumption is also tailored to their needs, with a strong focus on shopping and architectural restoration to form a coherent space of consumption. This all works to attract the type of residents and tourists attributed to changing the integrity of the original community of gentrified areas (6). Zukin writes, “By buying into this cultural capital, gentrifiers also buy into a spatial narrative that makes up a new fictive nexus of the city. Areas that had for years seemed rundown, archaic, even disused are regenerated by invoking a quasi-mythical past.” This space is given more credibility through the coveted landmark historic district label, even though there is no objective standard for these types of designations, and much of the decision-making lies in the social power of the committees in charge. Zukin agrees with Patrick Wright that a gentrified neighborhood is not so much a real place but, rather, exists between “the prosaic reality of the contemporary inner city and an imaginative reconstruction of the area's past” (7). This idea portrays the truth of Oklahoma City’s Deep Deuce area, which is led by a narrative of history that no longer applies to its current reality. This research will dissect this narrative to show how cultural consumption has exploited the area for the sake of tourism and residential living.

In "Different Shades of Change: Historic Districts and Their Impact on Gentrification and Neighborhood Trends," Karolina Gorska studies how historic district designation affects gentrification trends in Los Angeles neighborhoods. Gorska states, "if revitalization is desired within neighborhoods that provide affordable housing options due to incumbent upgrading (Clay 1979) or increased market interest, the question of how preservation relates to displacement and gentrification is fundamental" (15). Gorska found in her research that many of the neighborhoods with historic designation had more non-White than White residents and higher cost of living than city and county average. Through the typologies she created, she found that 13 of the 29 neighborhoods transitioned over time from one type to another, showing shifts in economic class and/or racial composition. While more neighborhoods remained the same, this does show demographic change is possible in historically preserved areas. Gorska's research shows that it is important to evaluate who has decision-making control and influence. Though the language used by the Office of Historic Resources implies that the needs of entire community remain the focus while making decisions regarding these areas, closer examination reveals, "those that are the most active guide and influence the final document," which does not accurately consider the complete community. The author finishes her

dissertation with four policy recommendations: “1) greater design and housing flexibility for HPOZs<sup>1</sup>, 2) required community outreach, 3) the reconsideration of HPOZ designation by the City Council Motion, and 4) a need for anti-displacement strategies” (374). Gorska focuses on 29 different HPOZs in the Los Angeles area, while this research will focus on one particular Oklahoma City neighborhood, Deep Deuce, which has undergone the most drastic changes. The original community had a 100% African American population (with a diverse population of working class, families, business owners, and an upper-class) and was created through segregation lines; the present area caters to primarily affluent White tourists and residents. Gorska’s assessment of the relationship between the communities, those with more power, and how final decisions are made, shows there is a need to examine these same factors regarding Deep Deuce. This research will examine the language attributed to historic designation used to promote whitewashing of Deep Deuce’s history to better serve gentrification in the area.

In, “Tourists in Historic Towns: Urban Conservation and Heritage Management,” Aylin Orbasli describes urban heritage as the “interpretation of history by a variety of users and by decision makers

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<sup>1</sup> HPOZ stands for Historic Preservation Overlay Zone. Gorska defines HPOZ’s as “an area of the city, which is designated for its architectural, cultural, or aesthetic significance” (12).

aiming to attract more users.” Stating that the past is both more accessible and more vulnerable, Orbasli describes an underlying tension that exists in this environment between the present and past, the internal and external (8). Cities have undergone rapid change since industrialization and the advancement of technology, and now historic districts/cities have a commercialized value, which creates the next big wave of change: mass tourism. Going off of Youngson’s argument that, “Civilisation resides in communities, not in things,” the author states preserving an object is not sufficient in preserving the environment once occupied by a different community (9). The research regarding Oklahoma City’s Deep Deuce area will root itself in this idea, analyzing the language used to attract tourists and new residents into an area that has completely changed regarding its community, connection to African American history, and culture. While Orbasli argues no place belongs solely to one culture or nationality, this work will emphasize the rhetorical significance of using the language, culture, and history of a place strongly connected to African American people to further the development of a new, significantly White community with no ties to the former beyond occupying their space.

In, “The Importance of Downtown in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” Donovan D. Rypkema highlights the continuing importance of public spaces,

specifically the downtown area, in expressing the meaning of the community. Rypkema views buildings as symbolic, yet recognizes more recent architecture in cities to have no meaning. Arguing there is a lost relationship between the intellect and emotion between the building and what occurs within it, Rypkema writes, "This affects both historic preservation and new construction. The buildings that were built in a day when the building was the message ought to be kept because the message—our common set of values—is, or ought to be, as valid as ever" (2). Regarding this idea of common set of beliefs, Rypkema recognizes that the individuals of a community have varying beliefs and opinions, but that they still share a desire for things such as mutual respect, recognition of tradition, and an appreciation for history. If a community wants to truly maintain meaning in these beliefs, this requires buildings with value. Because economic and cultural globalization seeps into all 21<sup>st</sup> century cities, "local response to globalization will necessitate identifying local assets...those assets need first to be identified, then protected, then enhanced" (4). Rypkema believes cities should assess what makes their community's unique character competitive to a global economy rather than becoming a victim of globalization and the meaninglessness that can infect and destroy the values of a city, specifically its downtown. He points out that, throughout the country,

historic districts are unique in being one of the only areas that house a wide varying range of people from different classes and races; if a person is not living in a historic district, they are guaranteed to be in a segregated neighborhood. This statement is interesting when evaluating Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce area, considering there is almost no diversity in class and race in the neighborhood currently. This shows there to be a need to evaluate the rhetorical value of Deep Deuce's historical preservation status and how it compares to other, less segregated historic districts in America. Rypkema writes, "If we are to have meaningful historic preservation, downtowns are important" (6). With this in mind, looking at Oklahoma City's entire downtown discourse is necessary in understanding how they value and emphasize their community character as they rapidly change and revamp their downtown and historic areas. It is also important to evaluate how segregation and racism affects this "common set of beliefs" Rypkema speaks of when looking at the core character of a whole city. This is especially necessary when looking at a neighborhood that was created out of segregation practices.

Contrasting Rypkema's belief that historic areas are the least segregated areas, Velma Zahirovic-Herbert and Swarn Chatterjee argue historical designation can parallel the effects of gentrification, leading to displacement of local residents and an increase of a

Whiter, more affluent population. In, "Historic Preservation and Residential Property Values: Evidence from Quantile Regression," Zahirovic-Herbert and Chatterjee write that, "maintaining physical reminders of the past creates a deeper sense of place that enhances residents' and visitors' perception of a neighborhood," while also offering economic benefits, and leading to enhancements in the area (1). Though there may be a wide range of positive improvements that come from historical preservation, similar to gentrification, it opens the area to exploitation, and can directly result in displacement of low to moderate-income residents due to higher property taxes and rental value (2). Zahirovic-Herbert and Chatterjee explain the differences between local and national designation, stating historic districts have the opportunity to have both types. The National Register holds much respect and gives the historic district opportunities to receive federal tax credits and grants. Local designation provides protection through the Historic Preservation Commission without tax credit opportunities but can additionally include landmarks that are not listed on the National Register. Using the Hedonic price models in Louisiana, the authors conclude, "Houses that are in close proximity to historic landmarks sell for a substantial premium over comparable properties (7.5 per cent higher prices)," which also agrees with Leichenko *et al.'s* data finding Texan historic

designation premiums between 4.9 to 20 percent (9). Leichenko *et al.* further emphasizes in, “Historic Preservation and Residential Property Values: An Analysis of Texas Cities,” that local, state, or national designation has a “mixed effect on housing values,” concluding that, although historical designation may have a negative effect on property values on an individual basis (as argued by critics), overall, it primarily boosts value in the Texas areas studied (12). The research on Deep Deuce will require looking at the district’s local, state, and national historic designation status and how that plays a role in the decision making for the neighborhood up to the present. This can then be rhetorically analyzed for how historical designation status has been used to increase property values.

In his article, “An Examination of Selected Consequences of Revitalization in Six US Cities,” Frank F. DeGiovanni looks at twelve different neighborhoods from six cities, analyzing the costs and benefits of areas labeled *revitalized*. To understand the consequences of this revitalization, he categorized changes into three categories: “(1) changes that are distinguishing features of revitalization (2) changes that may accompany revitalization but which are not essential components of the process; and (3) changes that are probably the consequences of revitalization.” DeGiovanni refers to “immigration of higher-income groups, property renovation,

or the altered nature of market transactions” as the consequences (3). Additionally, increased property tax and significant transitions from renter to owner-occupied homes can affect those in the area before revitalization occurs, resulting in displacement. When looking at renovation of declining homes, DeGiovanni finds evidence that revitalization can encourage rehabilitation by pre-revitalized occupants, but this result wasn’t conclusive for many of the gentrified areas, showing there to be little evidence that this was a true, consistent result from revitalization. Overall, new incomers still complete the majority of renovation in these areas. While his research shows cities usually gain from revitalization through increased property tax revenues and rehabilitation of the areas, comparable non-revitalized neighborhoods show there to be little difference in assessed values between the two (14). While the cities benefit less than usually suggested, multiple negative consequences result from reinvestment, including the potential for displacement, removal of renting options, and increased rent and housing costs (11-12, 14). While the changes regarding renting is comparable to non-gentrified areas, the analyzed cities also show to be “underassessing improved properties relative to their increase in value” (14). DeGiovanni tackles the complexity of assessing the impact of gentrification by taking on the word *revitalization* and showing it to be

both positive and negative. While he focuses on housing, renovation, and taxes, this work will investigate the word revitalization through a rhetorical lens, showing how this word is understood and applied by everyone affected by gentrification in the Deep Deuce area of Oklahoma City. This will involve interviewing residents and looking closely at the language of those who benefit from the revitalization and those who experience the negative consequences of it.

Though *rhetoric of choice* is applied to both feminist (abortion, motherhood) and racial issues surrounding the idea of choice, “The Rhetoric of Choice: Segregation, Desegregation, and Charter Schools,” by Ansley T. Erickson, focuses on how language surrounding individual choice and decision-making is used to justify educational segregation in the past (desegregation) and present (segregated charter schools). Explaining that desegregation created “powerful myths about inequality” that worked to attribute autonomous individual choice to its failure to succeed, he writes, “Examining the gap between the rhetoric and the reality clarifies the history of desegregation” (2). This false choice now takes the form of parental “choice” in the ability to choose charter schools, yet, in both past and present, policy plays a much larger role in creating limited options for students and encouraging segregation. Erickson quotes Matthew Lassifer in stating that the invisibility of these heavy-handed

policies “contributes to color-blind suburbanites innocence.” By accepting rhetoric of choice, the achievements of these suburbanites can be attributed to hard work, instead of “reliance on extensive and effective government subsidy in housing and beyond.” Even in documenting this time period, historians heavily favored the White perspective, neglecting how desegregation affected African American communities (4). Erickson concludes rhetoric of choice holds such strong influence to this day because it “offers an appealingly simple, yet fundamentally false, line of thinking about what makes segregation and inequality and what could make greater equality” (6). Just as examining the gap clarifies history regarding school segregation, bringing rhetoric of choice into this research will help break down whitewashing in Oklahoma City’s history regarding white flight and desegregation, and its direct effect on the past decline of the original Deep Deuce area.

Though Erickson uses examples from different American school districts and its connection to segregation in charter schools, my research will solely take a look at Oklahoma City and Deep Deuce. I will trace the rhetorical moves of decision/policy making in Oklahoma from the early 1900s and forward, centering Deep Deuce’s history. This information will connect to the present-day discourse surrounding the area, problematizing the exploitation of Deep

Deuce's forgotten history, while unveiling the inaccuracies of contributing segregation, urban renewal, and white flight to individual choice, which all strongly contributed to the collapse of the original community of the area. Erickson's writes, "we need a better way to think and talk about how both current and historic policy choices interact with individual choices...any approach to educational improvement needs to take account of both" (7). Understanding that this directly relates to the thinking of Oklahomans regarding the changes in Oklahoma City, a link will be created between individual action and the larger policies regarding past and present changes in Deep Deuce and historical preservation as a whole in Oklahoma City.

In the article, "Tourism Gentrification: The Case of New Orleans Vieux Carree (French Quarter)," Kevin Fox Gotham uses the French Quarter to challenge the claim that gentrification "is a reflection of consumer demands, individual preferences or market laws of supply and demand" (1). Similar to Erickson's argument that changes in cities are not merely reactive to the will of the public, Gotham attributes tourism gentrification to the power of the tourism industry. This results in a specific type of gentrification that increases housing prices, displaces community members, and leads to an increase in tourist attractions such as large entertainment clubs. Gotham provides an overview of a scholarly approach to gentrification,

pointing out that many scholars agree that gentrification today differs from the 1970s and 1980s; the third wave of gentrification began in the 1990s and continues to present day. Yet, “few scholars agree on how analysts should conceptualise gentrification...they disagree over its form, incidence and impact” (2). Preservationists have worked to keep tourist-centered businesses out of the mainly diverse residential Vieux Carre area, yet there has recently been an increase in hotels, bed and breakfasts, time-shares, condominiums, and large entertainment clubs; rises in median incomes and property values followed, while conversion of homes to condominiums displaced lower-income and African American people (2). Gotham’s work shows gentrification to affect more than just spatial differentiation, class shifts, and displacement. Its relationship with commercialization shows the real estate and tourism industries to have greater influence on community changes than individual preference of the consumer. “Consumer taste for gentrified spaces is, instead, created and marketed, and depends on the alternatives offered by powerful capitalists who are primarily interested in producing the built environment from which they can extract the highest profit” (16). The author’s scope of the New Orleans French Quarter has similarities to the scope of this research over Oklahoma City’s Deep Deuce in that the conflicts surround commercial

revitalization, historical preservation, and neighborhood integrity. While Gotham aims to examine the “relationship between global economic process and local actions in the transformation of urban space,” the goal of this work is to connect his findings to the discourse of tourism and residential living in the Deep Deuce, showing how the language exploits historical preservation for the benefit of the tourism industry and gentrification (2).

David Wilson and Dennis Grammenos look at the vital relationship between gentrification and rhetoric when discussing its affect on Chicago’s Puerto Rican communities in the article, “Gentrification, Discourse, and the Body: Chicago’s Humboldt Park.” The authors describe rhetoric as “crucial to gentrification. Through such rhetoric, a potentially contentious and politically explosive process is facilitated or obstructed” (1). Real estate capital is an active contributor to this controlling narrative. This type of discourse promotes gentrification as “cleansing, beneficial, and city-serving,” as it attacks the character, identities, and bodies of communities that are predominantly lower-class and non-White (3). Chicago’s gentrified rhetoric has transformed from “saving and salvaging” to “confrontation and cleanup.” This shift creates a discourse around improving the moral decline of the character of the communities and is seen on an institutional level through examples such as curfew

ordinances and reduced housing subsidies (5). All of this makes gentrification easier to swallow as residents want to “clean up” areas that have been labeled as dirty and immoral. Wilson and Grammenos note that coding youth bodies (such as the way they look and dress) is a main rhetorical strategy, connecting the way they look and exist within the space of the community to their negative stereotyped identities, thus being something that needed to be addressed and fixed by gentrification. The authors then examine how imagined spaces are used in this rhetorical strategy to create a narrative that works in their favor. For Humbolt Park’s Puerto Rican community, “these imagined spaces repetitiously offered and tied to these kids in discourse, infused bodies with meanings to serve as Lefebvre's (1984) spatial reference points. ‘Ghettos’, ‘ethnic enclaves’, ‘public-housing blocks’, ‘decrepit downtowns’, and ‘the streets’ illuminated the supposed real landscapes that shaped and molded these kids” (10). Understanding the way people in power use racialized rhetorical strategies and stereotypes to code the bodies and identities of the communities they gentrify is important in understanding the complexity of gentrification’s effects. Similar to this area of Chicago, Oklahoma City’s Deep Deuce area, a historically African American community, has seen multiples tides of community change through the years. The aim of this work is to analyze the discourse of those

who influenced and made decisions resulting in these changes and how they used African American bodies and their identities and culture to serve changes resulting in the decline of the area in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and erasure of Black culture through gentrification in the past decade.

Discussion around gentrification is large and far-reaching in the academic field and pop culture, yet meaningful analysis of its racialized facets is immensely lacking. Though scholars have difficulty giving gentrification a straightforward definition, there is no doubt that it affects communities and spaces in both positive and negative ways, all depending on perspective and privilege.

Scholarship shows that changes in gentrified areas are more often the result of decision making by those in power and those looking to economically benefit, rather than an accurate reflection of the needs and desires of the community as a whole. This also proves true for many neighborhoods with historic designation status, resulting in exploitation of an area's history to make money and further tourism, businesses, and real estate. This creates a need for understanding the role rhetoric plays in influencing the perspective of the community, especially when looking at historic African American neighborhoods experiencing gentrification, due to it frequently resulting in displacement of residents of color by affluent White

people. This research aims to bring a lacking racialized perspective to existing gentrification research that studies historically designated neighborhoods. To remove race from the conversation is to look at gentrification incompletely, which further removes people of color from the discussion. Though there is a large amount of research that touches on gentrification and its relationship to industry and historic districts, there is still a growing need for scholars to introduce race into the discussion in a meaningful way.

## Methodology

This research project will use a pragmatic approach in evaluating the discourse of urban development and gentrification in areas with historic designation status, challenging how African American history is exploited to further tourism, business, and residential living in a historically African American neighborhood. I will specifically look at whitewashed and racialized rhetorical moves made by the different people involved in the changes and marketing of the Deep Deuce area of Oklahoma City. This involves applying theory regarding gentrification, tourism, residential living, and historic neighborhoods to this specific area to assess the motives behind how it is changed, treated, and marketed. A major component includes examining the historical records of Deep Deuce and comparing its history to the rhetoric of tourism, businesses, and real estate occurring presently in the area. Rather than only use traditional rhetorical sources from academic scholarship, such as Foucault, contemporary real-world sources will be used from blogs, news articles, and other applicable non-scholarly sources, with a focus on African American voices. The main method of gathering relevant information will occur from interviews conducted by me with people in the Oklahoma City community. Interviewees will include those with connections to Deep Deuce, local business owners, and

other relevant community members. Keeping the importance of access and efficiency in sharing information in mind, this project will be presented on a free website, [www.theOKspace.com](http://www.theOKspace.com). The project will be written in a way that will be easily understood by most viewers, with definitions and a thorough explanation of rhetoric provided. The project will be broken up into parts focusing on urban renewal, historic preservation, the modern Black community in the Eastside of Oklahoma City, and the different industries exploiting African American history. Transcripts of interviews and pictures of Deep Deuce and Oklahoma City will be included on the website and intertwined through different parts of the project.

## Organization

The main goal of this project will be to provide a platform for voices of color, outside of the rhetorical academic field, to real-time events occurring in Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce neighborhood regarding the whitewashing of history to further the tourism, business, and real estate industries in historic neighborhoods. Maintaining an emphasis on community voices and shedding a light on the history of Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce neighborhood, this project will first provide the area's history in part one. Next, a rhetorical focus will be established in looking at the overall issue of White-dominated businesses and residents profiting and benefiting from the history of the area. Rhetoric of choice will be introduced as a way to challenge the city's historical response to racialized issues such as segregation, white flight, and gentrification regarding the common argument that individual choice is solely responsible for these events, removing blame from people in positions of power that furthered racist changes in urban life. This will be followed by an explanation of gentrification, tourism, historical designation status, and real estate. This information will be applied throughout the project as well. A connection can be made between this research and the changes occurring in the Deep Deuce area, and a rhetorical analysis of our state's historical designation standards and goals will

be examined to assess how history is preserved, valued, or potentially open to exploitation in areas affected by gentrification. A comparison of the neighborhood's objective history and how the history is currently presented (or failed to be presented) will be rhetorically examined using non-scholarly sources from people of color to understand what is problematic about how African American history is whitewashed and used to benefit businesses. The next parts of the project will individually break down how different industries rhetorically use the African American history of the neighborhood for gain. The first will focus on the rhetorical motives of historical preservation, then it will examine the discourse of tourism, business, and real estate regarding historical preservation and the use of African American history to profit financially. The project will conclude by using local interviews to express the voices and experiences of the Oklahoma City Black community and share their opinions on proper preservation methods for African American history.

## Introduction

Urban change is occurring rapidly across the United States, and the Midwest is no exception. Though cities like Oklahoma City are much smaller in size compared to New York or Los Angeles when it comes to the scale of its downtown and what is offered, similar patterns of urban change exist in regards to migration of the White population back to the city from the suburbs, new efforts to preserve historical neighborhoods, and both positive and negative effects of gentrification on the pre-existing communities. Most people are familiar, by now, with the term gentrification and how it can be seen either as revitalization of a declining area, or destruction of the culture of an existing community that results in higher rent and displacement of vulnerable people from their homes. Because gentrification is subjective and complex, the rhetoric around how it is discussed can be heavily influential in how it is accepted by community members. Scholarship regarding gentrification, and other urban changes such as historical preservation, often fail to represent the racialized motives and effects around these topics. Historic designation often parallels the negative effects of gentrification, including erasure of culture for the benefit of dominantly White communities and the displacement of lower-class residents and people of color.

Deep Deuce, a historic district in downtown Oklahoma City, was birthed from some of the nation's earliest residential segregation laws after African American workers and families began looking for industrial jobs in the area. It became a thriving, self-sufficient community with successful businesses, entertainment, and night life by the 1920s, and stayed this way until the 1960s. Just as segregation led to the neighborhood's creation, integration laws and policies ironically caused changes that aided significantly in its decline (Arnold). Urban renewal practices and the construction of a major highway through the center of the community was also an intentional move made by the government to further destroy the neighborhood. After a lifeless period of time, the area eventually became sought after for historical preservation, construction of residential living spaces, and new businesses serving those in nearby downtown OKC. Today, the district has been transformed into a modern neighborhood with many new expensive lofts, high-end restaurants, bars, and other businesses catering young affluent White residents. The population has transitioned from 100% African American to nearly 100% White, yet the district is deemed historic and uses the area's rich African American history in its marketing and current presentation of identity (Payne & Greiner 7-9).

Changes in areas with historic designation status often parallel the effects of gentrification, which can be labeled as positive or negative depending on the perspective of the person talking about it (Zahirovic-Herbert & Chatterjee 2). Walking down the streets of the area today, one will pass sidewalk plaques with the names of historic Black figures like author, Ralph Ellison, and banners reading “Historic District.” Newly built hotels, expensive restaurants and bars, and several new lofts can now be found on the streets of Deep Deuce. This modern, gentrified area that boldly markets itself as a historically preserved district operates in contradiction. Deep Deuce's African American history is used as the neighborhood's most defining point and identity. This furthers profit, tourism, and growth in the area, yet those who are profiting off of the history are still being racist toward the Black community by excluding them from being business owners, patrons, or part of the decision-making process for the area.

Deep Deuce history has been marketed to exhaustion by the city and businesses with a whitewashed version of the history that fails to address the role racism played in the changes and destruction of the original neighborhood. The results of urban change often occur through different groups of people with power and influence making choices together. This includes business owners,

politicians, the housing industry, the local, state, and federal governments, and the city, which has great influence in urban change and the power to provide or restrict funding and resources. The actions of these units led to the destruction of the original Deep Deuce community, and now, the same type of people with similar power, still neglect, mistreat, and restrict resources from the current Black community, and have actively excluded them from modern Deep Deuce (Robinson-Hershey).

To find details of Deep Deuce's history, a lot of searching is required. Before the 1960s, there was no official effort made to gather or retain African American history in Oklahoma. This led to preservation of few photographs and artifacts of Deep Deuce. While a person can find archives at the Oklahoma Historical Society regarding Deep Deuce, the full history is not readily accessible online. While researching for this project, an online search yielded a few news articles and blog posts with scattered details and many links leading to pages that no longer exist. While I cannot speak for the individual instruction occurring in every classroom, it is commonly understood that African American history, specifically regarding the Deep Deuce district, is not taught in the Oklahoma education system.

The actions and language of the Oklahoma City community still upholds a White-centered, discriminatory dominant discourse. The schools and neighborhoods are still highly segregated, the African American communities face daily discrimination while its members are incarcerated at higher levels, and the Eastside (an area long known for being home to the African American community) lost its only grocery store in the past year, creating a food desert (Dickerson). Though it seems at surface level that Deep Deuce's transformation and historic designation status show a change in the rhetoric of the city's racialized discourse, further analysis of the language and actions of those engaging with the area show cultural erasure, whitewashing of history, and the same ole' racist structures in a new, modern, gentrified form.

Theory around rhetoric looks at the creation and negotiation of meaning behind the language people use, the thoughts they think, and the actions they take. I will not spend much time referencing dead White scholars in this project but there are a couple of main rhetoricians that help explain the relationship between discourse, power, and the community. Rhetorician, Kenneth Burke, describes humans as symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animals. He argues that humans engage with meaning, language, and knowledge through different color filters, also described as

terministic screens. Burke states, “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality” (1341). Even when humans think they are viewing reality in a truthful and factual way, they are actually viewing everything through a filter—a *selected* reality—based off of the language they have heard and the experiences they have gone through.

Discourse is strongly tied to what is perceived as reality, the exchange of power, and the production of knowledge through language. In “The Order of Discourse,” Foucault breaks down the concept of discourse, stating there is an anxiety in trying to materialize it, for it is abstract in concept yet makes up everything that is known and understood. Previous scholars misunderstood discourse to be the facilitator of the exchange of knowledge, meaning our social reality is made up of pre-existing truth and this knowledge is exchanged between people. People often recognize fields like science and psychology to be purely factual and unchangeable, using it to deem certain information as *natural, the standard, or common sense*. This mindset creates common phrases like, “well that’s just the way it’s always been.”

In, *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke discusses a “scientific” vs “dramatistic” approach to understanding knowledge in a social reality. “Scientific” refers to language’s role in defining knowledge, while “dramatistic” characterizes language as symbolic action (1340). To ease guilt, early White society successfully dehumanized slaves through the language they used. One instance of this was spreading the idea that African American people feel less pain than White people. This knowledge still affects the treatment African American people (especially women) are given to this day. They are taken less seriously by healthcare staff and doctors, experience higher rates of death, and receive less pain medication (Hoffman et al. 2). Acceptance that African American people feel less pain because it is *common sense* or *natural*, showcases the “scientific” approach. Understanding that these views about pain are not natural, but, rather, the product of language motivated by the interests of slaveowners, is an example of the “dramatistic” approach, which views language as symbolic action.

Foucault, whose work heavily focuses on power dynamics on an individual and systematic level, recognizes that power produces reality, thus those in power have the ability to produce reality in a way that creates knowledge and perceived truth.

Burke states in *Language as Symbolic Action*:

...can we bring ourselves to realize just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by 'reality' has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems? Take away our books, and what little do we know about history, biography, even something so 'down to earth' as the relative possibility of seas and continents? What is our 'reality' for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past, combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present? (1342-1343)

Discourse is not a reflection of the world but, rather, a form of action or event which produces social reality. Foucault states, "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality." Not only does discourse describe what is desired by those within it, it is also the object of desire, "the power to be seized" (1461). In every society, there is a dominant discourse that creates a standard of what is normal and perceived as the main body of truth or "common sense."

In America, White-centered language and actions make up the dominant discourse. It favors the versions of social reality that uphold the existing structure of power, and in America, these structures of power still have whiteness at their core. Burke states in *Language as Symbolic Action*, “an ‘ideology’ is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes the body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it” (6). If a discourse can limit someone’s ability to act outside of the reality it creates, this produces a powerful ability to control someone’s actions and sense of identity (such as a doctor’s biased actions when treating an African American person). America’s dominant discourse is highly racialized and patriarchal, centering White male culture, perspectives, and power. This is seen throughout history in the media consumed, the ideal beauty standards, the topics covered in school, and so many more things that are often not consciously noticed.

All of the above examples point to a long and complex history of racism that lingers in every aspect of past and present American life. Again, humans are symbol-making and *symbol-misusing* animals. Related to urban change in Oklahoma City, control of the discourse surrounding gentrification gives power to those aiming to control the narrative. This results in language that overwhelmingly

describes gentrification as positive and revitalizing when this is not true for many people affected by it. Gentrification is often linked to changing pre-existing neighborhoods in a way that centers White culture and serves more affluent residents, while displacing and erasing the voices and culture of the previous community (often people of color). The narrative around Deep Deuce oversimplifies its history, community, and relationship with the city as a whole. Those in power are taking the language of Deep Deuce from its history and using it in the dominant discourse in a way that serves those in power (aka those making money from it) and discredits the reality of the African American community's experiences. How can it still be the truth when it is centered in someone else's reality? This is especially offensive considering the state and nation's long history of ignoring and failing to preserve African American history. Examining how Oklahoma City's social reality is created and upheld gives insight into how language is used to further gentrification through historic preservation and further cultural erasure of the African American community and their history.

# RHETORIC DEFINED



## DEFINITION

"Rhetoric refers to the study and uses of written, spoken and visual language. It investigates how language is used to organize and maintain social groups, construct meanings and identities, coordinate behavior, mediate power, produce change, and create knowledge" (rhetoric.sdsu.edu)

## PURPOSE

Rhetorically analyzing any major system in America is like pulling back the curtain to reveal white supremacy pretending to be the Wizard of Oz. We see changes happening in our cities without understanding that underneath the surface of language like "revitalization," land has always been used as a weapon to control, exclude, and oppress people of color.

*Simply put, rhetorical analysis looks at the different meanings behind things such as the language and actions of people or the objects they interact with.*

## RHETORICAL ANALYSIS IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Deep Deuce district in Downtown OKC is labeled as a historically preserved neighborhood, yet rhetorical analysis shows that the history of the original African American community has not been preserved in any meaningful way. Though physical objects like plaques, signs, and restored buildings are present, there is no real meaning behind the hollow gestures. A sign has little value when the Black community feels excluded and unwelcome in a space that once belonged to them. A plaque holds no meaning when looking at the history of community destruction through white flight and urban renewal.



# DISCOURSE DEFINED

THEORY BY RHETORICIAN, MICHEL FOUCAULT



## DEFINITION

In its simplest terms, discourse is the group of statements and actions of a social society that come together to form their truth and knowledge. It is the production of knowledge through language and actions.

Rhetoricians used to think that the knowledge we have about the world around us always existed, and we continue to uncover objective truths about it.

**Foucault changed everything when he argued discourse is an event where author, meaning, and knowledge are functions of it, not the other way around.**



Discourse is strongly tied to what is perceived as reality, the exchange of power, and the production of knowledge through language. Foucault states there is an anxiety in trying to materialize it, for it is abstract in concept yet makes up everything that is known and understood.

## DOMINANT DISCOURSE

In America, the dominant discourse has long been controlled by white people in power because they create the laws made, the media we consume, and the curriculum we learn in class. This is why all of these things are so white-centered. While there is a dominant discourse in any space, there are many different discourses occurring in a society.



Because so much of the language and social practices we engage with are white-centered, it starts to feel *natural* that whiteness is at the center of everything. White supremacy is, however, a myth created through the millions of large and small words /actions that occur to support it on a daily basis. The dominant discourse produces this knowledge of white supremacy, which is then understood to be the truth by many because it's the main discourse they engage with.



## COUNTER DISCOURSE

Engaging with counter discourses, meaning engaging with the social practices of other cultures, non-white narratives or media, etc, can show you new truths and bodies of knowledge.



# New Rhetoric, Same White Supremacy

Modern Oklahoma City has been shaped through the 20th and 21st century by a fierce drive to segregate urban areas and keep African American people in an inferior position by controlling and limiting their access to land and dismantling their communities through white flight, urban renewal, and gentrification. As society changed in the 20th century, it was no longer permissible to openly enforce discrimination and segregation on an official level. Creative change of language and action by White supremacists allowed the same racist meanings to be expressed and the same racist goals to be achieved in new subtle, acceptable ways.

*America's history of weaponizing land to divide and destroy Black communities calls into question how originally Black spaces, like Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce district, are historically preserved.*

# Urban Renewal

People in America have a long history of racially coding their words and actions. When urban renewal was introduced to American citizens, a lot of positive rhetoric and fear-based language was used to convince them that cleaning up "the slums" of cities was necessary for growth and "revitalization." Through the decades of the 20th century, the rhetoric of those in power evolved to more easily enforce racism without directly stating their true intentions.

## WHAT IS URBAN RENEWAL?

A federal program that granted large amounts of money to 933 American cities to help rebuild "blighted" and "slum" neighborhoods as a response to the nationwide movement of middle-class families to the suburbs. The program didn't do anything to prepare new housing for the affected residents, displacing around 1 million people throughout America.



## HOUSING ACTS

The Housing Acts allowed local authorities to build segregated public housing projects and funded the destruction of 2,500 neighborhoods, causing mass displacement of residents of color. The acts are known for being full of contradictions by promising to clear slums with poor living conditions to improve the lives of lower-class residents, yet causing worse conditions for those affected.



## WEAPONIZED COMMUNITY CONSTRUCTION

The federal highway program became an effective way to achieve slum clearance by planning routes that cut through African American communities. This was done through the teamwork of federal, state, and local governments.



## ERASURE IN URBAN RENEWAL

News, media, and scholarship often erase the role racism played in driving urban renewal practices. While a story is told that urban renewal's main goal was to improve living conditions of lower-class areas, "slums" and "blight" were racial codes for Black/non-white areas, and the real goal was segregation and destroying the unity of these communities.



<sup>2</sup> Fullilove, Mindy Thompson (P 4, 20, 57)  
Rothstein, Richard (P 128-129)

# Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Projects<sup>3</sup>

## *University Medical Center*

1965-1974

Federal Funding:

\$11,648,652

## *John F Kennedy project*

1966-1974

Federal Funding:

\$20,381,398

## *Central Bus Dist No 1a Project*

1967-1974

Federal Funding:

\$27,301,117

University of Oklahoma  
University Research Park

Once part of the Northeast side of OKC, the University of Oklahoma bulldozed hundreds of homes by the 1960s with urban renewal funding to create the university medical center. The area has since become the University Research Park with various medical buildings and the OU Health Sciences Center.

The OU urban renewal project displaced 713 families. 90% of displaced citizens were people of color.

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<sup>3</sup> "Overview of the Legislative History of Urban Renewal."

## Downtown OKC Before Urban Renewal<sup>4</sup> (1954)



## Downtown OKC After Urban Renewal (2014)



Daily Oklahoman  
June 12, 1960

## Blighted Area Cash Available For Oklahoma

(By United Press International)

Oklahoma towns are eligible for federal urban renewal money and the government is eager to help remove the blighted area, a federal agency administrator said here Saturday.

John A. Foster, regional administrator for the housing and home finance agency, said all Oklahoma towns now are eligible for benefits from the urban renewal law passed in 1959 by the Oklahoma legislature.

Attorney General Mac Q. Williamson recently reversed a year-old opinion that the two laws authorizing urban renewal were unconstitutional.

### Commission Needed

"Cities simply create a commission to handle the blighted areas, then contact us and we work with the commission from there," Foster said. "The federal government pays two-thirds of the net cost of the project and the community pays one-third."

Some cities even miss paying the one-third by including costs of community projects in the renewal. School buildings, sewers, water lines and streets are some things which may be subtracted from the city or town's cost of the project, he said.

"It's time we got started on this program," said Republican Party chairman Henry Bellmon, Red Rock, who invited Foster to Oklahoma.

"The rest of the nation started taking advantage of this federal law in 1954. The legislators saw the light in 1959, then the attorney general held up progress another year.

### Benefits Cited

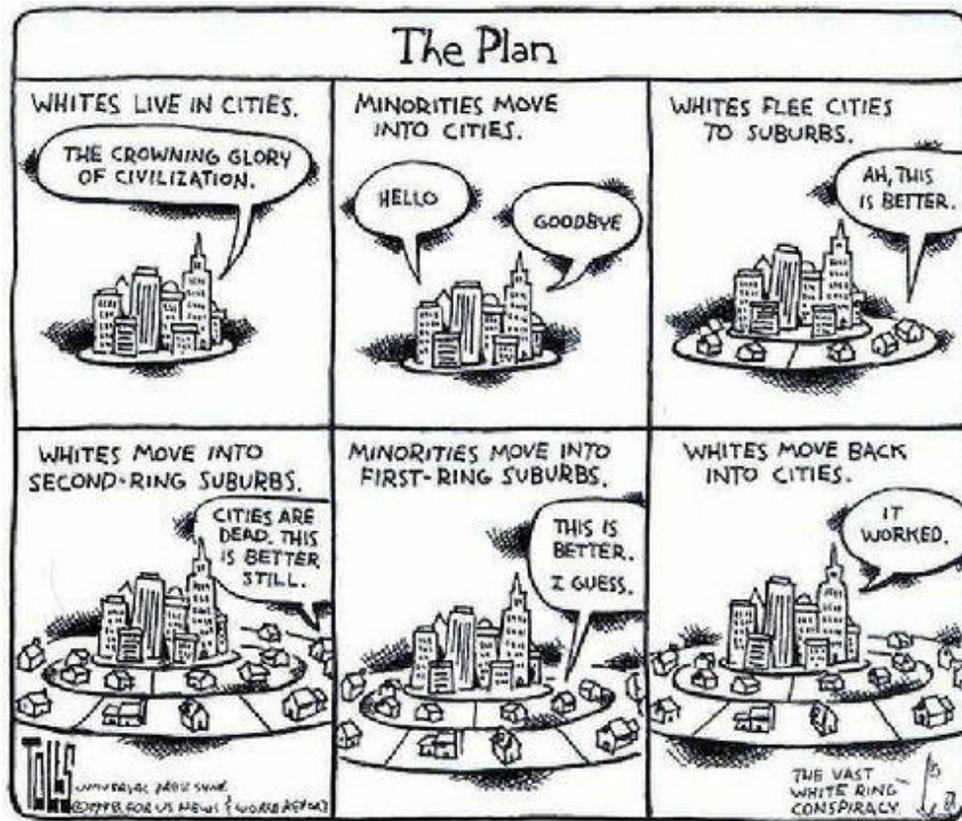
"Finally, state towns are free to take advantage of this law," the party leader said.

"We don't loan money to the cities or deal directly with the cities," Foster said. "We deal only with a citizen commission set up for urban renewal projects."

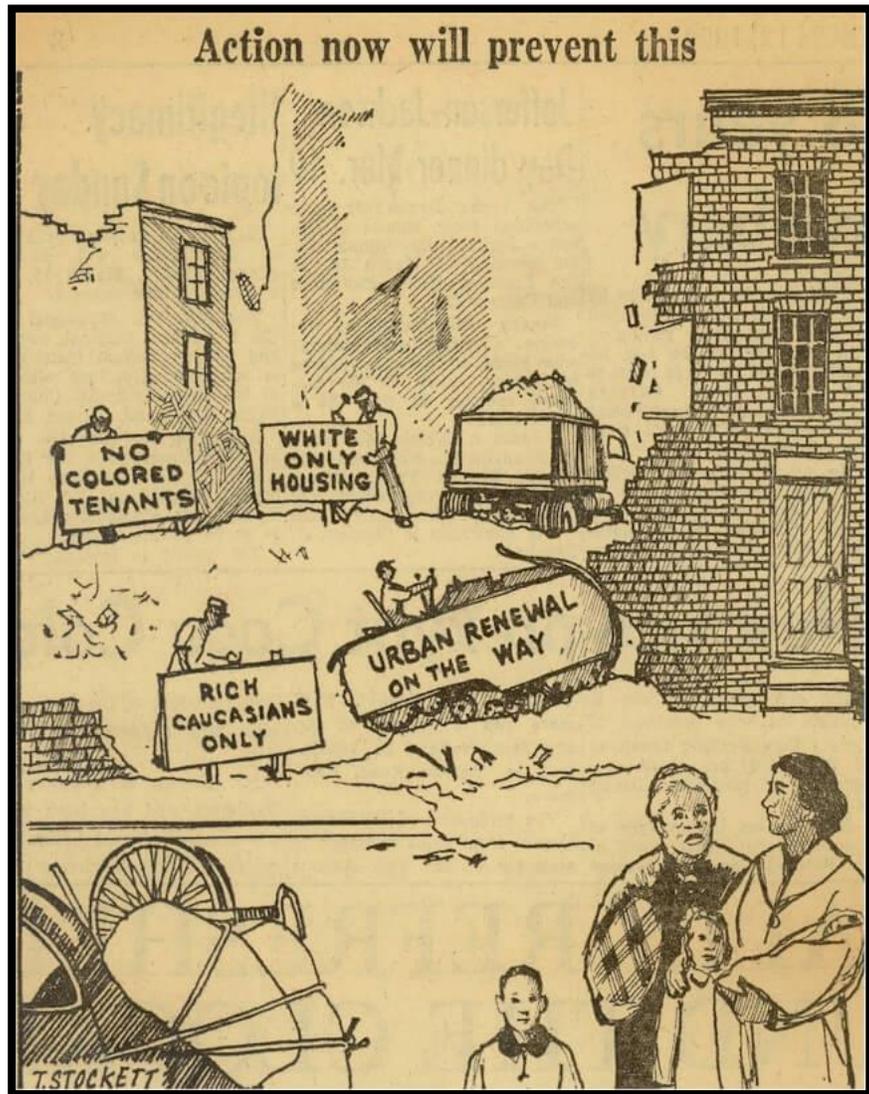
<sup>4</sup> Hampton, Shane.

# Urban Renewal Comics

5



<sup>5</sup> Tolls, Tom (Date of Comic: 1998)



<sup>6</sup> Stockett, Thomas (Date of Comic: 1960)

"The transformation of Deep Deuce goes far beyond that which is visible on the landscape. It likewise provides an instructive example to geographers and others of the potential pitfalls associated with trying to discern, only by reading the extant landscape, the nature of the forces that produced it. Since the initial federal approval in 1976 to construct I-235, the remaking of Deep Deuce has been underway for more than forty years—a remarkably long time. This process has involved a complicated series of events linking local, state, and federal scales. It has also been shaped by approaches to urban planning and urban management that reflect the enduring influence of urban renewal and gentrification on the functioning and form of urban places. For this reason, it is not adequate to explain the transformation of Deep Deuce as simply an example of the consequences of urban renewal. Nor is it adequate to attempt to explain Deep Deuce as solely an example of gentrification. These two processes have been intricately woven together, which necessitates a consideration of both."<sup>7</sup>

Adam Payne & Alyson Greiner

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<sup>7</sup> Payne, Adam A., and Alyson L. Greiner (P 2).

**Putting Race Back into the Narrative**

**ANSWERS**  
To Your Questions About  
**URBAN RENEWAL**

Downplays the influential role the federal government played in encouraging segregation through Urban Renewal

Land was often sold at a highly discounted price to developers who intended to create white-only housing that the previous population could no longer afford

The government failed to provide adequate support or assistance in finding new housing for the one million people displaced. This left many people of color in a very difficult place trying to find new places to live

Many people never received any financial assistance for relocation

white city

and can pretend Black people don't exist more easily

**Question:**  
**TO WHAT EXTENT IS URBAN RENEWAL A FEDERAL PROGRAM?**

**Answer:** Once an area is shown to meet minimum requirements for federal funding in Urban Renewal Actives and the plans are outlined, it is a federal program only to the extent that the federal government supplies two-thirds of the net cost. The program itself is conceived, planned, controlled and carried out by local citizens.

**Question:**  
**WHAT IS URBAN RENEWAL'S RELATIONSHIP TO PRIVATE ENTERPRISE?**

**Answer:** In the original 1949 Housing Act which made renewal possible, Congress directed that "Private Enterprise shall be encouraged to share as large a part of the total need as is consistent with governmental assistance shall be utilized where feasible to meet a private enterprise need as large as the total need." Thus urban renewal's main function is to help businessmen and investors create a better economic climate for a white man's benefit.

**Question:**  
**WHEN DID URBAN RENEWAL START IN LAWTON?**

**Answer:** The Citizens of Lawton, in March of 1962, voted to establish an Urban Renewal Authority in Lawton. The Mayor and Council appointed a five member Board of Commissioners to govern the operations of the Lawton Urban Renewal Authority in May of 1962. The City Council requested federal funds to plan Lawton's first project, in August of 1962.

**Question:**  
**WHO PAYS FOR URBAN RENEWAL?**

**Answer:** In Lawton, the city has a financial responsibility for one-third of each project's net cost. The remaining two-thirds is provided by the federal government through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

**Question:**  
**WHAT IS PLANNED FOR THE DOWNTOWN AREA?**

**Answer:** The Central Business District Project Number 1, will accomplish several things. First, it provides for the removal of all substandard buildings. Second, the use of the land will be organized so that definite patterns of trade will be visible. For example, in the center of the Urban Renewal Project Area, a six square block area, will be reserved for Retail Sales. Adjacent to this retail shopping complex on the south are hotels and Motel facilities along with a Convention Center. To the East, an area has been set aside to accommodate adult entertainment and recreation such as bars, private clubs, taverns, etc. To the West provision has been made for office, banking and Courthouse use.

**Question:**  
**HOW CAN THE CITY PAY FOR ITS SHARE DOWNTOWN?**

**Answer:** It's this simple . . . "Capital improvements." Improvements that must be made anyway. So long as the public has neglected the downtown area. A large portion of the existing capital improvements were constructed as much as five decades ago. The Urban Renewal Plan identifies the improvements that need to be made in the downtown area. These include all street public parking, street improvements, new sidewalks, landscaping, a fire alarm system, a water distribution system, a sanitary sewer system, a new Railroad overpass at Third and "P" Avenue, and others.

**Question:**  
**HOW DOES THE CITY GET ITS INVESTMENT BACK?**

**Answer:** One of the amazing facts about urban renewal is that the city recaps such fast returns on its investment. The new tax revenues realized from this more valuable downtown property can pay back our city's investment within a few years. In addition, these increased tax revenues will continue to be received for many years after the initial investment is returned.

**Question:**  
**DOES PROPERTY GO OFF THE TAX ROLLS AFTER IT IS BOUGHT BY URBAN RENEWAL?**

**Answer:** Only during the time that Urban Renewal actually holds title to the property prior to selling it for private redevelopment. The city of Lawton however receives cash credits for the gradual amount of taxes not paid during this period. This credit accrues towards the city's one-third share of Urban Renewal costs. At the time that the property is sold by Urban Renewal for private redevelopment it is once again entered onto the tax rolls.

**Question:**  
**WHO WILL OWN THE LAND TO BE REDEVELOPED?**

**Answer:** Whoever buys it. The Urban Renewal Authority factor the land only until it is cleared and ready to be private redeveloped or to a public agency such as the city.

**Question:**  
**HOW CAN AN INDIVIDUAL OR BUSINESS BE SURE THAT A FAIR PRICE WILL BE PAID FOR PROPERTY PURCHASED BY THE URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY?**

**Answer:** Two independent appraisals of each property by highly qualified appraisers will be made. Each appraisal takes into consideration comparable land and property costs, the projected income from the building, and prices received for similar property in a comparable location. Based on these appraisals, the property owner is offered an amount representing the fair market value at the time of acquisition by the Authority. If the property owner finds this offer unacceptable, the matter can be taken to court and be finally settled by a jury.

**Question:**  
**HOW DOES URBAN RENEWAL DETERMINE A PRICE TO SELL PROPERTY?**

**Answer:** Two "Retailer" Appraisals are made by independent appraisers. These appraisals are based on land values for a particular parcel and the restriction use. The Urban Renewal Board then establishes a minimum price for which the parcel may be sold.

**Question:**  
**HOW DOES URBAN RENEWAL SELL PROPERTY?**

**Answer:** Parcels for private redevelopment will be sold through established policies set by the Urban Renewal Authority Board of Commissioners. These include public offerings (sealed or open bids), public auction with a guaranteed minimum bid or through negotiations with specially qualified developers. In addition to price, proposals are judged according to how well the redevelopment fits the plan's objectives to enforce segregation.

**Question:**  
**WHAT HAPPENS TO FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DISPLACED BY URBAN RENEWAL CLEARANCE?**

**Answer:** Urban Renewal relocation counselors help individuals and families secure standard housing they can afford. Experience in other projects shows many families gain improved living conditions from this change. The Urban Renewal Authority reimburses displaced individuals and families for moving costs up to \$200 per family. Some will also be eligible for relocation adjustment payments of up to \$1000 or replacement housing payments of up to \$5000.

**Question:**  
**WHAT HAPPENS TO BUSINESSES WHO ARE DISPLACED BY URBAN RENEWAL?**

**Answer:** Urban Renewal relocation counselors will give individuals aid to each business. The Authority reimburses businesses for moving costs up to \$25,000 per business, pays up to \$3,000 for eligible personal property losses, and can provide small business displacement payments of \$2,500 to those eligible. Many types of special assistance are also available to relocated businesses from the Small Business Administration.

**Question:**  
**WHY SHOULD A RETAILER OR BUSINESSMAN IN ANOTHER AREA SUPPORT A DOWNTOWN PROJECT?**

**Answer:** Without judge a city by its downtown entertainment and visitor facilities. An existing city draws tourists, conventions, visitors, outside money, and daily city revenues from its downtown. Market Consultants estimate that city wide sales will increase \$50 million annually. The Downtown will receive only \$15 million of this annually. This means that the balance, \$35 million, will be spread out over the rest of the city. This is only possible after the Downtown area has been revitalized.

**Question:**  
**WHY SHOULD AN ORDINARY CITIZEN SUPPORT THE REBUILDING OF DOWNTOWN LAWTON?**

**Answer:** First, the downtown area should bear the lion's share of the property tax burden. Its continuing decay means that individual taxpayers will have to carry a larger share. Second, rebuilding downtown will spur Lawton's economic development and increase employment. Third, every citizen will share in a more white city environment. Those who work or shop downtown benefit from improved streets, more parking, better organized retail shopping areas, better walkways, the new theaters, restaurants and other forms of entertainment.

**Lawton Progress Association, Inc.**  
Gale Sadler, Pres.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF  
**HOW TWENTIETH  
CENTURY  
AMERICA  
SEGREGATED  
ITS CITIES**

**1920s**

Hoover administration propaganda persuades white middle-class families to move from apartments to single family homes, and in the next decade, insures mortgages to those who move into all-white neighborhoods.

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**1930s**

Roosevelt administration creates redlining by mapping out zones in every metro area as a way to deem non-white areas as high foreclosure risks and refuse to issue loans in African American neighborhoods.

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**1940s**

With increasing need for housing, the government builds segregated public housing. Following WWII, the federal government kick starts the suburbanization of every metro area by providing bank loans to builders who agree to build all-white subdivisions.

**RACIAL  
COVENANTS**

Becoming increasingly difficult for the government to openly enforce segregation, they depend on endorsing it at the private level. The government at every level aids in enforcing covenants that prevent African American people from moving into white neighborhoods.

Homeowners and developers use covenants in deeds and community association bylaws to restrict ability to sell to non-white home buyers. Federal government uses these methods throughout this century to get around anti-segregation Supreme Court rulings.

**1942: Due to a racial covenant, The Oklahoma Supreme Court nullifies a property purchase by an African American man. He is forced to pay court and attorney fees for himself and the white seller.**

**1949-1973**

The federal government and HUD officials use the urban renewal program and construction of highways to intentionally destroy African American neighborhoods which they call "slums" and "blight" and further ingrain segregation into the urban landscape.

*Information from  
The Color of Law  
by Richard Rothstein*

Racism through segregation and urban change was accomplished on multiple levels. The racist actions start at the local, state, and federal level which has a lot of power and influence. The courts and law enforcement aid in enforcing racist policies and laws. The news and other forms of media erase the truth and use language that subtly or directly encourages racist beliefs. On a smaller level, the racist attitudes, internalized beliefs, and day-to-day actions of the overall White community help reinforce racist behavior in a less official manner. All of these groups share and express the power to uphold racism on a daily basis.

# Tools of Segregation

## Blockbusting<sup>8</sup>

Tactic of housing industry and housing administration to instill fear in White residents that their neighborhood will soon be "invaded" by African American people. This motivated homeowners to sell their house at a lower cost, allowing real estate agents to then make a larger profit when reselling the property.

## Eminent Domain<sup>9</sup>

The government's ability to take private property for public use in exchange for a minimum compensation. This was used to remove 713 families in Oklahoma City for the university medical center project, and to remove homes for the federal highway project.

## Housing Act of 1949<sup>10</sup>

Funded segregated high-rise projects. The drive to enforce segregation in public housing left a lot of African American people without appropriate housing assistance. White communities rejected public housing projects from entering their areas, and large concentrations of these buildings were placed in communities of color, especially low-income African American neighborhoods.

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<sup>8</sup> Rothstein, Richard (P 95).

<sup>9</sup> "Legal History Behind Eminent Domain."

<sup>10</sup> Fullilove, Mindy Thompson (P 57).

# Redlining

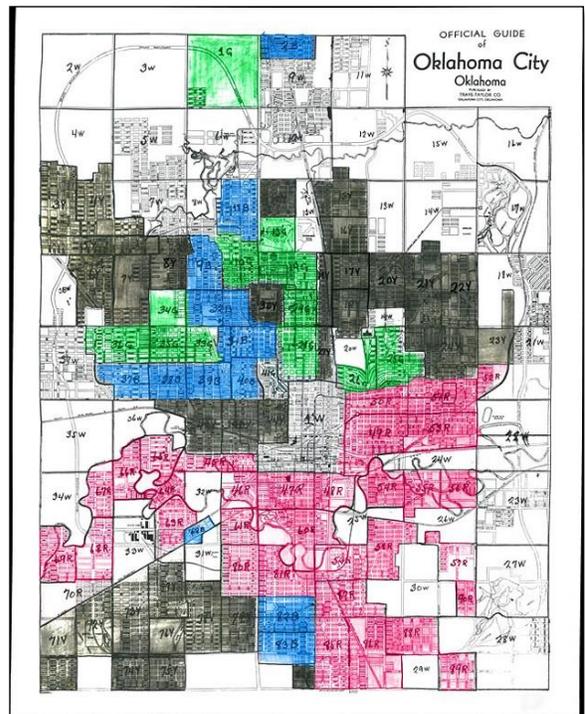
Created and used by The Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) from 1933-1977

The name comes from red lines drawn on maps to zone areas of a city as a low or high risk for mortgage lending. African American neighborhoods were automatically placed in the red zone with no consideration for the condition of the neighborhood.

The housing industry and mortgage lenders used coded language through these maps to map out areas with large Black populations. By zoning non-white neighborhoods as hazardous, lenders were able to deny loans to African American people. While Black people could not live in White neighborhoods, they now, also couldn't get loans for houses in non-White areas.<sup>11</sup>

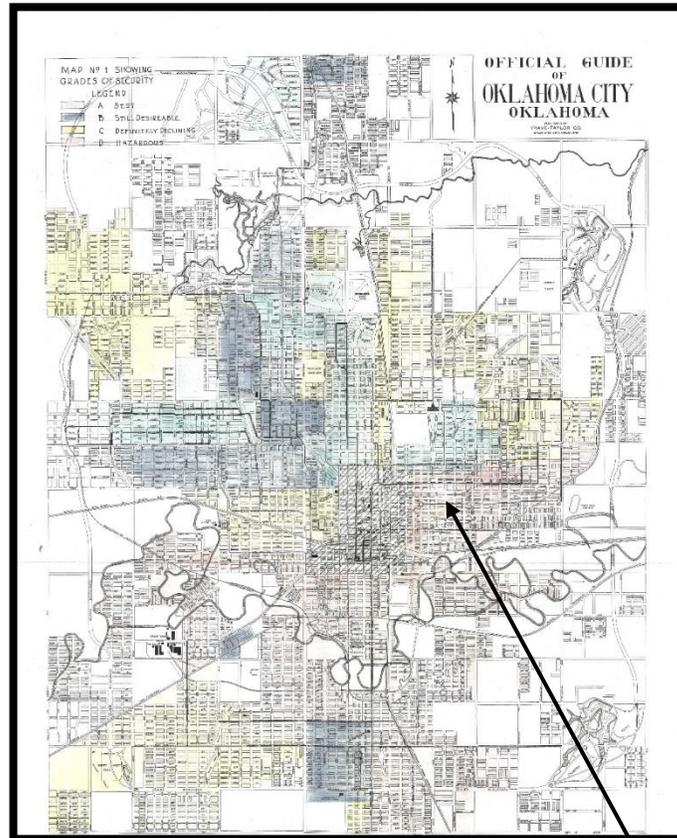
"Federal housing policy simply blocked African Americans from accessing real estate capital, leading to the creation of segregated mass suburbia and, neighborhood by neighborhood, opened residents to opportunity and wealth accumulation or closed citizens off from the American dream."

- Mapping Inequality Project



<sup>11</sup> "Oklahoma City." *Mapping Inequality*. Map: Poppe, Nathan.

# Oklahoma City Redlining Map



**GREEN = A,  
Best, lowest  
lending risk**

**BLUE = B,  
Still  
Desirable**

**YELLOW =  
C, Definitely  
Declining**

**RED = D,  
Hazardous,  
biggest  
lending risk**

Deep Deuce  
Red Zone

"The maps had a huge impact and put the federal government on record as judging that African Americans, simply because of their race, were poor risks."

– Richard Rothstein<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Rothstein, Richard (P 64).  
Map: "Oklahoma City." *Mapping Inequality*.

**BLIGHT  
SLUMS  
HAZARDOUS  
RISK  
INVASION  
GHETTO**

"Slum clearance, however, had great political appeal. The notion that the inner-city environment trapped the poor evoked a sympathetic response across the political spectrum. To rally support for a national public housing program, public housing advocates inveighed against the evils of slums and promised that good public housing would eliminate them. 'It may have been the wrong technique,' one leading public houser wrote to Bauer afterward, 'but it did get housing started. I wonder where we'd be today if we had not scared (the hell) out of people about conditions in the slums, and would have just talked about beautiful little cottages with white picket fences around them' (Bohn 1941)."<sup>13</sup>

- Alexander von Hoffman

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<sup>13</sup> Hoffman, Alexander von (P 4)

A 1963 article in the Lawton Constitution features an interview with Raymond Rebsamen, the president of the Arkansas Urban Progress Association, who states, “urban renewal is good for business and good for any citizen in any city that undertakes the Urban Renewal Program.” This section about the city shows how business-focused individuals draw meaning and value in a city from its economic standing. Stating that downtowns are “dying” and must “rebuild to survive,” creates rigid binaries where the presence of poor neighborhoods equals death and despair while urban renewal equals happy, quality life and growth. The language continues this narrative

MANY of the large cities in the east are losing population and actually dying. Their downtowns are becoming slum areas. They must rebuild to survive. We are more fortunate. Southwestern cities have been gaining population at a rapid rate. So let us use urban renewal to our best advantage and save what we have.

Cities are more than places — they are part of the working capital of our economy. They are not havens of protection against the enemy — they are wide-open market places, dependent on trade for their prosperity.

Please don't misunderstand me. When I say "city" I don't mean only that area held within the arbitrary boundaries of the city limits. I mean the organic whole, the metropolitan area, which is dependent on the city.

Whether you live inside the city or not — whether your store or plant is inside the city or in the fringes, your prosperity depends to a large degree on the economic welfare of the city.

So, if "Urban Renewal is good business and is good FOR business," then it's good for YOUR business and YOUR city.

Urban renewal is good FOR business because it stimulates trade, the lifeblood of cities.

Lawton Constitution 1963

with words like “let us use urban renewal to our best advantage and save what we have,” and “if Urban Renewal is good business and is good FOR business, then it’s good for YOUR business and YOUR city.” This article fails to mention race or displacement once. The affected communities are completely erased from the narrative of urban renewal and the program is justified through language that paints the government and businesses as saviors of dying cities and “slums.” It solely focuses on the economic advantages of urban renewal, implying the economy is the most valuable aspect of a city. Rebsamen states in the article, “Cities are more than places—they are part of the working capital of our economy.” In America, the economy is often seen as the heartbeat of a city, preventing people from seeing and treating communities within it as more valuable than the buildings they live/work in and the profits they

produce. This is easier to do when African American people have been dehumanized since the start of American slavery.<sup>14</sup> Post-Civil War, African American communities had to depend more on each other because they were excluded from opportunities, money, and equality. This made their communities even stronger and more unified because they had to depend on each other's support to survive, as

<sup>14</sup> Goff, Phillip A (P 292-306)

well as needed each other to further the fight for equality<sup>15</sup>. The urban renewal narrative convinced the country that there was no value in the powerful ecosystems of the communities they destroyed because of the condition of the places around them. The overall narrative also failed to mention the racist role those in power played to create the conditions that caused slum-like conditions that they now state they need to save the people from<sup>16</sup>. Underneath all of the layers of highly intentional language used in marketing urban renewal was the driving motivation to further segregation and destroy the progress African American citizens were making toward equality, financial independence, and success.

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<sup>15</sup> Fullilove, Mindy Thompson (P 27-33)

<sup>16</sup> Rothstein, Richard (P 122)

# Root Shock

**Definition: Traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of one's emotional ecosystem**

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**Each community has its own unique emotional ecosystem that cannot be perfectly recreated once destroyed. This ecosystem attaches people to the external environment around them.**

## URBAN RENEWAL

Due to urban renewal, a million Americans around the country had their lives disrupted, resulting in trauma, displacement, and destruction of community ecosystems

## INDIVIDUAL EFFECT

The destruction of one's community dismantles the working model of the world in an individual's mind. This completely changes how someone views the world

## COMMUNITY EFFECT

Community destruction fractures relationships between those in a neighborhood, causing its members to be scattered in new locations

## CONNECTION

Neighborhoods are so much more than buildings that provide shelter. The emotional connection community members have with their location directly influences how they perceive the world



[www.theookspace.com](http://www.theookspace.com)

ALL INFORMATION  
FROM ROOT SHOCK BY  
MINDY FULLILOVE

Mindy Thompson Fullilove's book, *Root Shock*, breaks down how urban renewal was traumatic and destructive for many communities of color. Communities make up an emotional ecosystem which is unique to the individuals that engage with the external environment around them and connect with each other. Additionally, because of the adversity African American people faced at that time, community life was even more important and connected to aid in each other's survival.<sup>17</sup>

The actions of the government prove to be intentional in trying to dismantle these communities so that they cannot help each other succeed. The government removed over a million people from their homes/communities around the country and made no effort to help them find new places to live while also actively limiting their opportunities to move other places through segregation laws, racial covenants, redlining, and other tactics.<sup>18</sup>

Calculated rhetoric convinced American people that urban renewal was positive and necessary. By calling Black neighborhoods "slums," and "blight," they distracted from the fact that valuable humans and communities existed in these spaces deemed blighted.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Fullilove, Mindy Thompson (P 11-12)

<sup>18</sup> Fullilove, Mindy Thompson (P 79-81)

<sup>19</sup> Hoffman, Alexander (P 2-5)

*Why do you think segregation is still so prevalent here?*

"I think a lot of that, to me, it comes from the fear of the unknown. Just like, "oh my gosh, I don't know what it would be like to live next to a Black person." You know, but it's funny to me, growing up, me and my sister, we were like the first Black home that a lot of people had been to. Which was still weird to me. They would come into my house like, "oh, it's normal." What did you think it was going to be?"

Soreeta Hinds, OKC Business Owner  
of Brown Cow Bakeshop  
(Community Interview)

**COMMUNITY  
HOME  
BELOVED  
CONNECTED  
CREATIVE**

"The schools [in the Eastside of OKC] are being so poorly financed and don't have textbooks. There are a lot of holes in the system. And so, that all by itself is how you suffocate a community. And once you suffocate a community, and you make it where they can't breathe, they can't live well, there's no grocery store—then nobody lives there, and it makes an open market for investors. Which is just unfortunate. If people were just given more opportunity to shop, buy, and build their neighborhoods, they would. But you can't strip all the resources from an area."

Krystle Robinson-Hershey,  
OKC Business Owner  
of Sage & Elm Apothecary  
(Community Interview)

# Deep Deuce History

At the start of the 20th century, many Black families moved to downtown OKC to seek warehouse jobs. In response, residential segregation laws were created (this was one of the first cities to create residential segregation laws) to prevent African American people from living past 2nd street.<sup>20</sup> The area that became Deep Deuce was forged out of racism that created physical barriers between White and Black communities.<sup>21</sup>

Visit [www.theOKspace.com](http://www.theOKspace.com) for more about Deep Deuce's history.

Scan the QR Code to view video, "SOA: Endangered Black History - Deep Deuce"



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<sup>20</sup> Arnold, Anita G.

<sup>21</sup> Payne, Adam A., and Alyson L. Greiner (P 1)

## Deep Deuce, Early 1930s<sup>22</sup>



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<sup>22</sup> "Deep Deuce in Early 1930s"

# Black-Owned Deep Deuce Businesses<sup>23</sup>

**HISTORIC DEEP DEUCE COMMUNITY**

Ossie Lawson Barber 226 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street	Le Ora Hodge Beauty Salon 830 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	The Scales Cafe 322 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Clover Leaf Barber Shop 307-A NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Lyons Beauty Salon 316 N. Central	Midway Inn Café 330 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Finn's Men's Furnishings 309 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Nilar Jewel Beauty College 816 NE 5 <sup>th</sup> St.	Elpatio Eat Shop 803 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.
Up-To-Daters Club 2008 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Gene's Beauty Shoppe 615 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Ideal Eat Shop 837 NE 8 <sup>th</sup> St.
Roanoke Bar 312 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Dream Girls Beauty Shop 326 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Blue Bird Tea Room 331 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Jumpsy Bar 1820 NE 8 <sup>th</sup> St.	Glamour Manor Beauty Salon 718 N. Bath	Pulliams Bar-B-Q 538 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.
Jax Beer 1618 NE 5 <sup>th</sup>	Eunicia Marie Beauty Shoppe 829 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Berry's Texas Bar-B-Q 515 N. Gear
Rendezvous Bear & Lunch 306 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Nellie B. Ellis Beauty Shoppe Corner 2 <sup>nd</sup> & Stiles	Moten's Hickory Pit 810 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.
Louie's Supper Club 730 N. Bath	East Side Cafe 310 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Bolton's Southern BBQ 1100 NE 7 <sup>th</sup> St.
Ruby's Grill & Dance Hall 322 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.		
Forest Park Nite Club 2401 NE 10 <sup>th</sup> St.		

Black-owned businesses during Deep Deuce's peak era in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Canton Hotel and Coffee Shop 200 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Wilson Hotel 200 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Son's Grocery 534 NE 3 <sup>rd</sup> St.
The Monarch Hotel 200 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	C. B. Parker Music Teacher 331 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Eagle Wing Hotel 200 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
The Littlepage Hotel 219 N. Central	A & B Grocery 531 N. Bath	Wilson Grocery 1218 NE 6 <sup>th</sup> St.
The Youngblood Hotel East 4 <sup>th</sup> and Stiles	Food Center Grocery 921 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Calvary Baptist Church 201 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Lusters Modern Hotel 3402 NE 23 <sup>rd</sup> St.	Wehba's Food Store 901 NE 6 <sup>th</sup> St.	Harry's Food Market 429 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.
Ida Turner, Hairdresser 315 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street	Ralph's Grocery 914 NE 8 <sup>th</sup> St.	Honest John Meat Market & Grocery 800 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.
Hotel Terminal 911 W. California	Bob's Food Market 921 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Pythian Journal Publishing Co. 325 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Standard Life Ins. Co. 330 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Sellers Food Market 600 N. Nebraska	Carr's Barber & Beauty Shop 322 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
323 Club Hotel 323 NE 1 <sup>st</sup> St.	East Side Mercantile 900 E. 6 <sup>th</sup> St.	Wilson Hugh Barber 312 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street
I Cove Pharmacy 330 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Norwood Food Market 805 N. Eastern	Golden Oak Barber Shop 327 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.

<sup>23</sup> All images of this list come from Moore, Kendrick (P 55-58)

Bills Cleaners 718 N. Bath St.	East Side Music Co. 308 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street	Dan M. Moore, MD 522 NE 3 <sup>rd</sup> St.
Dinks Parrish Laundry 14 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Ferguson Music Co. 309 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Dr. W. L. Haywood 319 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street
Best Dressed Cleaners 312 N. Central	Herbert's Records Corner 17 <sup>th</sup> & Eastern	Dr. W. L. Moore 315 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Alex The Clothes Doctor 302 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Randolph Drug Co. 331 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Dr. I. W. Young 330 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street
Elliott Cleaners 610 N. Laird	Thomas Prescription Shop 307-B NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Dr. Baxter Whitby 548 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.
Pittman Lorenzo Taxi 310 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Sanford Drug Co. 301 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Victor Lodge No. 248 JPOE of W 322 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street
5 <sup>th</sup> Street Cleaners 925 E. 5 <sup>th</sup> St.	B & W Five & Dime 1828 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Rolfe Funeral Home 1020 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.
American Legion Hall 313 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Bethel Drug Store 330 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Blanton & Butler Funeral Directors 311 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Box Studios & Printers 815 NE 8 <sup>th</sup> St.	McKerson's Prescriptions 1233 NE 6 <sup>th</sup> St.	McKay Funeral Home 928 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.
Hookers Studio 220 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Lottie Drug Corner Lottie & 8 <sup>th</sup>	Dawson Funeral Home 1001 NE 6 <sup>th</sup> St.
E.W.'s Record Shop 610 N. Laird	Toliver Drug Co. 901 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Edwards Funeral Home 300 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.

New Magic Shoe Shop 326 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	North East Real Estate 705 N. Lottie	Okla. Grand Lodge K of P 206 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Stonewall Shoe Shop 1163 E 8 <sup>th</sup> St.	Midway Real Estate 706 NE 5 <sup>th</sup> St.	South Town Lodge No. 23 K of P 206 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
The Black Dispatch 324 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Strong's Auto Service 815 N. Lottie	St. Charles Lodge No. 28 K of P 206 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Dr. J. T. Jeter 418 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Russell's Service Station 400 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St	Rising Star Court No. 93 206 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Climax News Stand 317 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Mathues Service Station & Garage 1023 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Lilly White Rose Court No. 145 206 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.
Peoples Church 432 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Avriett's Garage & Service Station 1426 NE 4 <sup>th</sup> St.	Tiger Temple No. 1 Knight of Omar 206 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St
Parkers News Stand & Delicatessen 307 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Richardson's Conoco 400 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Co-Operative Mercantile Co. 313 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street
North Carolina Mutual Life Ins. Co. 331 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St.	Pythian Assembly Hall K of P 206 NE 2 <sup>nd</sup> St	

The community had an African American Chamber of Commerce during the 1930's and 1940's. The president was A. D. Mathues and was located in the Slaughter Building on northeast 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.

## 2nd Street, from the 1920s through 1950s, was the center of Black business and entertainment



"By day it served as a business district with barbershops, doctors' offices, beauty shops, clothiers, restaurants, a newspaper office, a cab company, lawyers' offices, a drugstore, a movie theater, a hardware store, and many other businesses, depending on the decade. At night Deep Deuce turned into a cultural center for African Americans, with

nightclubs, supper clubs, and a legendary dance hall featuring outstanding local talent, many of whom gained national acclaim, such as Jimmy Rushing and Charlie Christian."<sup>24</sup>



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<sup>24</sup> "Deep Deuce." *OK Travel*

# Modern Deep Deuce<sup>25</sup>



<sup>25</sup> All Images taken by Anna Doré



# Historic Preservation of Deep Deuce

Before the 1960s, there were not any official attempts to preserve African American history in America. The Oklahoma Historical Society ignored donations from the Black community, leaving Black communities responsible for preserving their own history. The inauthentic ways that cities go about preserving history for neighborhoods like Deep Deuce parallel the same issues with the methods of gentrification: the culture and community of the neighborhood are excluded, and African American communities are not given a seat at the table for decision making.

What makes a neighborhood a neighborhood? Or a community a community? Does preserving the buildings/architecture of an area and putting up signs stating, “Deep Deuce Historic Jazz District” make it Deep Deuce? Mindy Fullilove’s book, *Root Shock*, examines the effects of urban renewal and the destruction of communities of color. She writes “places—buildings, neighborhoods, cities, nations—are not simply bricks and mortar that provide us shelter.” Fullilove explains how humans become connected to their locations, and that the spaces around us are filled with emotions, life, and memories. When an individual’s neighborhood is destroyed, they experience root shock. Fullilove states that even if a neighborhood is recreated to mirror its predecessor, it can never repair the damage the destruction caused.<sup>26</sup> This begs the question: is it appropriate to advertise modern Deep Deuce as “Deep Deuce Historic Jazz District” when the original Black neighborhood has been destroyed? And replaced by White businesses that are now profiting off of the name, history, and aesthetic of the original community, while also actively excluding African American people from the neighborhood?

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<sup>26</sup> Fullilove, Mindy Thompson (P 10)

"This once was an African  
American community...  
it doesn't look like it  
anymore, does it?"<sup>27</sup>

- Willie McNeal

Deep Deuce  
YouTube Video



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<sup>27</sup> McNeal, Willie

What does it mean to historically **preserve** an African American neighborhood in an American city? What kind of meaning does the word "**preserve**" have when there was no effort made to **preserve** the original history simply because it was Black history? When the same type of people that called the neighborhood "blight" now wear its history like it belongs to them? When the **preservation** excludes Black business owners and Black culture? When the city continues to hold back resources from the Eastside community and gentrify the area without trying to help the community that is already there?

# Local Websites Marketing Deep Deuce

When it comes to tourism and marketing for businesses in Deep Deuce, the people creating this content heavily use the neighborhood's African American history to draw people into the area. They proudly describe it as historically significant, a center for jazz, and a hub of African American culture.

Oklahoma City's Deep Deuce district, a hotbed of jazz music and African-American culture in the mid-20th century, has since transformed into a true downtown neighborhood of restaurants, late night hot spots, art galleries and more.

[Adventureroad.com](#)

Your new apartment home is in the heart of Downtown Oklahoma City, just a few blocks from the Bricktown Ballpark, Bricktown Canal and the Chesapeake Arena. This is America's original jazz district, home to amazing history and exciting nightlife.

[Deep Deuce at Bricktown Apartments](#)

## DEEP DEUCE

The Deep Deuce District, located just north of Bricktown, was the heart of Oklahoma City's African American neighborhood in the 1920s and '30s, and during that time, the district was known for its incredible jazz music. Music legends Jimmy Rushing and Charlie Christian both called Deep Deuce home, as did Ralph Ellison, the author of *Invisible Man*.

[Visitokc.com](#)

**Known for its African-American heritage**, Deep Deuce is recapturing its glory days as a vibrant urban neighborhood. During the 1940s and 1950s, the area was a hotbed of jazz music and African-American culture. Today, the neighborhood is undergoing a renaissance with many large-scale apartments and condominiums.

The district is also now home to cozy neighborhood restaurants, clubs and art galleries.

[view website >](#)

[DeepDeuceDistrict.com](#)

# Local Websites Marketing Deep Deuce

## DEEP DEUCE IN OKC

The Deep Deuce district is located in downtown Oklahoma City, roughly between Main Street and NE 4th Street, from Broadway to I-235.

Known for its African-American heritage, Deep Deuce is recapturing its glory days as a vibrant urban neighborhood. During the 1920s and 1930s, the area was a hotbed of jazz music and African-American culture. The neighborhood has undergone a renaissance with many large-scale apartments and condominium. The cozy neighborhood offers a great walkable environment with a variety of restaurants, pet friendly businesses, art galleries, and an ever-growing list of new amenities

Deep Deuce business owners and stakeholders have recently begun meeting to organize the district, create events, and to promote the area. The group meets quarterly on the second Wednesday of the month at 3pm at Artspace at Untitled. The meetings are open to the public. For more information, call Downtown OKC Partnership at (405) 235-3500 or email us.

[Apartments.com](#)

### Explore Deep Deuce like a Local

Deep Deuce is recapturing its glory days as a vibrant urban neighborhood. Today, Deep Deuce is a popular urban housing attraction and has several neighborhood hangouts, like [Deep Deuce Grill](#), [Leaf + Bean](#), [Belle Kitchen](#), [Wheeze the Juice](#) and [Anchor Down](#), which is a gourmet corn dog eatery (yes, we said gourmet) located in a shipping container. Trust us, it is worth trying.

[Visitokc.com](#)

## EXPERIENCE OKC'S DEEP DEUCE

Deep Deuce carries tremendous historical significance as a center for jazz music and African American culture in Oklahoma City.

[Visitokc.com](#)

The excerpt below comes from a 2018 blog post titled, "The 5 Best Neighborhoods in Oklahoma City." It starts by describing how to fit in the area. The first statement speaks to a large part of the area being home to businesspeople, with the iron and lint roller implying that they are well put together and professional. The third qualification states, "Aren't focused so much on knowing your neighborhood as much as you are on knowing yourself."<sup>28</sup> This shows a disconnection between the current population and the actual neighborhood. Similar to the other websites, descriptions of the area always vaguely explain surface-level qualities of Deep Deuce, never mentioning race or segregation as part of the history even though it played a huge part in the creation, evolution, and fall of the community. Although the purpose of these travel blurbs and blogs are not to dive into the complexities of America's racial history, there is still a subtle erasure of the truth. Even [deepdeucedistrict.com](http://deepdeucedistrict.com), a website about the area, makes no mention of anything about race or segregation.

You'll fit right in if you:

- Own an iron, lint roller, business suit and a Keurig and use them often
- Are on a fixed budget but have goals for financial growth and job stability
- Aren't focused so much on knowing your neighborhood as much as you are on knowing yourself

From the 1920s until the 1940s Deep Deuce, an Oklahoma City neighborhood bordering the downtown area, was **one of the largest African American communities in Oklahoma** and was the place to be if you wanted to experience jazz music at its finest.

Expansion and construction projects for Oklahoma City and major highways surrounding the metroplex left the Deep Deuce community scattered by the 1960s and the neighborhoods proximity to downtown made it a destination for upwardly mobile business professionals.

Most Deep Deuce residents live in low rise apartment buildings and condos. The current cultural renaissance of Oklahoma City is giving way to a revival and celebration of historic communities like Deep Deuce, making this the perfect place to enjoy both work and play.

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<sup>28</sup> Harris, Nazerene

Deep Deuce was not always desired or sought after by the city. This page from the Oklahoma City African American Discovery Guide talks about 2nd Street being treated like a "step-child" by the city. Though there were passionate people interested in preserving and restoring the district in the past, they were unable to get the support they needed.<sup>29</sup>



*This is what the Deep Deuce may have looked like if restored.*



N.S.S.R.C.  
P.O. BOX 1432  
OKC, OK 73101

**LET'S HISTORICALLY PRESERVE  
N.E. 2nd ST. BUSINESS DISTRICT**

*Bumper Sticker*

E.S.D. Associates was interested in the "Deep Deuce." They propose to restore the old brick structures in the block between Stiles and Central, creating a modern center for boutiques, restaurants, specialty shops and entertainment spots. These buildings were two stories and the second levels were to be used as offices.

E.S.D. Associates purchased a substantial amount of property on the Deep Deuce. But, because of lack of funding, the proposal was never finished. According to court records, Gary Holmsley, attorney and partner of the E.S.D. Associates, sold most of the property to Craig Brown. A newspaper article dated November 2, 1979, in the Journal Record, states the N.E. 2nd Street Re-development Corporation's president, Melvin Luster, accused the city of treating this district like a "step child." "Urban renewal passed over N.E. 2nd Street district and never touched us," says Luster.

There were other proposals made to save the N.E. 2nd Street district. The Renaissance Developers - a partnership with Dr. Charles Biscoe and Royal Office Products - Gary Royal, owner. (Source: Melvin Luster Estate)

A group that called themselves the North East Second Street Re-development Corporation, put out this bumper sticker in 1975 to gain financial and community support to save the business district on second street. Some of their other projects were: Centennial Expressway, Lincoln Bank, Bricktown, and Presbyterian Hospital. All was financed and developed except Northeast 2nd Street. Every financial institution in the city turned them down and even threatened to take Urban Renewal to court. At that time, all the buildings on the *Deep Deuce* were still standing.

31

<sup>29</sup> Moore, Kendrick (P 31)

This letter shows the distrust between a member of the local African American community and those who engage with Black history. It states, "They are asking us to bring any history we have about the deep deuce area, and turn it over to the white man that don't give a "hoot" about our history unless he can make a dollar." This expresses the mistrust of White people exploiting and profiting off of Black history.<sup>30</sup>

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN

DON'T GET TRICKED AND FOOLED AGAIN  
OKLAHOMA CITY

The two stories on channel 5 were the sorriest stories they have every produced on our history about the deep deuce. The same people that took our land on second street and surrounding areas, then tore it down, want us to believe they have an interest in our history. They are asking us to bring any history we have about the deep deuce area, and turn it over to the white man that don't give a "hoot" about our history unless he can make a dollar. If he is truly interested in the African American, the apartments they are building on the deep deuce will not be "up scaled" apartments. They have a few of our African American leaders and citizens still enslaved. If you have any history you would like preserved for our future, take it to the Oklahoma Historical Society or to the Ralph Ellison Library.

Phone Number for the History Society is: 522-5206  
Phone number for the Ralph Ellison Library is: 424-1437

Or contact Mrs. Clara Luper at the Freedom Center

Thank you very much  
A concerned african american citizen  
Claude Britt

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<sup>30</sup> Flyer preserved at Oklahoma Historical Society

"I noticed that a lot of businesses that were either in Bricktown or Deep Deuce were pushed out. Whether that was through rent increases, just modifying the area—they weren't allowed to stay. Prices weren't affordable or there were complaints on things like, a noise complaint, for example. But if you have bands playing at a facility, then it's not going to be like a little quiet place. And I think that removing the culture from Deep Deuce was important. And that meant making it look more suburban, including the noise level, and the type of people they decided they wanted to be a part of Deep Deuce. And I think that's unfortunate because it takes away from the culture. Kinda like going to New Orleans and just seeing pictures of jazz musicians and not hearing jazz music in the streets."

Krystle Robinson-Hershey,  
OKC Business Owner  
of Sage & Elm Apothecary  
(Community Interview)



**Deep Deuce at Bricktown Apartments uses jazz as a marketing theme for their apartments, stating on the window that they have "jazzy new interiors."**

They want the history

They want the buildings

They want the jazz

They want the musicians

They want the authors

They want the streets

**They do not want  
the culture or the people**

Chaya Fletcher speaks about her experiences as the only Black business owner (at the time) in Deep Deuce. Her restaurant, Urban Roots, has since closed its doors in 2015:

"It's different being the only Black business owner considering the history. We weren't readily accepted, you know, I think the neighborhood has done a really good job saying, it's Deep Deuce, all that jazz, and uses that history to sorta make it a vibrant cool area, but there's not much homage played into that history. Besides the placards on the sidewalk, we don't have any sorta interaction with how that history plays into what is happening now...I don't think it's talked about as much as it should be. And I don't think we honor it like we should. For me it's our sense of purpose, it's our history. We don't teach it in our schools, our children don't know. If you don't know where you come from, you don't know where you're going."<sup>31</sup>

Chaya Fletcher Interview



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<sup>31</sup> Lackmeyer, Steve. "Amidst Deep Deuce Revival, Fears of a Lost History Emerge."

"My sister actually owned a restaurant, Urban Roots. She opened it in [2010]. It was on Walnut in Deep Deuce. We did have a lot of challenges with surrounding businesses coming into that area. Often times, the police would be called about noise, even though they have live music as well. Or like the tax commission or ABLE commission would be called. So, it was very apparent that we were not wanted in that area."

LaTasha Timberlake,  
Owner of Lillian Timbers Farm  
(Community Interview)

Looking at 20th century history, Oklahoma City's White communities, the local, state, and federal government, business owners, and the housing industry all worked together to enforce segregation. They denigrated the neighborhood, calling it blight and a slum, even though it was thriving and self-sustained at its prime. They used language to dehumanize African American families, calling them dangerous and a financial risk. They used urban renewal to destroy 713 homes for one project and built a highway through the middle of the community. They didn't care what happened next, providing little to no support for those forced out of their homes and neighborhood. They didn't want equality, so they used land as a way to keep African American people out of White neighborhoods and cut them off from the resources they needed.

How can historical preservation of an African American neighborhood be done better and more authentically in your opinion?

"It should, and have to, include businesses of color...It's like taking Greenwood in Tulsa and turning it into an all-White neighborhood and area, when historically that's not what Greenwood was. Same thing with Deep Deuce is what's happened. I think that businesses of color should be allowed to be there. I think as far as that plan, there should be rent on loan purchase agreements that are much more flexible and affordable in the purchasing of those options for those tenants. Because if you raise the rent an exuberant amount, for example, \$5000 a month, but you have forced them to take their business elsewhere where they can't generate that kind of revenue fast enough to meet the rent, then how can they survive? And [survive] well? I think there should be a financial break there and give them a chance to grow in order to be successful."

Krystle Robinson-Hershey,  
OKC Business Owner  
of Sage & Elm Apothecary  
(Community Interview)

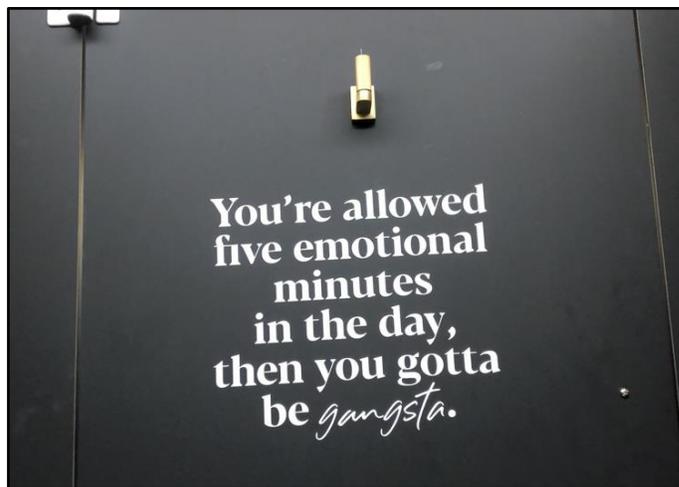
# Eastside Oklahoma City

Deep Deuce was once the largest African American community in the city; now, it serves a mostly White population. Deep Deuce is connected to the Eastside, which is Northeast of downtown. It is currently a predominantly Black neighborhood, though African American residents are now spread throughout the city and out into nearby suburbs. The White, affluent population's migration back into the city from the suburbs has pushed lower-class citizens and people of color further out through the process. Gentrification has started moving inch by inch into the Eastside with the same goals it had for Deep Deuce. The Eastside is proof that those with influence on urban change still weaponize land by restricting resources to the community, which causes vulnerability and destruction to the people, land, and structures. Though the city and others involved claim they are listening to the needs of the community and want to help, they still prevent the Black community from accessing resources to meet its most basic needs, like access to food. The vulnerability of the area has allowed gentrification to easily and cost-effectively occur in a way that benefits outsiders more than the actual community itself.

"My parents are late 60's and so, you know, I think the major thing that is talked about is the noticing of how the neighborhood has changed in terms of demographics. In some of the streets, you know, there are no longer any African American families left, but then also, the property values, the things that are coming in and the physical changes in the neighborhood, are not in aesthetic with the homes that have historically been there. So, the entire look of the neighborhood has changed. Even my own neighborhood off 6th and Lottie, I was driving over there the other day when I left the urban garden lot that we are working on and I didn't even recognize it because of the buildings that have been put there."

LaTasha Timberlake,  
Owner of Lillian Timber Farms  
(Community Interview)

Though gentrification in the city has aimed to erase Black culture in the urban landscape, subtle appropriation of Black culture occurs throughout the "revitalized" parts of the city. The overall White population seems to enjoy small bites of Black culture, yet still fear Black communities and contribute to the destruction and takeover of their neighborhoods. The problem is not merely hating the presence of White people in African American neighborhoods. The problem is contributing to and ignoring racism while not respecting or preserving the culture of the community that has been there for the past century. An even bigger issue is that so many Oklahoman's cannot, and will not, see the problem for what it is or acknowledge that it exists.

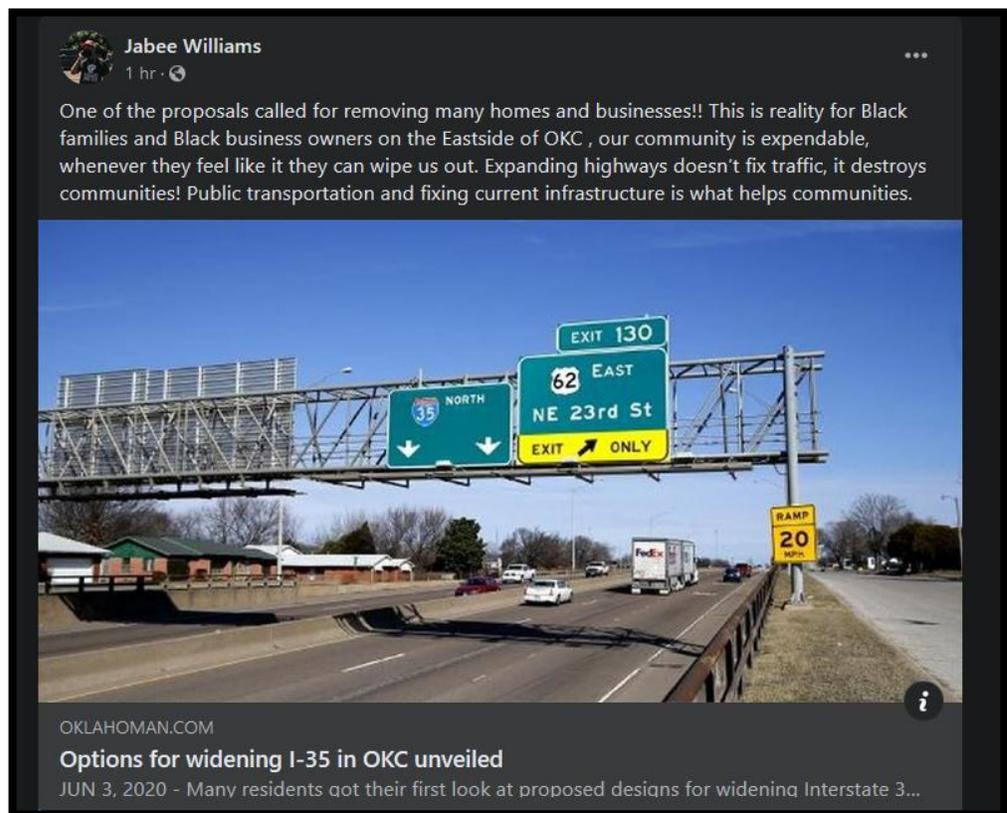


Bathroom stall at local, Midtown restaurant cafeteria, "The Collective."

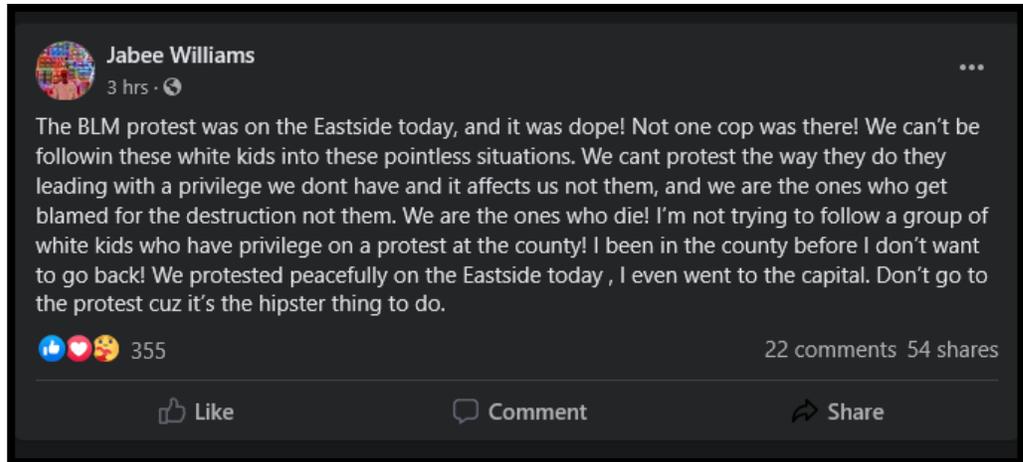


Parking sign uses phrase "Yo Homies" outside of local clothing shop, "Opolis."

Jabee Williams is a well-known community member in Oklahoma City. He is a businessman, activist, rapper, artist, and much more. He uses his platform to advocate for, and celebrate, Black culture and his community. He has also used social media to challenge the ways in which gentrification has occurred in his neighborhood.



Williams, Jabee. Post about Oklahoman Article.



Williams, Jabee. Post about BLM Protest.

A lot of Black people on the East side [of Oklahoma City], we feel like the East side has always been a cool place to live and be. It's always been the spot for us. It's always been a cool place to live for us.

If you want to displace people, the first thing you do is you take away their resources. You take away their food so they have to move somewhere else to get it. [So that happened.](#)

And then for families who are moving into a new place, a new neighborhood, or new community, the first thing that they look at when they move to a new house is schools. So if you're trying to attract a certain demographic of people and you've already taken their food so this demographic of people is forced to be displaced and then with the [changing of the Northeast High School](#) – the picture that you're painting, regardless of what you say, is the beginning stages of gentrification.

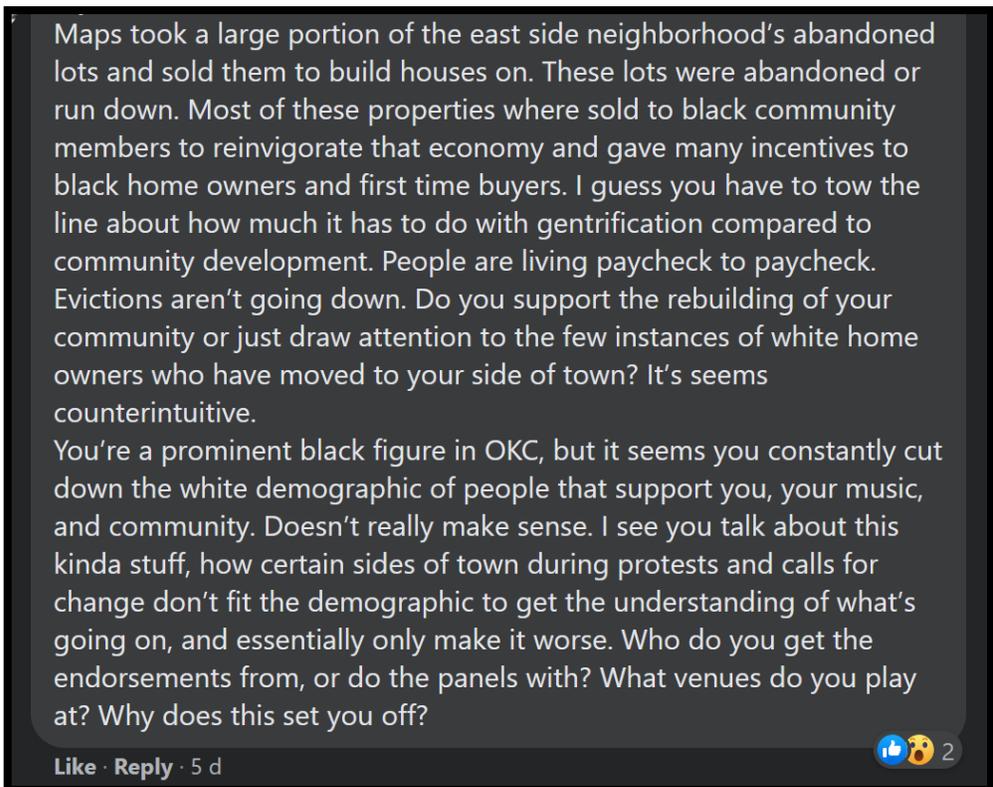
Viriyapah, Matthew.

In this Facebook post, Jabee calls out the way White people treat the Eastside as if it is trendy, yet they do not respect the culture of the community or aid the struggles the community members face. Stating, "like it's so cool u...discovered this new land" shows how disconnected the White population is from the Eastside community.



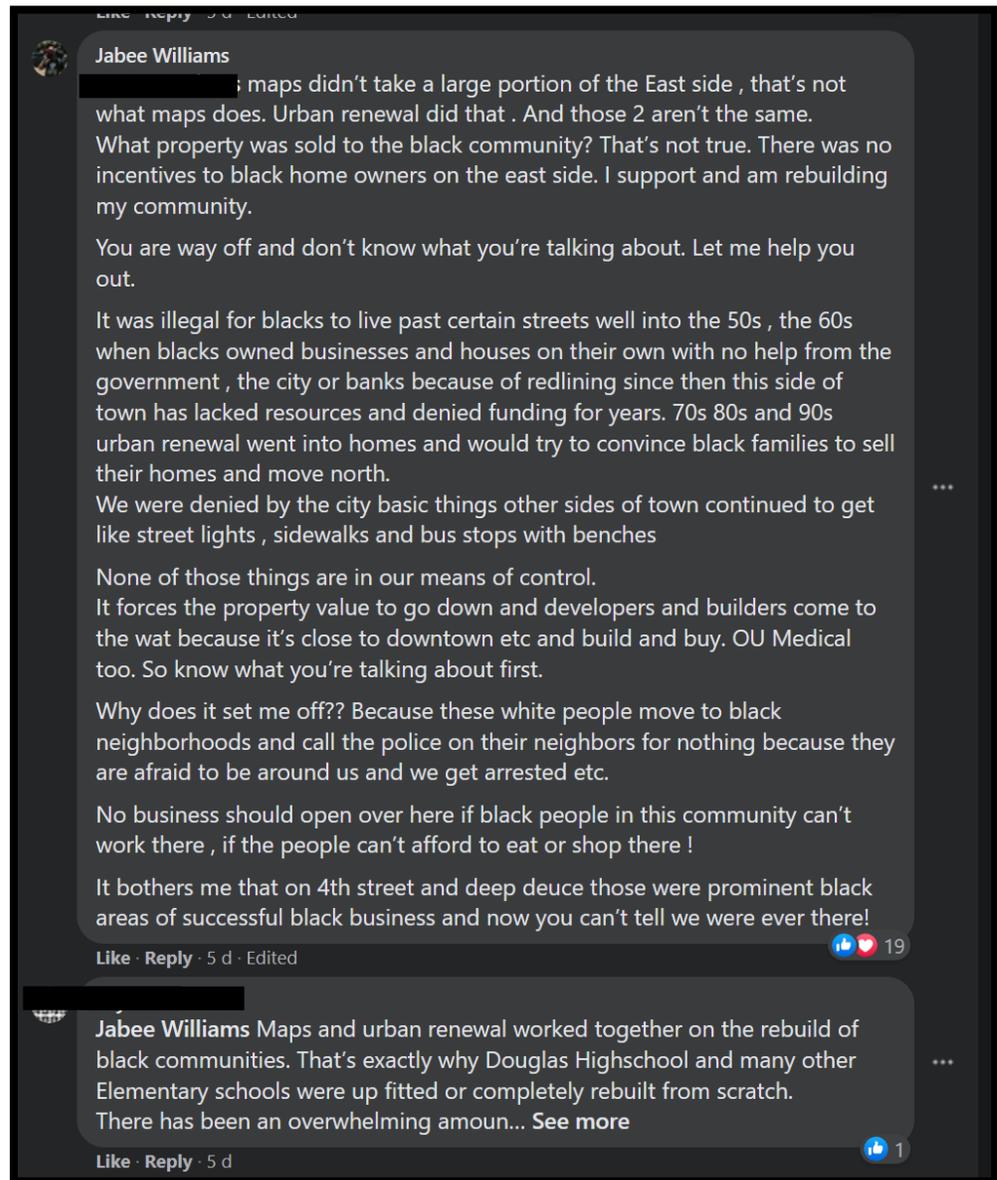
Williams, Jabee. Post and Comments About White People Moving to NEOKC.

This comment on Jabee's post about White people moving to the Eastside perfectly shows the erasure of racism from America's history of urban change. Not only does this commenter find Jabee's post to be disrespectful as a "prominent black figure in OKC," but he is convinced that gentrification and urban renewal is synonymous with "community development." As mentioned in the Urban Renewal section of this project, a community is much more than the buildings and businesses around it. Many people seem to only see new buildings as development of the Eastside community, yet fail to see how severely the city has, and continues to, let down the existing community by ignoring its needs and refusing to invest in the people that are already there.



Williams, Jabee. Post and Comments About White People Moving to NEOKC.

Jabee does an excellent job breaking down the true history, yet this person, like many others similar to him, refuses to listen to the Black people speaking about their own community and from their own history and experiences.



Williams, Jabee. Post and Comments About White People Moving to NEOKC.

Erasure of the truth about racism in this city, state, and country runs so deep that for many, it's easier to live with willful ignorance, rather than listen to those who have actually experienced it. Even after Jabee shared several facts, this man continues with strong defensive statements in several comments, arguing that urban renewal helped rebuild Black communities. This is not true. Though he provides some sources that do nothing to give credibility to his argument, he asks Jabee if he would like him to pull more examples. Jabee replies, "You pulling examples? I'm saying pull the black people, black families that they helped in the community?!? You don't know any!"

If you take away anything from this project, let it be this: You need to actually listen to Black people. You need to believe Black people. How can we stop the violent effects of racism if we don't even believe they are happening?

"The go-to answer, if somebody asks you about—they do training about this—if someone asks you, "hey is this area safe? Is this a ghetto area?" the way that you're supposed to respond to those kinds of inquiries is to say, "here's a website, you can go look at crime rates." That's our official response to someone with prejudice, most likely, asking about the state of the neighborhood. You can go look at crime rates anywhere. That is something that they teach us locally, that's the only thing that we're supposed to say, which doesn't really solve the problem at the forefront, which is that our buyer is afraid of living in this area because of stereotypes and things that they've been told...we should be able to point out the dangers of a buyer even asking that. Squashing it in its step. Or asking them, "why are you asking this? Because we've seen a lot houses in the Paseo, which isn't crime free, and you haven't asked me that. So, why when I show you something in Lincoln Terrace, why are you wondering about the crime there?"...I will say, I've worked with a lot of Edmond clients as well, and they never ask me "what's the crime in this area?" I haven't had one person in Edmond express any sort of fear about the neighborhood, or say anything like "oh, this is the good part of Edmond." There's a reason for that. People aren't afraid. They know Edmond is all White, they know Edmond doesn't have a lot of diversity at the moment. With people like that, it's going to be really hard to change their minds. We're seeing that right now with what's going on in the world. It's the people that don't have to think about it that don't."

Krista Spears, OKC Real Estate Agent,  
(Community Interview)

The Eastside community has suffered a lot due to neglect from the city and the racist actions of those with money, influence, and power. They currently lack a full-service grocery store and fresh produce in stores.<sup>32</sup> Community members have to drive several miles to reach a grocery store, which is challenging for those without a car. Oklahoma City is far from walkable and businesses are spread out. A grocery store, Homeland, is now being built in the area, though construction has not begun yet, and it is being built on the edge of the community in the gentrified area. Looking at location and the higher price point, it seems this grocery store is being built for the wealthier, new population moving into the gentrified parts of the community.<sup>33</sup>

The Black community has responded in many ways to the problems in the Eastside. Some of the people I talked with are business owners and educators, working to mentor and share resources with others. The younger generation is full of activists demanding more from leadership. Some have lost all hope in the political system, knowing from experience that politicians are all talk and no action. Farmers have stepped up to problem-solve multiple problems in the community. They understand that farming can give profitable career opportunities to people in the area; it gives the Black community a unique skill-set that could give them more autonomy over the Eastside; and most importantly, it gives the community direct access to fresh food.

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<sup>32</sup> Dickerson, Brett

<sup>33</sup> Overbey, Alaric

Gentrification in African American neighborhoods often leads to whitewashing the spaces in a community, meaning the businesses are white-centered in the way they present themselves, what they offer, and how they engage with the public. As a White person, it can be hard to notice this because whiteness is centered in most things in this country, causing it to feel normal. The destruction of the Deep Deuce and Eastside communities has led to a much smaller number of Black spaces in the area. This is seen in all of the abandoned buildings down 23rd Street. The street was once full of Black-owned businesses which contributed to the connection, self-sustainability and happiness of the community. While there are many strong, successful Black-owned businesses in the city, urban renewal and gentrification forced the Black community to spread out, changing the ways community connection occurs.

## **WHO IS BLACKSPACE?**

BlackSpace demands a present and future where Black people, Black spaces, and Black culture matter and thrive.

As a collective of Black urban planners, architects, artists, activists, and designers, we work together to protect and create Black spaces as well as push each other to excellence in our chosen professions.

The home page of the BlackSpace website states, "BlackSpace honors the lives of countless victims of this violence, we celebrate Black existence in its current form, we mourn lost Black futures. Our private homes are not safe. Our public spaces are not safe. The "justice" system must change, and it does not stop there. No landscape is neutral. Urbanists design and plan the built environments where these tragedies occur. The disciplines impacting our built environments are steeped in racism and anti-Blackness. BlackSpace challenges architects, planners, urban designers, artists, and all curators of built spaces to unlearn traditional values and rethink Manifesto-based practice. We create spaces for Black urbanists to use talent, culture and rituals to design Black futures. We continue to demand a present and future where Black people, spaces, and culture matter and thrive."

BlackSpace is a local organization that works to address one of the key problems that came out of the past century of racism, intentional community destruction and White-centered gentrification. In their manifesto, BlackSpace models how a Black space can be effectively created or restored.<sup>34</sup> Some elements of the method include connection with the people in the community, acknowledgment of racist barriers around preserving and maintaining Black spaces, and prevention of historical and cultural erasure.



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<sup>34</sup> “BlackSpace Manifesto”

# Take Action

Imbram Kendi states, "One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist." This rings true in a country that still upholds racism in all of its structures and institutions. An attitude often seen in Oklahoma is that one is not racist if they do not want to commit hate crimes. This viewpoint fails to address all of the ways a person can contribute to upholding racism in indirect, normalized, or subtle ways while going through one's day. The impact of one's actions can be racist even if the intentions are not. Expanding your point of view through education, forming respectful relationships, and supporting other communities in your city is important in fighting the deep-seeded racism in this country.

# Working Toward Anti-Racist Practices

## Educate Yourself and Give Your Resources

Read books, listen to audio books and podcasts, watch YouTube videos, find free accessible resources.

Follow activists, educators, and organizations on social media (especially local ones). LISTEN to people about their experiences.

Donate time and money. Show up to protests, local meetings, workshops, and events held by community-focused artists.

## Books to Read

The Color of Law by  
Richard Rothstein

Home Girls: A Black  
Feminist Anthology

Women Race & Class by  
Angela Y. Davis

Citizen by Claudia  
Rankine

Root Shock by Mindy  
Thompson Fullilove

## Instagram Accounts to Follow in OKC Area

Black Space OK

ACLU OK

Dream Action OK

Black Lives Matter OK

UNR Indian Territory

OKC Black Eats

The Black Times

Latinx Landia

Progressive Women OKC

Check Your Privilege

Freedom Oklahoma

Privilege to Progress

ULOKC Young  
Professionals

OCI Justice

NC4RJ in Norman

Anti-Racism Dail

# Interviews

The following interviews were conducted over the phone with community members of Oklahoma City. These interviews served as primary sources for the project in substitution of traditional, scholarly sources. This was important for multiple reasons: the voices of OKC's Eastside community has been historically underrepresented; There has been an intentional lack of preservation of Black history, thus limiting sources to pull from; Lastly, this project's main goal is to bridge the gap between education that comes from academia and education and experience that comes from the community level.

## Krystle Robinson-Hershey CEO of Sage & Elm Apothecary

*Highlights: During our conversation over the phone, we discuss the culture of the Oklahoma City Black business community, cultural erasure and historical preservation in Deep Deuce and Oklahoma City, the problematic structures of the local education system, and how the OKC Black community continues to persevere despite failed leadership and support.*

JUNE 28, 2020

Anna: Can you tell me about your business?

Krystle: Sage Apothecary is almost 2 years old. I've been making products for 7 years. I developed Sage Apothecary as a tool for a lot of people to introduce self-care to themselves and for others. It gives people time for themselves. It's necessary to their mental health journey.

It's important to me that all of the herbs I use, that they all have different cultural meanings, history, and ability. I use those to connect to others, to help them on their own journey of self-care and relaxation. And, also, for their spirituality, who they are, and who they are destined to be. Those things are very near and dear to my heart; it's been really successful for others who have worked with me. I spend a lot of time with them, one-on-one, and really discuss who they want to be because it's really important to me that the individuals lead their own journey. The journey is designed to be theirs, and I'm just here to help them along the way. Whether that's people are really stressed and having a hard time or whether it's helping someone have a healthier lifestyle, it's just a part of the journey.

Anna: What, to you, is unique about Oklahoma City?

Krystle: I think what's unique about Oklahoma City is the fact that people here are very invested in the success of others and they want others to be successful. Also, very family oriented. It's a great place to learn and grow as a child and as an adult.

Anna: Would you say there's two sides to this idea of investing in others in Oklahoma City? The last time we spoke, we talked about Deep Deuce a bit, and how you felt like Black businesses weren't welcome there. Can you tell me more about what you've seen?

Krystle: I noticed that a lot of businesses that were either in Bricktown or Deep Deuce were pushed out. Whether that was through rent increases, just modifying the area—they weren't allowed to stay. Prices weren't affordable or there were complaints on things like, a noise complaint, for example. But if you have bands playing at a facility, then it's not going to be like a little quiet place. And I think that removing the culture from Deep Deuce was important. And that meant making it look more suburban, including the noise level, and the type of people they decided they wanted to be a part of Deep Deuce. And I think that's unfortunate because it takes away from the culture. Kinda like going to New Orleans and just seeing pictures of jazz musicians and not hearing jazz music in the streets.

Anna: What does it mean to you for a space to be whitewashed or white-centered? What differences can be seen between a whitewashed space and a space that isn't whitewashed?

Krystle: I think the difference is, when a business is whitewashed or white-centered, you know, the pictures on the wall, they're not of people of color, or the pictures on the wall are of people of color, but people of color don't work there. They don't live there or conduct business there. You give the illusion of being inclusive without the tangible effects of inclusiveness. It's like loving Black culture but not Black people.

Anna: Do you think whitewashing is a problem in OKC? What are the unique ways it's happening here?

Krystle: Oh yah, absolutely. Deep Deuce is a great example, so is Bricktown. There were a few businesses that have opened in Bricktown. Over time, they were all forced to close because they either were told that, you know, they weren't allowed to be there because of the patrons they had coming into their business or things like that. So, over time, there would be these laws or rules created, these unspoken truths created, in areas that push citizens of color out.

Anna: How can historical preservation of an African American neighborhood be done better and more authentically in your opinion?

Krystle: It should, and have to, include businesses of color...It's like taking Greenwood in Tulsa and turning it into an all-white neighborhood and area, when historically that's not what Greenwood was. Same thing with Deep Deuce is what's happened. I think that businesses of color should be allowed to be there. I think as far as that plan, there should be rent on loan purchase agreements that are much more flexible and affordable in the purchasing of those options for those tenants. Because if you raise the rent an exuberant amount, for example, \$5000 a month, but you have forced them to take their business elsewhere where they can't generate that kind of revenue fast enough to meet the rent, then how can they survive? And [survive] well? I think there should be a financial break there and give them a chance to grow in order to be successful.

Anna: Can you talk a little more about the ways you feel like the city or the state has created barriers that have set up failure for businesses of people of color?

Krystle: For example, on 23rd [street], you are no longer allowed to sell things on the side of the road, whether it be potatoes, you know, it's on 23rd. I believe it's from Broadway all the way to almost, or past, Grand. With that being said, if those types of rules are put in place that people of color, in areas where they've always sold things openly to one another, whether it's cabbage or spinach or potatoes, or anything, and they've always done that, and there's rules put in place to quote-on-quote "cleanse the area" to make it more palatable for others who want to come in and purchase. I think those things are disheartening because there's people in the community trying to make a living. Closing things like grocery stores; it makes it difficult for other grocery stores to come in when you allow an abundance of dollar stores to come in. Dollar Tree, Family Dollar, Dollar General. The problem with that is once those dollar stores come in, it dismisses or deters grocery stores from wanting to come into our neighborhood because people often times will go and shop in those dollar stores for their immediate needs, which impacts the grocery store. The real question is, why are so many of those type of stores being allowed in Black areas?

Anna: Oklahoma City has a long rigid history of creating very clear segregation lines, and I think a lot of people don't realize that Oklahoma City is still extremely segregated in a lot of different areas. Especially when we look at education and the different kind of communities and neighborhoods—segregation is still happening a lot. Can you share some experiences that you have witnessed in the city where you feel like segregation has been upheld around you?

Krystle: I think you see quite a bit in the school districts. For example, when you have a better school district on one side of town than the other, people, no matter what their ethnic background, will drive to those places in order to give their children the best education possible. In Oklahoma City, finding a school district that has great values and, you know, diversity among educators, can be very difficult. So, parents went to other districts to get their children in better schools and the treatment from those schools has been very very stressful. It's been very very disrespectful, culturally insensitive. It's sad because they were driven out of their neighborhoods where different things were not enforced—the safety of the police coming into a classroom if needed and not harming people further in the situation. The schools are being so poorly financed and don't have textbooks. There are a lot of holes in the system. And so, that all by itself is how you suffocate a community. And once you suffocate a community, and you make it where they can't breathe, they can't live well, there's no grocery store—then nobody lives there, and it makes an open market for investors. Which is just unfortunate. If people were just given more opportunity to shop, buy, and build their neighborhoods, they would. But you can't strip all the resources from an area.

Anna: I think we're seeing that with the recent protests stemming from George Floyd's death. They are bringing up all of these other problems occurring in Oklahoma City. For a lot of people, it feels like the area is improving and progressing. We see the use of the words like "revitalization" a lot, but on the other side of it, there's these communities that don't have as much of a mainstream platform to talk about what's going on in their communities. Do you feel like that speaks to the cultural erasure that's going on in the city as gentrification progresses?

Krystle: Oh yah. Gentrification really feels like it was designed to bring a certain level of individuals into the fold of the community and leave others out. When you look at the places downtown, how

often do you find that people of color are able to afford those places to live? So, often times, depending upon their social and economic level of development, they can't. It's interesting because if you dig a little deeper, their grandma and their great grandmother lived in those areas. Or their property is taken over by eminent domain. So, it's really really just sad, it really is. Even if you look, not just downtown, but if you look a little further over, where OU medical center is, and how slowly but surely they bought up so much rich historical property—neighborhoods that once people frowned upon to live in, and now they're flocking to buy property that very same way. It's near the hospital, there's medical students, it's a great place to live, you know, but prior to that, in the Black community, they're looking for other forms of support for home ownership in the area, improving their schools in that area—those opportunities aren't shared.

If you look at schools like John Rex and you look at the demographic of John Rex and look at boundary levels—look at how light it is. It's amazing that John Rex, a brand-new elementary school here in Oklahoma City, just recently built in the last few years, sits on the Eastside of Oklahoma City, but does not serve very many minority students of color. How many Black kids do you see at John Rex? Not nearly what it should be.

Anna: How do you think that the overall cultural erasure links to the results that we're seeing with the highly segregated schools and not hearing about what's going on?

Krystle: I think, number one, is who is talked about. Then what happens, the media's involved, and they promise they're going to do something, and two weeks later there's nothing really happening. And that's a common cycle here in Oklahoma City and it's unfortunate, but, often times, those in power say they want to do something and give to the communities but when you look at what's actually happening and those who are involved and can help bring change, you see that somewhere in the bureaucracy and what it takes, that's where things get left behind. It's very unfortunate and very sad that some of the areas of Oklahoma City are neglected to the level that they are. People are not having difficult conversations because people want to avoid accountability.

Anna: It's a willful ignorance because it's difficult to face the truth of what's actually happening.

Krystle: Absolutely. Who wants to be accountable for not ensuring there were enough funds that went to a local elementary school where they don't feel there's enough parent attentiveness and activeness? Often times, when a school district is looking at closures, they look at their PTA rates. How active is the PTA in the school? And if you go to a low-income or urban school where, maybe in those areas, the parents work a lot of shifts at work, maybe they work in a hospital or work until midnight—if you look at that, will those parents attend PTA meetings? So, how likely are those parents to become members of the PTA? So, before they know it, they look up and a local neighborhood school has them basically wiped away because secretly, people moved out and the school was taken, and then it lays dormant for a while, for years. So, it is just sad because a lot of parents don't realize that now they need to be more active as a parent in the child's school just to be accountable and to be helpful. It's a partnership. A lot of them don't realize the game is so much bigger than just their child attending a school.

Anna: In the 20th century, when experiencing white flight, so many people rushed to areas like Edmond and the media put a lot of that blame on the individual instead of those in power. What have you witnessed that speaks to the argument of individual choice vs governmental/leadership responsibility?

Krystle: One of the things you see often times when parents are trying to move to a better school district, when they try to get a transfer, they'll look up and all the sudden, where if they went to the district one year and the parents both have the same address, that they we're allowed to continue attending that school. Well most of the school districts now are creating policies that parents have to reapply every year and there's no guarantee that their child will be able to keep attending that school district if they don't live in the district; so, the ability to even get a transfer has become more difficult, which is sad because all people are wanting is a meaningful education for their children. People in power know the importance of a quality education and, so, when their children are going to private schools or not going to neighborhood schools where they live, there should be a special bond because if it's not good enough for their child then it's not good enough for ours.

Anna: Can you speak on the culture around being a local Black business owner?

Krystle: I think that as Black business owners, we try to really make sure that people in the community and children in the community see us out and about, talk to us, feel like they can approach us and become business owners. I think that's important because people often times relate to, or aspire to be, what they see. So, in the community, we really try to be focused on bringing those efforts to children and to young people and giving them guidance because we want them to know that they can be a business owner too. You can do this too. The opportunity is yours as well. So, it's hoping that they are inspired enough, despite what's in front of them, to still know that they have opportunities and our community will always try to share.

I've worked in a lot of schools. I've had students of color, I worked in the education system for a long time, and students say, "what do you do now?" and I say I'm a business owner and they say, "You do? Well what kind of business. What do you do? You can make money doing that?" They didn't know! I tried to always encourage them to know that opportunity is here for you, and you can create an idea as a kid. What is something that you think that people will really like? You have to be able to have those conversations with them and show them. We're all trying to extend a hand to young people and I think there are a lot of opportunities for businesses of color, but a lot of them feel stagnant and they feel stuck in having questions concerning resources and opportunities and being approved for things. It's getting the knowledge into the hands of people that matches their interests and level of opportunity. They want it. They just don't know how to go get it.

Anna: You mentioned before how a lot of people in the Black community are close and feel very connected to each other. Would you say that part of that strong connection is from having a lack of support on a larger scale from the city?

Krystle: I think we're close because we surround ourselves with like-minded individuals. We do a lot of collaborating, a lot of talking, a lot of sharing. A lot of bridge building. We have to be the resources for one another that we often times can't get from the area that we're surrounded by, whether it be the city or other things. We try to really bridge a gap for one another and become allies. Not everyone's going to be the best business owner. There's

some that are great, and some that are growing. We just really try to be there for one another. What makes it unique is that we are here to support. We are supporting and sharing, we're asking questions among one another. It's just, it's a movement. That's how we make sure we stay afloat and support one another.

Anna: You described it as a movement. Would you say that the way the Black business community operates is a continuation from the days of Deep Deuce or is this something new?

Krystle: This is the norm in the Black community. That we go out and work hard to support one another. Nobody else shops and supports us. We know that we have to support each other in order to stay open and thriving. We encourage others to spread their wings, you know, in our community and beyond our community for longevity. If you have a great product or business, people are going to love your business once they get exposed to it. We try to really give one another exposure. We try to share. I think that has trickled down from other historical areas and individuals who had businesses here in Oklahoma City for a long amount of time. You know, they're kinda your business ancestral parents. There's those who can support you that can tell you about different practices and different things and different buildings and what they used to be, and try to really remind you what culture is really about and how to bring culture into everything you do.

Anna: Understanding that Oklahoma City, as well as the rest of the nation, didn't make any effort to preserve African American history until around the 1960s, how have you witnessed the community preserve their own history and how has it been preserved differently than White history, which was able to be preserved in a more "official" way?

Krystle: We preserve our history by telling each other stories that have been passed down for generations and taking our children to different cultural spots or places of business and showing them, maybe, wonderful pictures that's on the wall. Telling them why we choose to eat or shop there. What it means to our community. I think that we work hard to preserve our history a variety of ways. Through education, storytelling, and passing down, even fighting for one another to ensure that we can continue to grow together.

Anna: I feel like, when you state that history is preserved by going to businesses and seeing pictures on the wall, this shows in a big way how big of a problem it is that Deep Deuce is claiming they are preserving history, yet, not including the authentic methods or tools of historical preservation that you described.

Krystle: Yah, I mean if you look at it, what's on the walls there? Nothing. If we didn't have historical papers and historians, like the ones at Langston University, giving us the information we need, we would not always know the stories that we share with one another. It's almost lost at times.

Anna: Trying to find information online about the history of Deep Deuce has been very difficult. It definitely doesn't feel accessible even though it was such a big part of Oklahoma City's history.

Krystle: It's awful actually. It's really disheartening and that's why it's important that we preserve our own stories whether it's newspaper articles or a brochure or pamphlet. We keep those things in our culture, within our homes and families, so that we have documentation and proof that it exists. If you're depending on, perhaps, an entity that doesn't have any interest in telling the story of Black businesses, then you're never gonna get the information you desire because why would they want that to be told?

Anna: You stated you worked in education. Can you tell me about the education system in predominantly Black schools and how it relates to other local schools?

Krystle: When I worked in education, especially public education, it was my personal goal to always work in predominately Black schools. I wanted children who look like me to see a person like me. To see a person in advanced education, you know, come into their world and be an educator. And so, one thing that's really unique, if you have ever attended a school that's predominately Black with predominantly Black educators, is the amount of culture that is embedded in the classroom and in the educators because they can relate. If you are at a school where it is predominantly Black, if a little girl has her hair in beautiful African braids, it is not a problem. That little girl is never asked to go home; she's never asked to take her hair down because it's a potential distraction. We don't have those kinds of problems and it's not a distraction. It's simply a part of our cultural identity. It's things like that.

Even in History [class], you know, we tell all the students, “so of course we're going to use the textbooks that are given, but we know those textbooks are flawed.” And so, what's beautiful is the rich culture that we see in schools where there are Black educators involved and Black children. And so, that was one of the things that I wanted to be a part of when I worked at places and I loved it. I asked them to do research on their own, and "let's talk about it. What did you see, what did you think?" I think that often times that's missing and that's one of the beautiful things about having educators of color so that children can see themselves and see others that look like them and see the positivity because no matter what you look like, if on the news every day you see that the people that look like this are bad people, you're going to assume it's true even if it's not because that's what you see.

Anna: Are there any stories that you can think of that express the culture of Oklahoma City from your experience of being here?

Krystle: Yah, we hear, there are beautiful places around Oklahoma City that are no longer open. There used to be, like, a Black social area that had an amusement park. This is where Metro Tech is. There used to be an amusement park out there. Down 23rd, right after Grand, there used to be a skating rink and bowling alley. There was an indoor social hangout place. It was really really cool. When you meet others in the community who were children at that time, they tell you about all these cool things that used be on the Eastside for people of color to go out and socialize. It's really sad. Those buildings still exist but the businesses are long gone, you know. There used to be grocery stores, convenient stores. There used to be a variety of clothing stores because we weren't allowed to shop with others. We had to create our own community so as our communities were stripped of everything little by little, the people began to flee in an attempt to have a better life, and this is what's left. We're trying to bring back, not only the culture, but the beauty of what's here. You see that a lot here in the city, but we're taking it back. We're opening up more restaurants and more businesses whether it's with my company or it's with a local bakery. Or a barbershop or a doctor's office. It's just, it's beautiful. We still all work together to bring those things to our community and we've stretched out what our community really is...because we don't all live in the same area anymore. We're constantly sharing about how to make our community proud and how to rebuild it.

Anna: Do you think your community has the tools to get it back to how it was before on your own, or do you think there needs to be some changes by those in power, those who make policies and are in charge of historical preservation, that really need to change before you feel like you can achieve the goals that the community is wanting to reach?

Krystle: I'll be honest. I don't think that the community has all of the resources that it deserves. I don't think that they have access to all of the knowledge that they would need to be successful as quickly as they need. I think that is unfair. I think that it's going to take a lot longer to get those things done. Such as, you know, during COVID, getting PPE. How many businesses of color we're actually given money in the first round? How many businesses of color, you know, really and truly understood what they needed to have ready and available on a timeline to be successful? The information was not given in a timely manner. And that's what you see a lot in this community. You see the information and resources not be in place out openly and so if you don't know where to go get it and how to go get it, often times we're left behind.

Anna: With the recent protests after the death of George Floyd, do you feel like protesting is going anywhere with making the city recognize what the community is asking for? Do you think a cultural shift is happening?

Krystle: Mmmmm, I see a cultural shift happening other places but I don't know if there is necessarily a cultural shift happening here. I think that if you see one, it's very slow. I think that people feel sad and people feel bad, but I don't see anything actually taking place to ensure that the community has what they need. Once again, the Eastside is a food desert and doesn't have a grocery store. That alone speaks volumes and it's been a problem for a very long time. I feel that people have all these questions on what we should do but they aren't as motivated to put words into action. "I wanna do something but I don't really wanna do anything to make a change because it might take away from plans for something else. And that might be an inconvenience." And I think that is why people are becoming more frustrated and they're really called to justice because it's time to even the playing field.

Anna: Do you feel like the younger generation is wanting to be more proactive in making demands and getting involved in activism?

Krystle: Oh yah! They're more involved in the community, they have questions, they're asking the hard and heavy questions. They are pushing forward and they're not as patient because they feel that patience has not gotten them where they think they deserve to be. And so, I feel like that's beautiful and that's the energy and snap of young people. And we have young people who have been through so much. They've been through economic depressions and countless decades of social injustice and so they're looking back and they have a long history of hearing stories...and so they're tired. And they are demanding change. And they seek to be the change they want to see. And I think that scares a lot of people who are comfortable where things are.

They're being more active and looking for more change. I think they're even calling people in office with questions about their policies, on their partnership, and on their push for change. I think it's important that people get a really firm history lesson on a system as a whole. So, I think it's easier when you're only looking at the system from your point of view. You have to look at a system as a whole and look at why it was created, and how it was put into practice, how it was executed, and you have to continue up until the present day, you know. I think when you look at a system as a whole that way, you get a better picture of what needs to be done. If a system was designed to dismantle communities, whether it's through housing, or finance—talking about people of color not being able to get loans from banks—or things like that, then that is a dismantling of a community. So, I think we need to look at the system as a whole. Look at the history of this country, look at each system, look at how it is broken, and make sure this isn't a band-aid when you need surgery...It is broken.

Anna: What language do you hear being used to talk about gentrification and justify it?

Krystle: You hear words like "urban." Words like "revitalize." Words like "refresh." Words like "develop," or "partnership." But nobody has even started asking the question, "well, who were the partners at the table?" You hear a lot of things like that, and so, you hear that people are teaming up and collaborating. "In the community we're going to have this brand-new partnership." And the question is, well who are the partners? Often times the

partners don't include people of color and so, well, who were the partners deciding who the partners were? You hear words like that in our community a lot.

Anna: Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Krystle: I think that one keynote is to know that businesses of color deserve to exist all around the city and the surrounding area, and not just be in the Eastside. It's important that money is set aside for the historical preservation of the Eastside and businesses of color on the Eastside. There should be funds allocated just for that so that the area can thrive. I think that what you see happen often times is that the resources aren't available...we're going to fight for it.

Anna: That's all of my questions, thank you for your time and having this conversation with me.

## LaTasha Timberlake Founder of Lillian Timber Farms

*The following is a partial transcript of my conversation over the phone with LaTasha Timberlake. Due to technical issues, the entirety of the transcript is unavailable. The urban farm, located in Northeast Oklahoma City, describes itself online as, “an educational and sustainable 501c3 farm dedicated to growing and creating organic produce and products for healthy living practices in underserved communities. We foster and create community through project-based programs.” LaTasha spent time in Hawaii learning sustainable farming practices and has returned to the Eastside to share her education, grow food, and teach new skills to the community.*

August 1, 2020

Anna: Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

LaTasha: I am a native of Oklahoma, so I was born and raised here. Also, my family has been in Oklahoma. They actually migrated here from Texas. When we first came, they actually were in the Spencer, Oklahoma area which is a historical African American community. When I was around 3-4, we moved to the Northeast side of Oklahoma City. I lived off of 6th and Lottie, which is now referred to as the Kennedy neighborhood. Growing up, we never referenced it as the Kennedy neighborhood. With the recent gentrification, and the city developing a lot of these formally predominantly African American communities and neighborhoods, a lot of them really were not referenced by neighborhoods. The Kennedy neighborhood and there's another one over by Deep Deuce. But Deep Deuce has always been known as Deep Deuce. From my understanding, my family was very integral in Deep Deuce. I had two uncles that were internationally known musicians, Hugh Walker was one of them—a drummer. And Glen Walker. They both played Deep Deuce. My sister actually owned a restaurant, Urban Roots. She opened it in [2010]. It was on Walnut in Deep Deuce. We did have a lot of challenges with surrounding businesses coming into that area. Often times, the police would be called about noise, even though they have live music as well. Or like the tax commission or ABLE commission would be called. So, it was very apparent that we were not wanted in that area.

Anna: Did you grow up with your family talking a lot about Deep Deuce and living there?

LaTasha: Yah! Part of my family was from the Spencer area but the other part was actually in that same area, so they're graduates of Douglas high school and then Northeast High School, which is off of Kelly. So, you know, my parents and my aunts and uncles and my older cousins, they grew up, you know, going on 4th street in that area. I believe they had a small grocery store and market there and movie theater at one time. So, it was a very integral part of the culture for that community.

Anna: Does your family say much about how the area has transformed over the past decades?

LaTasha: You have to think about the difference in the age groups. My parents are late 60's and so, you know, I think the major thing that is talked about is the noticing of how the neighborhood has changed in terms of demographics. In some of the streets, you know, there are no longer any African American families left, but then, also, the property values, the things that are coming in and the physical changes in the neighborhood, are not in aesthetic with the homes that have historically been there. So, the entire look of the neighborhood has changed. Even my own neighborhood off 6th and Lottie, I was driving over there the other day when I left the urban garden lot that we are working on and I didn't even recognize it because of the buildings that have been put there. So there used to be this old, kinda, place where a lot of drug addicts and prostitutes went, but you know, they weren't harmful at all. And now, it's like, these high-rise condos that are there. So that's really weird for me because I remember what the neighborhood looked like. My parents, they are more—I don't want to use the term docile—in their conversations, whereas my siblings and I, because we see the direct connections in terms of not having access and opportunities. Whereas our parents, they grew up in a time where it was kinda take what you're given, make the best of it. And you know, do the best that you can. My age group is more like, "it's not just about opportunity, or you know, things being fair. It's more so about the inclusion of it." When they were getting ready to do this MAPS project, and all of these things, it wasn't about who was at the table. But my thing is, who's a part of the decision-making process? It's very one-sided in Oklahoma...what people are you asking? Who are you asking those questions? The people that you're asking, are they in awareness enough to really understand what it is you're asking? And what that process is?

That's the point of Lillian Timber Farms. Although we are using food, it's really about educating people to understand how these systems work. Because there's no reason the Northeast side of Oklahoma City should be a food desert.

Anna: Can you explain more about what that looks like to educate people through farming?

LaTasha: One of our goals is not to only educate people about nutrition and how you can grow your own food and sustain your own health outside of traditional grocery stores and things like that, but also, to bring in programming where people are talking about how you are able to not only stay in your community but help your own community grow. For example, having people come in and really talk about what the development process is and how it really works. And how a person cannot have any money or credit or different things like that and still be able to develop an area. Because that information is there, it's just that it's not in the right hands to be able to disperse it equally. Even for myself, I'm taking a course on small scale development, and in the course, they even had to be honest and say, "even though you're going through this process, one of things you need to know is, as an African American, it is going to be more challenging for you to get capital. So for that to be bluntly stated...for me, I'm like, ok, so, since you're telling me that that limitation is going to be there, I want to be able to create things so it doesn't have to be. That's the type of change that I'm talking about. Just because a barrier is there, doesn't mean it has to stay because "that's just the way it's always been." I don't agree with that.

Anna: What steps do you think need to be taken to help change that and destroy that barrier?

LaTasha: So, actually finding lenders and finding banks and other developers that actually want to have a more holistic approach and fair approach in terms of making sure that the equality of the process is a game for all people involved, all stakeholders.

## Bruce Waight Sr. CEO of Rooted Barber + Shop

*Highlights: During our conversation over the phone, we discuss the historic role of the Black barbershop, expressing culture and identity through his business, Black style in pop culture, and his experiences living in Oklahoma City.*

July 14, 2020

Anna: Can you tell me about yourself and your relationship to Oklahoma City?

Bruce: I'm from Texas. I moved here, I think, in 2001. I've been in the city since 2006. As far as being a business owner, I have two businesses. I have En Root Mobile Barbershop Company, which is the first mobile barbershop in the state of Oklahoma. I had to lobby to get the laws changed. There's a governing body called The Oklahoma State Cosmetology and Barber Board. So, I had to go through that governing body to get those changes made. My second company is Rooted Barber + Shop. I own those two barbershops. I also sit on that board now. I was the Barber representative on that board; now I sit as the vice chair of that board. As far as my relationship with the city, I do a lot of activism, so I work with the homeless population through a partnership with the Homeless Alliance. I actually built a second brick-and-mortar inside of the Homeless Alliance day shelter. That's a lot of my focus, helping that population through barber services. I have a boys group home that I also provide services to. That's my relationship to the city.

I believe if you don't have the means to give money, and you have a skill, then I think you should give your skillset away. At the end of the day, time is money, so it's kinda the same to me. It's the core of what I do. I love to give back and I find it easy to give back in that manner.

Anna: Can you tell me more about your Artist in Residence program?

Bruce: It's not a true artist-in-residency. We call it an artist-in-residency program and what we do is we provide a space. We try to do it twice a year. We select an artist, we try to make sure it's an artist of color and give them a whole space to do an exhibit for six months. And we have a lot of friends who are in the art world and we heard their struggles of getting their work in spaces. When I first got into a brick-and-mortar, and just the wall space, I was like man, I think I can do something different with this. Typically, barbershops have a sports theme or something like that, so we just wanted to do something different and actually be intentional about our space and how we use it. It's a win win for us because every six months we get new art decor, and it gives artists an opportunity to be seen. We typically invest in the artist in the form of two events. We throw an artist talk and an exit event. Artists get 100% of the proceeds from sales. That was just another program we created to try and give back in a different way.

Anna: What is unique about Oklahoma City to you?

Bruce: It's growing, and I like that. I think that we have a lot of young professionals that are moving to the city. It's a great place to live, I believe in my heart that it is. I think we have our problems like any city does, but I think growth is always good. It's an opportunity to succeed.

Anna: I spoke with another business owner, Krystle Robinson-Hershey, owner of Sage & Elm Apothecary. When she was describing the local Black business community, she mentioned it emphasizing mentorship and close connections, sharing resources. Would you say that speaks to the culture of the larger Black community in OKC?

Bruce: It's hard to say. I think that entrepreneurs have a hard time giving back because they're trying to build a business, you know. It's difficult already, especially, I think, for your Black entrepreneurs, to be able to have access to avenues that would be able to help them in their business. And giving back sometimes is on the back burner. As far as working with one another, in the barbering community, it's not very often. There's a lot of competition, but I don't think it should be. I think it should be more collaboration. But it's not. I care about my industry; I'm sitting on my local state board. Also sit on a national board. I've seen the

bigger picture and gone to different states and met with different barbers that are on the same level as I am as far as being on the state board. I think we should do more collaborating. And you see it happen. You see people who are trying to do those things. People that are creating organizations to try to pool the Black dollar together if you will. But it's still a process, you know. It's still a growing process, I believe.

Anna: What does it mean to you to be an inclusive shop and community space?

Bruce: One of the things that that really means to me—because our motto here is "Cuts and Culture"—So, with Rooted Barber + Shop, I think it's very important to be inclusive but not water down what we're about. To be professional, but to keep the culture. And I think, when I say that, I guess what I'm hoping for is that not only will I have barbers of different ethnicities here, but also the clientele base. I want to be able to get the clientele base to come in, be comfortable, and get to know us personally and the culture of what it means to be Black and to have this barbershop. You know, the Black barbershop, for decades has been the cornerstone of the Black community. It was a safe space—still is a safe space—that you could talk about politics or religion or what's going on in the community. It's wonderful to get people who otherwise would not be able to have access to Black folks or the community. To be able to come in and have a safe space and be able to be involved in that way. To be able to hear the things we're talking about and express their own opinions on it. That's what it means to be inclusive. You have a lot of White men and women who either had a bad experience going into a Black barbershop or just simply afraid because of what they see or what they heard or experienced. Professionalism to me is number one, but, just because I want to be professional doesn't mean that I have to lose my culture. Everything from the type of music that we listen to, to what's on the TV. I love when February comes around and I can do Black history month all month. I'm plannin all kinda music and Black cinema. It's just to give them an experience to understand that we're all the same but the cultures are different. So, come and enjoy this culture. Come learn about this culture. So, it was very important for me to have culture be a part of what we do here.

Anna: Do you feel like you have been able to meet those goals of having different groups come in and feel comfortable and enjoy the culture and everything like that?

Bruce: I think I have. I have women barbers, Hispanic barbers, and we have all kinds of people coming into this shop. All walks of life. You know, single mothers bringing their children. It has to be a safe place for single mothers. We have single White mothers bringing their half-Black babies here. It's a safe place, it's a professional place. But you're still going to be able to receive the culture in a positive aspect. Culture can be anything, you know. Just because it's culture doesn't mean it has to be positive, you know. You can go to a barbershop, and they could be doing things completely different than we are. It's all part of the culture. I want to be specific that this is a positive environment that we want to share with people.

Anna: You mention that some White people don't have experience being around Black culture or in a Black barbershop. Do you think this speaks to the level of segregation still occurring in the city? That there is so much separation.

Bruce: So, I'll tell you, I don't believe that necessarily in the city, but in the industry, it's definitely segregated. And what I mean by that is that typically people go get a haircut from someone who looks like them. That kinda keeps it segregated. What I've seen happen in the last 10 years or so, 15 years, particularly what your Black barber are skilled at and services that we're providing, everybody kinda wants that. We're kinda hot right now as far as the styles that we're doing. The fades, the type of haircuts, you know, that we're providing. So, I think we're starting to see a shift. It's a good time to be, and to really push inclusiveness, because people want what we're providing. Now it's just a matter of are you being professional? Is it a safe place? If you would have asked me that question 15 years ago, when the styles were different or no one was really paying attention to what the Black barbers were doing, it wouldn't be like that right now. I get so many phone calls to come teach classes at these White establishment schools because they don't know how to do what we do. They're still trying to figure out how to do what we've been doing. The industry has really been segregated for a long time. I don't think it has necessarily to do with the city as much as it does the industry itself.

Anna: Do you feel like you see a shift in people's attitudes in understanding what's going on in the Black community, or do you think it's more of an interest in the culture of the Black community? I've seen a lot of people challenge the idea of loving and enjoying aspects of Black culture (like styles, music, and fashion), but not caring about the community.

Bruce: It's cultural appropriation. That's what you see. It's hard for Black folks to sit back and see that because there's such deep issues goin' on in the Black community. And then, just add the aspect of, you know, if we're talking about barbering, right now people are interested in what we're doing because everybody wants to do what we're doin'. But guess what, years ago none of your multimillion-dollar White establishments cared about the black community—specifically the barbershops! Oh well, they doin' what they doin' over there? Well we gonna let them do what they're doin', we're doin' what we're doin' over here. But they had the opportunity to establish themselves on a larger scale and they have the finances to do things like that. And now that they see, ok man, this thing has taken a shift, it's the same thing. It sucks to see someone else take a dance move, if you will, and make millions of dollars from it and they took it right off the streets of the Black community. That's like appropriation. You talk about the money factor, but then you just talk about the support factor. Even if it's not financial. It's ok to look this, dress like this, talk like this, but you know, I don't want to march. I don't want to support. I tell you, in the midst of George Floyd and seeing the protests going on around the country, around the world, it's just been amazing to see that shift happen. To see so many white supporters out there. That made me feel really good. You didn't see that with Rodney King. You didn't see that with Sandra Bland. You didn't see that with a lot of these other lives that were taken by police. And so, I think it's a little different with the culture. I think it's just a little different. But I think you do have more Whites that understand it's a deeper meaning in the aspect of "how do I support what I'm trying to imitate?" if you will.

Anna: What do you think has changed?

Bruce: I think it's social media. I think it's cameras. Getting out the camera phone and actually getting the footage. I don't know why George Floyd was that person. I don't know why he's the one because there's been so many deaths by the hand of police, so, I think that's what it is. It's live videos, it's technology that's allowing for the world to see what's happening instantly.

Anna: Do you think that connects to the idea that cultural erasure can cause people who live in separate cultural bubbles to not see the other things happening in different communities? But, now with social media, that bubble is more easily infiltrated? Without it, people may not see things that those in power keep from their view, and the media is often silent about what is happening in the Black community.

Bruce: Oh yah. I don't want to sound like a conspiracy theorist, but absolutely. One of the oddest things I've witnessed with media is when you had natural disasters. Katrina for example. And you saw Black people trying to survive and gettin' things out of the store that didn't belong to them—They we're looters. But you saw the pictures, the same scenario of Whites that were taking things to try and survive, food and those type of things. They were surviving. The media tends to always paint a picture of Black being this evil negative group of people. When you can see that direct comparison, you know, when you can see it blatant, and they still choose to wordplay with it, it makes it difficult. And I put the blame on us too. A lot of times White folks don't want to come into a Black establishment. I blame us somewhat because we have to be more professional, but in the same sense, I think media plays a big part in why White folks don't want to come and try to support Black businesses. The picture has already been painted and the culture has been tainted, but it's not all their fault. We have to take some responsibility and be, just better, all around. That's what I kinda strive for. I had to grow into this person. With my professionalism, in my industry as a barber. Even at 30, I didn't treat it with the respect that I treat it with now. I think young men need an opportunity to grow. It's a shame when you see a White kid and a Black kid go through the same judge for the same crime. The White kid gets 6 months probation and the Black kid goes to prison for two years. You know. It's a shame because our children don't get an opportunity to be kids sometimes because we're being judged more harshly by our society. Really by White America. I try to remember that and I try to let my son be a kid, and I try to remember when I was a kid. But at the same time, I have to talk to my son and his friends when they go out. I have to have those talks—the police talk. You know. A lot of White parents will never know what that's like. They'll never have to experience that. They don't have to have the White police talk with their kids. It's that tightrope walk of not watering yourself down, but at the same time, understanding your reality in this country.

Anna: What does it mean to water down yourself?

Bruce: I'll give you an example. So, my family is from Belize. I remember visiting. Belize is like two parts. You have, like, an island, and you have the mainland. A lot of your tourists really go to the island. We're on this island, and we're going around, and we go to this one establishment and it's like a bar restaurant establishment. And we walk in there and they're playin' country music. And there ain't nothin' but White folks around. I was upset to feel like Belizean people have to water down who they are for the tourist attractions, to be able to bring that money in through tourism. And I get that. But at the same time, I'm lookin' at tourists like, "do you really want to leave wherever you comin' from to a whole 'nother country, to listen to country music? Like this is not the music we listen to here. This is not our culture. It's kinda like that. I wouldn't want to go to France to eat at McDonalds. I want to go to get the culture.

Anna: Why do those seemingly small things matter so much, such as the music choice in a restaurant? Can you speak more to the value of those kind of things?

Bruce: It's almost like you're sellin' out to who you really are. To what you really believe in. For the dollar bill. I don't put money at the forefront of what I do, and it makes it easy to make these conscious decisions and be loyal to myself and be loyal to my staff. To put this business first, you know. And that's the difference. That establishment in Belize. They weren't loyal to who they are; they were loyal to the dollar. And it's as simple as that. I don't worry about that. It allows me to be true to who I am and to the culture.

Anna: Do you think people fail to see that the Black community, because of segregation and isolation, has created its own unique, rich culture. Could that contribute to why they don't respect certain aspects of the culture?

Bruce: Absolutely. I would agree with that. One of the most fascinating things that I learned about Oklahoma is that it has, in the past, had the most townships started by Black people. That's a lot of great history. You talk about Tulsa riots and Black Wallstreet up there. I just think you gotta get out of your bubble. I think we should encourage inclusiveness and maybe that's our fault, in the Black community, to not encourage that. You have some Black businesses that don't want the White dollar. If you will. To me, it's not about the money. I would rather educate you. I'd

rather show you that all Black folks aren't what you see on TV. You know. Or on the news every night. I think it's both people. The business owner or the community have to be able to open their doors. America has painted the picture that Black folks are negative people, evil people, bad people. You know, you better clutch your purse. That's every race. I get nervous when I see a group of White men. I don't think many people can admit that, but I get nervous. Especially with the president that we have now [Donald Trump] and just so much animosity in the air. I get nervous.

Anna: You mention that your main goal is to educate people. Do you find it tiring to have to educate people often?

Bruce: Oh, never. I love to debate; I love to argue. I probably do it too much, but I think that's part of the barbershop culture. But no, I love it. I love to receive it.

Anna: Are there any experiences you can share about Black business owners working in Deep Deuce?

Bruce: I have a friend who owned a restaurant there. Her name is Chaya Fletcher. And I believe it was the only Black business in the community at the time. They end up, you know, gentrification, I think the owner sold it and the new owner raised the rent to a point that she couldn't pay and she had to go. It was called Urban Roots, you know. You have to surround yourself with people who want you there, and that can be difficult sometimes. Especially when you're dealing with a community that doesn't have love for what you represent, that's gonna be difficult.

Anna: Is there anything else you would like to say?

Bruce: I think if everyone had an open mind, you know, when it comes to each other, and different cultures, everything would be alright. Just try to be positive, that's it really. Be safe out here, bye.

## Tammy Gray-Steele CEO of National Women in Agriculture Association & the Sustainable Science Academy

*Highlights: During our conversation over the phone, Tammy discusses her involvement with the Eastside community, the restorative opportunities agriculture brings to the area, and some of the positive aspects of gentrification. Tammy is the founder of the National Women in Agriculture Association which has 30+ chapters worldwide. She was raised on a farm in rural Oklahoma, going on to earn her MBA and attend NYU law school. Her goal is to aid the next generation (especially people of color) in learning skills and receiving opportunities in agriculture. Tammy runs the Sustainable Science Academy in the Eastside of Oklahoma City and works with children ages 6 weeks to 18-years-old.*

JULY 30, 2020

Anna: Can you tell me about the different parts of your organization?

Tammy: One part of it is an agricultural outreach center, which is the headquarters for the National Women in Agriculture non-profit organization. When you first walk in the doors, that's the business office part of it, the outreach office. We help people start their farm operations, from backyard gardens, all the way to farm production. Anybody that wants to get involved in agriculture, if you want to stop by and make an appointment, we'll go out there and show you exactly how to understand the soil, how to plant, the depth of a seed, how to water, when to plant it.

On the other side, we have an agriculture childcare center and in the back of it, in the playground, they have their own garden. They grow their own food where they can literally walk out and eat it from the ground. We have an after-school program and summer camp. I'm opening a virtual learning center while the public schools are going virtual [due to COVID-19]. We're trying to open the doors to make sure they are being taught by their Oklahoma City public schools through their computers to make sure the children of this community are being taken care of.

Anna: Can you tell me more about NWIAA and why you chose to have a focus on women specifically?

Tammy: The women are not recognized as being the leaders that are doing something in the country. We are slighted. I know firsthand that there are other nonprofit groups like mine that men have, and they don't do even 1/4 of the work that we do. And they still receive the same resources, if not more resources, to keep their organizations going. It's unfair. It's very discriminatory.

Anna: What makes the Eastside community unique?

Tammy: The uniqueness is that it is a severe food desert and we have one grocery store that is not up to par to serve our community and our people are okay with it. They are okay with putting a grocery store on Lincoln which is not in the heart of our community. That's what I see is wrong. No one in leadership is really buying into it. It alarms me that I have to step up and grow food to make sure our people have good food. And how I do that is with the children and provide them with a safe haven and jobs. We start giving jobs at 15 1/2 and they come to us with a work permit and they have a job with us. If you get them at an early age...we start them at 6 weeks. They're growing food and helping the community.

You have to have the heart to do it. You can't be a scammer. One of my ladies in Canada told me, "Tammy, it's okay to be a hustler, a hustle will last. A scam will not." That's where, to me, our community has lost. We've had too many scammers that say they're doing something, but they're really not. When you're doing it, you're doing it in a way where you're taking everything from yourself, from your home and you're bringing it to our children and laying it at their foot. 90% in our community—we have too many individuals, from the individual churches, individual career people—they're really not focusing in and helping the community as a whole with the next generation, because it's too late for the older people.

I don't live in the community, but I bring all of my resources and educational background into the community and I work it and I make sure, tangibly, they can see it. Tangibly they can get paid. All I can say is, if I were White...would it be different? Would I get more help? If I were White, would I get more resources? If I were White, would they really understand what I'm saying and not be too harsh. Would it not be too soft? That's on every level. I've worked on the

federal level down to the city and smaller county levels and it's still the same personalities, the same red tape. I've been blessed that I have a family that highly supports me. Coming from the rural farm area, that's all I did was take from our farms and bring it to the urban area to make it bigger.

Anna: To you, does protesting have value?

Tammy: It's a voice, I just don't do that. My voice is over here doing what I do. They're crying out; I think that everybody plays a role. That's their only way of getting a message out. I tell them, "I keep the children." I have an agriculture childcare center. A safe haven with alarms, cameras. A learning institution to give them a jump start in life, an introduction to a sustainable career. Agriculture is sustainable. They don't have to worry about if they're going to have a job. Everybody has to eat, drink water, wear clothes, breathe air. That's all a sustainable lifestyle. I'm put on this earth to make sure children and people have a genuine opportunity to go to college and become agricultural leaders. That can be from a farmer up to the president. I'm trying to make sure the next generation sees that. Especially children of color. No one really gives a true chance, and really pours in resources (when I say resources, I mean money) into our children. Or their time. I have adults that come and try to take from their resources that I put here but I will not allow it. From putting their names on things, they will say they did something when children actually did it.

When I came [to the Eastside] and I went to church in this community, that's how I knew it was such a broken community. When I tried to bring this same program to the church, they rejected it. They said, "No we don't want to do that." The only reason they were rejecting it, mind you, is because they were looking at me as an individual that was going to get something out of it. As you can see, I'm giving way more than what I give. So, that's where I saw the need. When I saw the church was broken, and there was an opportunity to help where I was bringing the resources, and they said no. And that's how I knew there was a problem.

Anna: Do you think it's willful ignorance on part of leadership?

Tammy: I don't know what to say because if I was a leader and I was concerned about the Eastside community, I would know every business in my district. I would know what's going, what they're providing. I've literally had leadership (I'm talking about high

leadership), I'm talking about the head of the head saying, "I didn't know this place was here. I've never heard of it." And I'm thinking, really? It's not that I'm hidden because if you drive by here all you see is pink and vegetable gardens everywhere all over the grounds. It's totally different from when the YWCA had it, who got a million dollars a year to sit over here. To offer services the community were not even utilizing, and that's why they offered me to buy it because they saw that I really took a genuine interest and put something tangible here. While they owned the property, I was developing their property that I didn't even own. As a result of that, their leadership said, "you really care about this community, do you want to buy this place?" And luckily my family has resources, they have properties and made things happen for me. Not money but they have properties and things that made things happen for me.

Anna: Can you tell me more about the idea of using unused urban real estate for farming?

Tammy: Our Michigan chapter does that project. You have to have a team to do the work.

Anna: Do you think there are people willing to do the work if the opportunity is available?

Tammy: If it was structured right and organized, oh yes. That's the goal—to create green jobs. That's one of the main things that I know, that's what motivates people more than anything. That they're able to eat and live a decent life. They'll be ok. And people will act different. The community will look different. This conversation would not be, "I'm so important and dear to you" if it was really taken care of and done the way it's supposed to be done. My goal is to make sure that the next generation does not become the same type people. That's all I'm about. I tell people all the time, "if you're not coming over here to help me and the kids, keep moving, because I'm not going to let you take from me. I am an educated woman. Anything that people think that they could scam or play games with, I've already been through it with all the stuff that's happened in this community, and I've seen it like I said, from the White House to the farm house. I've seen it. And I've seen older people who stand in the way and stop progress from children by using them to get their own two-week paychecks.

Anna: Do you think agriculture could be one of the keys to restoring the community so that it's more self-sufficient and the community members have more autonomy over their decisions?

Tammy: Most definitely. I am working very hard and luckily, I do have a relationship with leadership. They're looking at me real hard to where whatever I'm growing, any grocery store that's coming in here, they will be buying from the community that's growing the food. So, they have a buy-in.

Anna: What's your opinion on the effects of gentrification in the community?

Tammy: It's going to do nothing but help. Let me tell you about this. Some of my best business partners are Caucasian. If they help, that's who I want in my community. I just think it helps. Because if they were going to do something, they would've done something. It's not that hard to help my community. I do know people of other races that I hire to do things with me and for me or work with them as a partner because they genuinely get stuff done with me. And that's the reason I believe in gentrification. And I'll tell anybody that. There's people that talk and there's people that provide action. I've noticed that in this community particularly, and that was one of the reasons I was going to lease my space out and move it to Atlanta. Because this is the headquarters. I tell them if you can do it Oklahoma, guys, you can do it anywhere because [Atlanta] has minority backing and leadership really helps them in other areas.

If you own something with the land, it would be hard for them to take it away. But if you're not doing nothing with it, then let them come in and do whatever they're going to do with it to make it better. If they're going to come in and create jobs. It's too hard for me to really say, "no don't let it happen," or "don't do this." I'm one of those people, if you're doing something, you're doing something, and they shouldn't be able to take it away if you're doing something productive for the community as a whole.

Anna: In the Eastside, have you seen erasure of culture with gentrification coming in?

Tammy: It looks better. I'm gonna be honest with you. I'm probably one of the few that would say that, but the ones who are arguing, I bet they haven't given \$1000 over here to help.

Anna: To you, do actions have much higher value than any words or language used by others?

Tammy: So, what, you don't want people to come in here and make it look better? Or do you want to keep the same torn up, ugly environment, you know? When they start hollerin' and cryin' about Caucasian people comin' in and buyin' up stuff. Well, what are you doing with it? Other than dirtyin' it up, throwin' things on the lawn. You don't help volunteer or maintain anything, so yah.

Anna: How have you seen COVID affect the community?

Tammy: It's crazy over here anyway, but yah. When I go into the stores, the mask protection isn't enforced. Just like the corner stores, it's not like what I see on my side of town, in the suburbs. I see our children just walkin' everywhere, and I'm like "why are we open?" I see kids out wanderin' everywhere. I see people walking around without any masks. It's just crazy. I see people just walkin' around like it ain't nothin', no masks, no nothin'. I'm like "wow." In my community, you can't go in a store [without a mask]. It's highly enforced. When I was in Dallas, we couldn't go into any store without a mask. I felt safer. When I'm here, I'm just like ugh. I hate to be like that, but if you don't have on a mask, I don't want to be around you. It's bad. It's leadership. That's the reason you young people need to run for office as well. We need younger leadership.

Anna: Do any of the young people that you work with show interest in being involved, running for congress, or protesting?

Tammy: They may go to the protests, but honey, I'm trying to make sure they get through high school and try to get to college and the military. I have taken some of them to Washington D.C. They've seen politicians and they see them come over here and take a picture with them and they see them no more. They don't hear from them anymore. Hopefully one day I will find someone that will take that interest, but the thing I'm finding that's unfortunate is that the older the children are, after 13-years-old, if they don't have certain structure and values and they're not AP students, it's almost impossible to bring them into this type of environment. That's the reason they have alternative schools and things like that. Because it's so broken down that I can't help them unless I try to get an alternative site for children or go to the site and partner and do projects on those sites with agriculture.

Anna: Can you tell me about the virtual learning center you're providing at your facility to respond to school closures due to COVID?

Tammy: The two main things I'm working on is the virtual learning, cause you know they're saying, "hey they can do home school." I work in this community. I've seen parents, what they pour into their children. That's because they're either working or they live a whole different lifestyle that they didn't want to give up because they had kids. That's the easiest way to explain how our kids go without.

It's totally virtual. I want to offer four hours a day. We'll give them some agriculture training and they'll learn how to grow food, and they can take food home if they want. Our community, some of the leadership act like it's so difficult. It's not that hard. I have leadership that goes "I didn't know this was here!" or leadership that goes "well what do you do?" Really? It amazes me that we have people like that, that's over us. It floors me that people play such head games. I don't know what it is. I think they just talk and aren't really thinking about what they're really saying. Because if I was in leadership, and you were in my community and you were a national organization and you were doing all this stuff, and you were a woman, and a woman of color that chose to come here and do this for us, I would be all over it. I don't get it.

You're leadership. You're supposed to lead the people to do better. If you really care. After the charter is done, I just plan to run for congress. That will be my next step in life because I don't plan to do this forever cause I'm getting older and someone else needs to take it over that has the energy. God chose me to help under-served children and I want to do it forever. I don't want to worry about their parent's income, I just want to get the money from the government to help take care of them. I don't care about all that other stuff. No matter what, the way the government is set up, usually the parent is in a catch-22. They make too much money, or they don't make enough. So, they're not able to get government subsidies. It's always a catch. And I'm like, I don't have time for that. I just want to be able to have scholarships for them to come here.

Anna: Thank you so much for your time and talking to me today.

## Krista Spears OKC Real Estate Agent

*Highlights: During our conversation over the phone, Krista discusses her experiences recently entering the real estate field in Oklahoma City. She shares that it has helped her learn more about the history and identity of Oklahoma City through the homes and historic neighborhoods she works with. Her journey into real estate has made her more aware of the city's history with race as she discovered many OKC homes that still stand were built with bricks imprinted with swastikas. Deeds for homes once included clauses forbidding African American people from purchasing the properties. Even though the real estate industry has a long history of aiding efforts to segregate cities, modern real estate culture remains silent on the subject, even though segregation persists in the city.*

JULY 5, 2020

Anna: How long have you lived in Oklahoma City and what has your overall experience been like?

Krista: I've lived in Oklahoma my whole life. I moved up to Edmond when I was 8 and stayed there until I graduated high school. I've been living in Oklahoma City since 2011. Compared to Edmond, I feel like people are watched a lot more here, I would say.

Anna: Do you feel like there was a bubble burst when you moved from Edmond to OKC?

Krista: Oh, definitely. In many different ways. Even just in the options of food. Being able to find multiple mom-and-pop places that weren't franchises. Everything's different in Oklahoma City. One of the first things I noticed when I got into urban exploring was basically areas that are left behind and my mind has been consumed with things that are left behind for a while now. I would go explore abandoned buildings, and just any kind of vacant building that we could get into at the time was really fun.

Anna: Compared to these areas left behind, how is that different from Edmond?

Krista: I don't remember there really be any abandoned places [in Edmond]. There was one thing in Edmond that we all went and explored, that was the Lost Circus. There were *No Trespassing* signs; everybody went anyways. Whereas, in Oklahoma City, all these abandoned buildings are everywhere. They don't necessarily have *No Trespassing* signs, and often times, it would be unlocked. There was still this mystery of "why is this left here in this location? What's it doing?" I never experienced that in Edmond other than that one place.

Anna: You post a lot about architecture in the city. Has since becoming a real estate agent led you to learn more about the history of these areas and buildings?

Krista: Yah, absolutely. So, if I do an open house or if I have a listing, or if I'm just looking for a buyer, it's important to me to know the history of the neighborhood. Especially with historical editions here in Oklahoma City. People that can afford homes in those areas, they're in high demand and some of those can sell for \$120 to \$160 a square foot. People like to hear about the details and so I have definitely gone in and done some research. There was this house in Putnam Heights Annex, so it wasn't a part of the original Putnam Heights, but it lies just North of Putnam Heights. This one is North of 36th and Classen. I ended up doing some research on the neighborhood because I was doing an open house one week and—this was probably about a year ago—I ended up finding one of the original deeds and some official documents about the edition, and one of the things written in there is that you basically can't sell or rent a home to a Black person. This was in the 1930s.

Anna: Is looking at the history of these areas something a lot of other real estate agents like to do?

Krista: No, getting into real estate, it's less about helping people and more "how can I hide my commission breath?" People aren't really concerned about anything other than "how can I seem genuine when I'm not really genuine?" That's the whole business, it's weird.

Anna: You mention a lot of clients have interest in the history. Do you find that to be an authentic interest? When researching historic preservation, one of things that was critiqued is that affluent people, and people connected to gentrification, seem to have an obsession with history and they are really drawn toward these historic buildings and architecture. This obsession is challenged with the knowledge that so much history has been erased through gentrification.

Krista: I think people that are obsessed with that history, deep down, they just want to know that the price is justified. I think that's what's behind that. I had a couple of open houses in the Plaza district. So when you do open houses, you get a lot of feedback from the open market. It's buyers that come in that are interested, aren't interested. Then you get nosy neighbors. The ones that I notice that dig in, as far as, "well when was this house built? Is that the original fireplace?" I don't think they care so much that it's original or wanting to know the genuine truth. I think they're just worried about, "well it's listed as \$145 a square foot, do we think it's worth it if that fireplace was just put in last year?"

Anna: People who are gentrifiers, I think they want to just connect to these artificial objects of history. They want to restore places, but to restore a building is not to restore a community or a culture. Real estate and land play a big part. Residential segregation laws are the reason Deep Deuce exists in the first place. Segregation is so normal to us that grew up around here that it feels like a lot of us don't even realize that segregation should not be normal. It's normal for America though.

Krista: Right. Especially by highways and rivers. I've thought about the Southside for a while since moving to Oklahoma City. Even living in Edmond, I never realized that it's not only segregated by race but also by bodies of water and transportation. Anytime I mention that, people just kinda think that it's a coincidence. But I don't think it is at all.

Anna: Was anything about segregation involved in your training to become a real estate agent?

Krista: No. We do have different types of training that we are obligated to do. First of all, whenever we take the class, you have to really study the laws of being a real estate agent, like Fair Housing Act, and all that kinda stuff. Your code of ethics. Whenever you get into the actual licensing, not only being licensed by the

state of Oklahoma but also the Association of Realtors. That's when it gets tricky because you sign an oath of code of ethics, but the oath, if you read it thoroughly, it focuses more on basically liable and slander toward other real estate professionals, than it does about your duties to uphold fair housing laws. In the classes, they'll give you examples for fair housing like this: "Ok if you have a Vietnamese client, and if your client asks you 'where do all the Vietnamese people live in OKC?' You legally can't say, 'Oh check out the Asian district! I love that area.'" That you could get in trouble for. It's cool that they mention that, but that hasn't happened to me yet. But I have had clients say, "Oh that house?...That's on the Eastside, we don't want to be in that area." But they don't ever bring that up in training or address how to respond to that. First of all, you're working for the client, so if they don't want a certain area, they don't want a certain area. But at the same time, if it is fueled by prejudice, there has to be something that we can do, or even ask why. They don't even bring that up in training. It's a lot of liability stuff so "don't talk bad about another brokerage. Don't talk bad about another agent. Don't talk bad about people in the industry." It's not just an unspoken rule, it's something that you sign your name to as well.

On social media, there is a huge group called Oklahoma City Real Estate Professionals. It has two admins; it's been around since 2017 and it has over 3,000 members that are real estate professionals. These are inspectors, builders...the Facebook group is huge. I've only seen one post about racial injustice. Someone had shared a post of a home inspector's employee that is basically like a Confederate apologist. Their profile is all about the Confederate flag, in support of it. She had shared it to the group and said, "I'm not going to support this anymore." And she got backlash from the moment she posted it. Her post ended up getting censored and she got blocked from the group. There wasn't any discussion about it, the admin just came on and said, "this has nothing to do with real estate, take this down." She said, "How does this not have to do with real estate?" And then she got blocked.

Anna: That's a great example of that language of erasure. "This has nothing to do with us." This has everything to do with real estate. Real estate played a massive role in creating and furthering segregation.

Krista: It was so frustrating to read this discussion. I went through the group rules and there's nothing about political posts but the last rule does state, "please share your experiences. We want to

know the good, the bad, and the ugly—here's the kicker—Who's your favorite lender, home inspector, builder, etc? Who should we avoid if possible? We can all serve our clients better with collaboration.” And yet, the first time this is brought up in this group, it gets smacked down within 20 minutes.

Anna: That's a great example of the shallowness of industries and companies that make these vague statements like, “we welcome open conversation. We stand against racial injustice.” And then, the moment something racially sensitive gets brought up, it gets shut down immediately and things are said like, “that doesn't have a place here.” They say they want to know the good and the bad...it's very obvious that when they say, “that has nothing to do with us,” that they're only talking about racial topics.

Krista: Oh yah, I've been in this group a long time. People will be like, “I can't believe what this inspector did, you guys hate this guy or what?” And then there will be 100 comments about how everyone hates this home inspector. Next post down will be like, “I can't believe Cindy at this title company didn't respond to my email in 12 minutes. Do you guys ever have trouble getting her to answer emails? I'm not using her anymore.” There's this whole back and forth about realtors having the leverage because they can influence people's money. I can influence the vendors my clients use because the average person doesn't know a good roofer or a good contractor, they just know a lot of bad ones, right? So, part of what I'm wanting to do is come up with a vendor list that is Black-owned, and minority-owned, and influence people's money that way. If we have the power to influence people's money with good intentions, like squashing white supremacy, why wouldn't we do that? What I found is that no one so far wants to tackle this with me. I ended up writing a comment, “why did that girl get blocked? Maybe we should just have a no political post rule?” I got blocked for that. I didn't even say which side I was on. I messaged admin and asked them to call me. He didn't want to call me. We had this back and forth and he basically said I can only come back in the group if I realized what I did wrong.

I've opened up my mouth a couple of different times. I brought up “just wait until people in Oklahoma City remember that their historical homes have Nazi symbols still laid in brick.”

Anna: Can you tell me more about that?

Krista: Yah, it's on this really liberal realtor's Facebook profile. He's really outspoken about everything, he calls people out all the time. I didn't even know I was going to ruffle his feathers by saying this. It's a Facebook comment. It all stemmed from John Legend calling on all realtors across the country to do their part and fix structural racism and he's quoted as saying, "They need to show Black people all of the properties for which they qualify." This guy is making fun of it saying realtors just care about money, they're not worried about that anymore. Basically, I said what I just told you [about the Nazi symbols in bricks] and he was like, "I personally don't know anyone that would care. I'd gladly sell it to a Jewish buyer if they want it and I'd probably hang around and help him rip it out." I was like, "Well would you gladly sell it to a White supremacist that wanted to keep it?" It all gets tricky and I don't know the solution myself, but the swastika bricks have intrigued me ever since I went to [Oklahoma City University]. All these people were wondering where [the swastika bricks are]. Well there's tons of them around. People started saying, "the swastika has been used over time for many things other than Nazis." I did some research. The homes in Putnam Heights—which is one of the neighborhoods where these are found—all those dudes were White bankers, none of those people were Native. So, if that's what they were thinking, that's not true. In the 20's and 30's, which is when most of these historic homes were built with swastikas, that's right whenever pro-fascism was starting to pop up in the U.S. in the form of grassroots movements. The conversation about this on Facebook never really went anywhere. I thought I was going to be able to get at least one person to be like, "wow that is really messed up" but in fact, it was just resistance on all fronts from all people that I thought were open-minded.

Anna: Do you ever hear real estate agents say anything about segregation?

Krista: The go-to answer, if somebody asks you about—they do training about this—if someone asks you, "hey is this area safe? Is this a ghetto area?" the way that you're supposed to respond to those kinds of inquiries is to say, "here's a website, you can go look at crime rates." That's our official response to someone with prejudice, most likely, asking about the state of the neighborhood. You can go look at crime rates anywhere. That is something that they teach us locally, that's the only thing that we're supposed to say, which doesn't really solve the problem at the forefront, which

is that our buyer is afraid of living in this area because of stereotypes and things that they've been told...we should be able to point out the dangers of a buyer even asking that. Squashing it in its step. Or asking them, "why are you asking this? Because we've seen a lot houses in the Paseo, which isn't crime free, and you haven't asked me that. So, why when I show you something in Lincoln Terrace, why are you wondering about the crime there?"...I will say, I've worked with a lot of Edmond clients as well, and they never ask me "what's the crime in this area?" I haven't had one person in Edmond express any sort of fear about the neighborhood, or say anything like "oh, this is the good part of Edmond." There's a reason for that. People aren't afraid. They know Edmond is all White, they know Edmond doesn't have a lot of diversity at the moment. With people like that, it's going to be really hard to change their minds. We're seeing that right now with what's going on in the world. It's the people that don't have to think about it that don't. Same with realtors. If you don't have any diverse clients then why would you even worry about speaking up because you're not going to lose any clients, right?

Anna: What does it mean to historically preserve an area beyond the objects in it?

Krista: Right, like beyond the actual physicality of a house. Regarding gentrification, I haven't really delved into that yet, but it's something I have to confront within myself. Because I love Oklahoma City, I love seeing growth, but at the same time, I do see this root of just greed that drives the growth. It's kind of a conundrum seeing the Plaza district do well, but at the same time, pushing others out as well. I don't really know how to reconcile that. I'm not really worried about my business, but more so with myself.

Anna: I made one post on the Nextdoor app while living in the Gatewood neighborhood, complaining that because of the Plaza, there's constantly crowds of people parking throughout the neighborhood and taking up a lot of street space, and making it difficult for the people actually living there. I was attacked so quickly by residents of the area for saying anything negative about the Plaza area. People saying the Plaza has driven the values of their homes up, and how the Plaza used to be nothing and now it's thriving. What do you say to those people making that argument?

Krista: Anytime someone responds with, "but money," it negates the issue. It's cool seeing an old house get remodeled. It's cool

seeing someone put their own spin on it 100 years later. It's also fun seeing buyers like it too, but as far as pushing poor people out, that way rich people can buy a plot half a mile from downtown and feel like they're cool, I don't know how to reconcile that as far as being in the real estate industry. I still don't. If you are in the real estate industry, you can see the trends before they happen. Metro Park has already been bought up. We're already onto Linwood Boulevard. The places that are selling right now, we won't even see renovations for another 14-15 months. So, the people starting to see gentrification, they don't know it's been in the works sometimes up to 2 years before. When all the wholesalers start buying houses for cash. When the investors come out of the wood works and have 16 houses in one edition. That tends to spark growth in an area. It tends to spark renovations and a lot of times it's not homeowners getting pushed out of an area, a lot of times it's renters. They don't have a say in the matter, they just have been renting in that area for so long. They might have been there 10 or 15 years, all the sudden they get a notice to vacate and they're showing their house to random investors. There's a bigger issue and I have no idea what the solution is.

Anna: What I'm noticing happening more in the Plaza is the demolition of historic homes and putting up the same trendy, farmhouse style home, and you see that happen over and over again. What bothers me is there was a lot of individuality in those homes and they're being replaced with something that seems like a trend in the moment, without a lot of thought for longevity.

Krista: Oh yah, and even with the houses that are still standing, people will completely change the inside. Right now, what's really big is open space, so if you renovate a home, most of the time you are taking out beams that were there 100 years ago. They're really beautiful pieces of wood. And it's just for the sake of making the space look bigger. It is interesting how they've been doing that in the Plaza. I appreciate modern architecture. I also appreciate someone's right to do whatever they want if they own the land. So, if a developer owns the space, they can do anything, they can tear it down. But it is so vastly different from the architecture around it. It begs the question, why? If the reason why is because there's still buyers around that will buy those modern houses, then what's their motivation for wanting to stand out like that?

Anna: Thank you for your time, that's all the questions I have!

## Soreeta Hinds CEO of Brown Cow Bakeshop

*Highlights: During our conversation over the phone, Soreeta talks about what it was like growing up in predominantly white areas of Oklahoma City, and how her family's race revealed the limited thinking of those around her. Soreeta faced similar challenges working in the Oil & Gas field as the only Black person at her company. She now works for herself as the owner of Brown Cow Bakeshop in Oklahoma City.*

JULY 18, 2020

Anna: How long have you had your business, Brown Cow Bakeshop?

Soreeta: I'm a home-based business, and I've actually been in business since I graduated school in 2012. I've kinda remained unknown until now. I didn't want to work for anyone else. I had a taste of corporate America and it was just too much. I worked in Oil & Gas and was forced to resign from my company. This was during a time where, this is where stuff is still kinda segregated. Even in the workplace. I worked in Oil & Gas and was forced to resign from my company. I was the only Black person on my floor. This was when Obama was first elected. So, it was just an awkward situation. Especially when, in Oil & Gas, it's very Republican based, good ole boy type system, and here I am like, little ole Black me, I'm the only Black person on the floor. And then we get our first Black president and it's just like, the company like shut down. Nobody was talking, everybody was quiet. It was the strangest thing to me. Once I was forced to resign from my company, I decided maybe I should just try to work for myself.

Anna: How do you try to incorporate your identity into your business?

Soreeta: My personality translates into my food if that makes sense. I have been told that I'm a kitchen witch so, I don't know, I keep calling it weird, but it's not weird. It's just a gift that I have from God...

A lot of people, when they order from me, they don't know I'm Black until they pick up their order. Which is kinda funny to me because basically, you don't know that I'm Black, but you see my food first and then you find out that I'm Black. And once you find out that I can create these things, you're like "oh my gosh, I didn't know Black people could do this." It's the craziest thing to me.

Anna: How long have you lived in this area?

Soreeta: My whole entire life besides freshman year of college.

Anna: You mentioned not knowing much about Deep Deuce before that conversation with your mother. Was the area not a part of your life growing up?

Soreeta: No, my parents raised us in predominantly White neighborhoods and schools just so we could see, "these are the opportunities you can have." Me and my sister have a unique experience growing up that way. Having your parents, you know, raise you in all White neighborhoods and go to predominantly White schools.

Anna: Did they express why you couldn't get those same opportunities in non-White schools?

Soreeta: No, they didn't really explain it. I think it's just how they grew up and the things that they saw because they were around and can remember being sprayed by water hoses, you know, White-only establishments in Oklahoma. You know, you always want better for your kids, so I think they didn't want to have to deal with any of that.

Anna: What did it feel like to grow up in a predominantly White school? Was there any aspect of it that didn't feel normal?

Soreeta: We went from an all-Black catholic school to public school. Me and my sister, basically we were the first set of Black twins that some of our friends had ever met. Which was kinda interesting because, you know, it's normal for us. So that was interesting, but it was just normal for us. We did have the occasional....one time we were walking home from school and a car pulled up beside us and told us, "N\*\*\*as, go home." We were kinda scared because we were in the fifth grade. We didn't know what to do so we just ran home, we had never been in that situation before.

We never had really any issues except experiencing Black-on-Black racism because we went to predominantly White schools. So, like, the language, people would say, "oh my gosh, you guys are trying to be White, you guys talk White." We were like "but we're not...that's how we speak."

Anna: What makes Oklahoma City stand out from other cities to you?

Soreeta: I think people don't realize how culturally diverse Oklahoma City really is. Even though it's been, I don't wanna say it's been segregated, but it kinda has been. But I mean, it's very diverse. Especially growing up on the Northside, and when I met my husband, he's White. When I met my husband, he lived on the Southside, right across from Capitol Hill high school, kinda like in a predominantly Hispanic area. Which was kinda like, very different for me.

Anna: Why do you think segregation is still so prevalent here?

Soreeta: I think a lot of that, to me, it comes from the fear of the unknown. Just like, "oh my gosh, I don't know what it would be like to live next to a Black person." You know, but it's funny to me, growing up, me and my sister, we were like the first Black home that a lot of people had been to. Which was still weird to me. They would come into my house like, "oh, it's normal." What did you think it was going to be?

I don't want to say I was born with my eyes wide open, we just have always been exposed to things growing up, like different cultures. So, my eyes were always open and I'm always paying attention. And it just amazes me that people are not paying attention.

Anna: That's an interesting idea, what is considered normal or not. I think it goes back to the bubble people experience by seeing the world through the lens of the community around them. In my bubble, these are the things that are normal and everything outside of it is not normal. When, in reality, we're all growing up in the same city.

Soreeta: Exactly, everybody's going through the same thing. We're all the same people, all have the same problems, it's just our skin color's different.

Anna: Last year, the Contemporary Art museum had an exhibit, Oklahoma is Black, from artist, Tatyana Fazlalizadeh. The exhibit expresses a recognition that a lot of people don't see the Black community or acknowledge that it exists, and not everyone in America even knows there's Black people in Oklahoma and Black farmers and Black cowboys. Have you seen examples of cultural erasure in the city?

Soreeta: Not in the city, but I've seen it with my experiences. Growing up in predominantly White neighborhoods, and all of the racial tension that has come up all the sudden, it's like, I have people reaching out to me like, "oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know you had to go through that." That's crazy to me too. I'm like, where have you guys been? Not that this is all I know, but racial tension has always been around, it just has been. It just blows my mind that the people that I grew up with, they were completely oblivious to it. Me and my sisters have these discussions all the time. I wonder if some of the people that we grew up with just thought we're White, even though we're brown, they just associated us with being White and didn't really take into consideration that we we're actually Black.

Anna: What do you think causes someone to think that way?

Soreeta: I don't know. It's mind-blowing to me. We're obviously brown, so I don't know how you think otherwise. I see the jump now, people are like, "what can I do to support Black businesses? What can I do to help?" One, educate yourself and educate your kids that brown people are not bad. And just supporting more Black-owned businesses.

Anna: In your experience, do people around you ever talk about Deep Deuce?

Soreeta: It's never really talked about unless someone's like, "Hey, I'm gonna go eat at the Wedge in Deep Deuce." The history is not really talked about. Nobody really talks about it. I don't know why. My mother moved from Oklahoma City to Tulsa, and now it's like, oh people didn't know about the race riots in Tulsa, and I'm like, how do you guys not know about this? Because it's not taught in our history books. That's the explanation. Sometimes you have to seek outside your history books.

The craziest part, for me, about the whole Deep Deuce area, is that that's where my parents used to hang out as teenagers. That was

their local hangout spot. It's crazy. I didn't know any of the history of Deep Deuce until the gentrification, the revitalization of that area. Until my mom was like, "oh yah, you know as teenagers..." You know where the area is? You know there's Douglas High School on the other side of the highway. That was like the only Black high school in Oklahoma City during those times. Which is crazy to me. My parents lived by Douglas High School, so my parents, so they would just, you know, walk or drive to the Deep Deuce and that was their hangout spot.

Anna: Have you ever witnessed the Black business community not be welcomed in areas like Deep Deuce or heard any stories about it?

Soreeta: Not me personally, but Tanya, who owns Culture Coffee, she and her husband own Bistro 46. Bistro 46 is on the Eastside of town. Now she has the coffee shop off [6th] and Stonewall, and they're re-gentrifying that area. She and I had these conversations because it goes both ways. A lot of times, Black people don't want to go eat in White establishments and vice versa. She's trying to work to make everyone welcome in her coffee shop. She's trying to work so that Black people come in because there's not really any coffee shops in the Eastside. They're right by the health science center. So, you have doctors coming in. She wants to make it a well-rounded place and bring everyone together because you know, people have their opinions on coming in and revitalizing areas and not including the people that actually live in the neighborhood.

Anna: What do they need to do to include people in the neighborhood? What would be a more correct way to "revitalize" the area?

Soreeta: I think they should have more town halls. Say you were going to bring your corporation into the Eastside. Give the people in the neighborhood the opportunity to have the jobs first, you know. Let it be like a partnership instead of "I'm coming in and taking over and this is what we're doing." That pushes people away sometimes, but if more people talked about it, like "hey, this is what we want to bring into your neighborhood, let's talk about it." Ask people what they think.

Anna: Are you able to speak on the effects of gentrification in the Eastside?

Soreeta: The only issue I know about over there is there's no grocery store. Black people gotta eat! That's what bugs me about that area. They made the streets nice, thank you. I had a whole issue when the MAPS project first started, and it all sounded good and dandy. And we have the Scissortail Park, and it just didn't...to me, like, why don't we just clean up the Eastside and make the Eastside nice first? Because it's by the Capitol. Instead of building all around it, you know what I mean? They should have started with the people of the Eastside first and fix that area up and kinda spread it out. It's like it's in reverse in a weird kind of a way. I think, like you said, Black people are just not thought of. Now you're just pushing Black people out into other areas. There's more Black people in Edmond and Mustang and Yukon. When I was in high school, it wasn't like that.

Anna: Have you heard anything about the Homeland grocery store that will soon be built near the Eastside? I've had someone express to me that it is being built to prepare for the current and upcoming wave of new people coming into the area. And not to remedy the lack of access to food in the current neighborhood.

Soreeta: I hadn't heard that. Not to knock Homeland, but Homeland's prices are expensive.

Anna: How have you witnessed Oklahoma City grow, as well as stay stagnant when it comes to community life, preservation of history, things like that?

Soreeta: I mean, I've noticed a slow progression. From when I was a kid to now. Things are definitely changing.

Anna: How would you describe the younger generation of the Black community in the city?

Soreeta: I think the younger generation, they're more aware and they're being more vocal than previous generations that have preceded them. I have some friends, their kids are like mini activists, and I'm like, "you go, girl!" [laughs]. I'm diggin this generation of kids, they are being more outspoken and stand up for what's right and what's wrong.

Anna: What attributes to this change?

Soreeta: I don't know. It's refreshing. Social media has definitely changed the views of the world.

Anna: It gives more access, and puts things in your face, making it harder to ignore.

Soreeta: That's true. It's bringing more awareness of the Karens acting crazy. Karens have been acting up since the dawn of time. They're just now being caught on camera and shown to millions of people.

Anna: It's so strange how we have two different groups of people protesting. Predominantly White groups are protesting, "I can't breathe" because of masks—

Soreeta: —Hhmm, how ironic is that?

Anna: Right! And then you have a group of people protesting police brutality, also using the phrase "I can't breathe." Does the comparison of those two goals bring into question how we define oppression in this country?

Soreeta: Yah, I see it every day on Facebook with like the people who I have grown up with. It's crazy to me. Yet again...It's like, "I can't breathe, I'm claustrophobic." I'm like, that's kinda ironic. Well you can't really breathe when you've got a knee on your neck either, but it's okay...they're not fazed by that.

Anna: Why do you think people don't see that irony? That what they blow up to be so important is not comparable to what people of color and the Black community are protesting about? Basic human rights are being violated, systematic oppression, all of these really huge things. Why is there still such a disconnect?

Soreeta: Because people refuse to believe that White privilege exists. It exists! You complain, "I can't breathe with this mask on." My son can't wear a hoodie now when he goes places. I fear for his life. If he gets pulled over, I fear for his life. My daughter got pulled over in The Village two months ago. She has a baby and her license is in the diaper bag so she's fearing for her life. Just by speeding. So, she's like, "I'm unarmed, I have to reach over. To the diaper bag. Because my ID is in the diaper bag."

Anna: Have you had any similar experiences with the police in your life?

Soreeta: Not with the police, but I was told on multiple occasions to go back where I came from, which was ironic because my parents are American. Where am I supposed to go back to? The consensus is the same with all of the Black people I know. We shouldn't live in fear. It's just weird feeling like people don't think you belong here when you're like, "I do belong here, just like you." We don't share the same fears every day. Most of my friends don't fear for their kids and they're just like, "I can't imagine what that's like." Have a little compassion.

Anna: There's such a pattern with all of this language that's used about the idea that White spaces and communities are normal and the standard and if you don't fit into that category, then you don't belong here. It's very contradictory of Oklahoma's long history of having so many Black-created townships and communities with thriving economies. What does it mean to you for a location to be a whitewashed space?

Soreeta: It's an embarrassment. All of this stuff is just weird to me!

Anna: What needs to be done to achieve historic preservation and urban change in a less harmful way?

Soreeta: You study the history of that area. If you look at Lincoln Terrace, those places. All of those places have been preserved. Why don't you look at the history of all of those old neighborhoods? Don't tear them down, just build them back up to the way they were.

Anna: What beyond the objects of an area are important in preserving these places?

Soreeta: We don't have a Black history museum! I think they should do more murals down in that area, you know, like, "this is our work!" Something visual. Art around the area.

Anna: What does a community need to survive and thrive?

Soreeta: Good leadership.

Anna: Thank you for answering my questions, have a great day!

## Alaric Overbey CEO of The F.A.R.M, Farmer & Educator of Vertical Farming

*Highlights: During our conversation over the phone, Alaric discusses his work with vertical farming in the Eastside of OKC. This method of farming will provide new job opportunities for the community and has the potential to produce large quantities of food in urban settings without the limitations of traditional farming practices.*

JULY 25, 2020

Anna: Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your relationship to the city?

Alaric: I came out here in October of last year. The reason I came out, I had reached out to Hank Binkowski, the owner of Uptown grocery store, so Uptown, and Buy for Less, and Save-A-Lot. So, the store that was located on 23rd and MLK. The goal for me, was to come into their stores and the new store they were going to set up on 23rd and Lincoln, and in there, I was going to put in a vertical farm, which would allow them to basically grow their own food for that particular community. So that's what brought me out here.

I had introduced the idea to them cause I understood some of the logistical challenges of grocery stores. Some of their challenges are having a continuous supply of a particular product at a particular price point. In order to do that right now, they have to use a lot of different vendors in order to supply them, so it's not exactly cost effective, so there's a very low profit margin for them. What I was doing was going in and kinda attacking the back end of how to address some of these issues as far as sourcing their produce, providing local produce, and cutting down their cost on the back end. Which would allow them to play on their price point in the front end, therefore offering that community a higher quality product at a more affordable price simply based on volume.

Anna: Did location have anything to do with it?

Alaric: Quality and location have a big issue in regard to where people can afford certain types of produce. Food security is more so about having access to healthy, affordable produce. Whole Foods sells organic but organic isn't affordable in this particular community, even though, if they had more organic there, they might have a reduction in some of the other health issues that they have in that community related to how they eat.

Anna: Can you tell me about your career history?

Alaric: I'm from California and my background is in IT. I specialize in data center optimization, pretty much as a solution specialist, specialist for companies as an introduction of data center optimization back when disaster recovery and cloud technology was comin' into play. My job was going into companies and introducing them to this new solution for current problems that they have when it comes to addressin' their data space. When I moved to Dallas in 2015, I applied that same methodology but using vertical farming technology because it was primarily about being able to grow foods with less resources in a smaller amount of space. For me, that was the solution to this particular problem we have about food access. You can transport the food but that's a whole 'nother issue. But if you have the ability to figure out how to grow the food more continuously in a smaller area where it's needed, than that would work as a solution to that particular problem.

Anna: Did you already have a separate interest in gardening or farming or did that come out of where your job led you?

Alaric: In California, gardening and food are a natural part of the landscape. So, you grow up with gardens, even in urban areas. When you walk down the street, there's orange trees and everybody has an orange or plum tree, or some type of fruit tree or something growing at their house. It's natural out there. Coming to Dallas, and being in Oklahoma, even when I was up there in Las Vegas, that's not really the case. So, having food that is readily accessible was very different in these environments.

Anna: Are there food deserts in California?

Alaric: There are, but there's quicker responses to food deserts in California. Oakland had an area considered to be a food desert.

How they responded was taking over a lot and starting to grow food.

Anna: The last time we talked, you mentioned using unused real estate for similar purposes, can you tell me more about your goals with that?

Alaric: Out here in the Northeast side, there's a lot of open land and empty lots that are both owned by the city and individual organizations and companies, and by individuals. A lot of times, people in these areas sit on these lots because they're waiting on that gentrification to come through so they can get a higher price point on those lots. They'll just hold off.

Anna: Do you know much about the people that own these lots? Do they live in the community? Or outside of it?

Alaric: It's a combination of all those things. There's people who own pieces of property out here who don't live out here. There's a lot of people who have property who tell me, "My dad owned a lot over here," or "We got 20 acres over here." So, there's a lot of just empty land out here that's not being utilized. A lot of it, the inner part, is a lot of urban area, where, you know, homes or buildings once sat. Then you have other areas that are somewhat rural or a little bit outside of the city, but it's owned by the people who live in the city. It's land that's been farmed and used in their family for years but over the last 10, 15, 20 years, they haven't done anything with it. A lot of it falls into probate. Then you start talking about unused real estate. A lot of the unused buildings that sit vacant, you have companies that are going out of business like Sears and things like that that have these large buildings that they don't know what to do with. The same thing happens in these communities. You can walk up and down 23rd street and see a lot of empty buildings because there's no real business models that are designed to go into those communities, that they don't know the people who have the money to do that. They won't feel that their business model is sustainable in that particular community.

Anna: What would it take to get that land to use?

Alaric: I think it's about having a plan for that land. For the individuals, I think if you can create a plan that says, "hey, we want to lease this lot from you for this amount of money. Right now, you're not getting anything from it. If you allow us to lease it, we'll

at least pay you extra amount of dollars a month for leasing your land."

Anna: Is that what you're in the process of doing or is it a future goal?

Alaric: That's kinda what I'm in the process of doing now. I'm working with a couple of people between Oklahoma City and Spencer and assessing what lots are owned by the city. What land is owned by the city. There's buildings and stuff that are owned by the city where people can build on these buildings for a dollar a month for 99 years.

Anna: Do you think the city will be receptive to it?

Alaric: Part of this is developing business models—gentrification is not a bad word. It's a bad word when it's used against people. So, when people feel victimized by gentrification, then it's a bad word. But gentrification in itself is just the upgrading of one area from one level to another. So if you develop a business model that's designed to enculturate the gentrification, to become part of it as it comes through, meaning your business model is something that feeds off of the gentrification that's coming. The economics that's coming from this particular type of gentrification. The type of people that's movin' into the community, if you develop a business model, no matter what color you are, that supplies a demand for those people that's comin' in, you cool. Our problem is in this particular community, we don't necessarily have a knowledge base on a collective level to develop those types of businesses. And if we do, it's more about taking those businesses to areas where we feel it will already thrive based on that business model. It's really the way you think about it. I might think about it a little differently because I'm not from out here, so I have a different view on the landscape. So, when I look at everything, I see things a little differently than people kinda livin' inside the box. You have to kinda get outside of the box and get a more holistic viewpoint of what it is and see how everything is kinda laid out and figure out what kind of business needs to fit where.

Anna: Are there any specific businesses in mind that you think would fit into a working business model for the community?

Alaric: The key one for me is food. It's food production. So for example—this is what I truly believe—If you was able to find a location out here, and develop a produce store that grew all of its

own produce and herbs right there on site, and it was like a greenhouse connected to the building, the same way you see a Walmart that has its garden area or a Lowes that has its garden area. But actually growing food. You kinda look at that, and you start to look at Northwest Oklahoma City, and look at the stuff they have out there. That model feeds into something for Whole Foods. That's why you always see Whole Foods in certain areas. Or Sprouts. Or certain types of restaurants. Developing a model like that, that offer those type of amenities that people are now looking for and gearing towards. If those people in this community did that, they would have ownership. Meaning, by doing that, now you're training them in a certain skillset that other people don't necessarily have. Which would mean vertical farming or hydroponic farm. Or other innovative ways of growing food and healthy food. Especially in this particular time period. When everybody is really concerned about having, you know, their distance, where food is coming from, how healthy the food is. There's an opportunity for this particular community to capitalize on that and not get ran over by gentrification, but become part of the gentrification as it comes in.

Anna: How do you think gentrification can occur positively without changing the culture of the community?

Alaric: Part of it is economics. When people feel like they can generate enough economics, enough income for themselves within their community to be able to thrive, and not just survive—that's one of the key points. That means that, when people over here get to a certain level where they can have certain types of jobs, they go outside of their community in order to do that, to find those jobs. So, if those jobs, they have to go outside and look for, those are the types of jobs that need to be created within the community. That's what will give them some ownership. Other places, either their community matches where they work at, or vice versa.

Anna: Do you know what is stopping this community from having those type of jobs?

Alaric: It's hard to say because that's a question that I've asked a lot. I've talked to a lot of people who tell me a grand history from 2nd all the way up to 50th. Of different Black businesses and Black shops and different things that were there. Honestly, I've had a hard time trying to figure out exactly what happened. I don't know if it's one thing or a combination of things. It just seems that, from the people I've talked to, as they've watched their family be in one

area, and they'll slowly migrate. You had a period out here, like for example, in California, you just did not have this period. You had a period of segregation that was very recent to people out here. So, school busing and stuff like that, where people were moving away and out of this particular community. Their kids were being forced to bus to schools in other areas. That had something to do with it.

Anna: Some of the other contributing factors were white flight, desegregation, more dependency on cars, and the highway placed through the community.

Alaric: The same thing was done down there in Dallas, where they split South Dallas and North Dallas with a freeway. You can look at a map, somebody showed me a map down there on the emissions effect. They know just by the way the wind blows, they know that by cutting the freeway this way, then the emissions are going to blow in this particular area. So, there's a whole higher concentration of emissions in this area that people are breathing. I believe that they understand what they're doing and the fact that you have so many that are affected by it that don't understand the effects. And by the time they understand the effects, it's almost too late. They feel they can't do anything about it. And then, there's also this habit in the Black community of voting from within. I think that the government and the system kinda capitalize off of that because they know just based on race that people are going to vote a certain way in these communities. And that's really unfortunate and it's been the detriment to a lot of Black urban communities. They get the same politicians in there that look like them but don't do anything for them. They take advantage of them. And the people from the outside know that's the case. They know that no matter what, they're going to vote for that person because of their skin color, gonna get voted into office. So now it's about "how much control can I have over that person?" What ends up happenin', those people in office, they tend to be puppets for people outside of the community. So that's why you don't see anything bein' done. I just ain't been too many places, you know, where I've seen really anything done. If those communities are still in that state, it's because that politician that's over that community hasn't done anything over them years they've been in office to change that.

Anna: It's like finding this balance, how much responsibility does the community take for restoring itself and where do you put blame on the higher power who does have a lot of power in what they could do to improve. Some other people I've talked to have expressed that leadership will always act very concerned about the issues you bring up, but, ultimately, do nothing about it, or even try.

Alaric: Especially in low level politics, man, you ain't gonna hear from nobody until it's election time.

Anna: Has anyone else expressed a similar view that you've talked to?

Alaric: Everybody over here. Most of the people over here recognize and understand it, but again, because they're in the problem, they're almost part of the problem. Here, it's very deep seeded than a lot of other places. You know, a lot of other places, they figured out a way to kinda progress at some point out of that. Here, the fact that there's so much denial about it makes it very difficult to change it.

Anna: Are there any noticeable differences between how you've seen change occur in California versus here? Or Dallas?

Alaric: In Dallas, they got the people who we're causing the problem over the years out of the office. And so, now some of that money is being redirected, and there's more money being redirected to those particular areas. You'll have somebody in there that has a different viewpoint because now they need to operate here. So that means that, as crazy as it might sound, unless you get somebody that's not from there, or you get somebody that's more progressive, you'll need somebody of a different background to go in there and fix something like that. And that's something the community has to decide to do. They have to vote to put somebody in office based on their merits and not their skin color.

Anna: Do you think effective change can happen within the system? Or do you think change has to also occur through methods that attempt to break out of the system, like protests?

Alaric: [Sigh]...We've been protesting for a long time, you know...Protesting gets you results that pacify you from protesting at that time. That's how I look at it. They respond to your demands but it's not a sustainable model for change. Policy and power.

Kinda shifting where the power is within the community. If you have a community that's in power, it's about educating the community on how to obtain some type of power of their situation. There's been other cultures that have done that. The Hispanic community, the Asian community. There's been other communities that ran into some of the same issues, but they responded differently...I don't know. That's a hard one.

Anna: What has stood out to you as unique about the community here?

Alaric: I like it out here because the people are interested in what they don't know. That means that they're open to change, they're open to opportunity. It's just about feedin' them the right information. There are other tools and mechanisms that can be used out here. For me, I have a particular lane, and I see a lot of opportunity in that particular lane that nobody has stepped in. But I'm also seeing that, if you can show it, it's something they will feed into. You can use it as a developmental tool for a community, and I think this particular community is hungry for something different. Everybody that's coming in and doing something is either not from here or they're not offering a solution.

Anna: What kind of solutions are the community looking for?

Alaric: They don't really know, and that's part of the problem. They know they want stuff. They want to have the same equal playing grounds as other communities. They just don't necessarily know how to obtain it. So, for example, they want a Black-owned grocery store, you know. That's a cool idea but is it something that's real tangible? And I say that even as a Black person because you have to look at it, you have to be kinda realistic, like, you know, what examples are there of Blacks owning a grocery store chain in recent history? So, you want something that you don't know how to do which is why it hasn't been done. So again, the biggest thing that I think can really be afforded out here, and given out here, is those type of opportunities. Those type of skillsets that can be scaled. And so, they're looking for something that says, hey, here we are, you know. This is what we're doin' that no one else is doin'. That's what I really wanted to be able to do with the grocery store because that would put a different focus on the Northeast side, as opposed to being kinda a place where people need help from. They always need handouts. All the news coverage and stuff like that is like, "Oh somebody else needs help out here, and they don't have a

grocery store, and this and this and this." It might be positive but it's a positive response to negative stuff.

Anna: What is your relationship to the Sustainable Science Academy?

Alaric: So, what I do is that I develop partnerships out here. I developed partnerships with different groups and different organizations. So, I have different relationships with these groups inside that they don't necessarily have with each other and they've been here. I kinda like been working my way through the community like a piece of thread that kinda pulls different pieces together. The first one was working with NEOKC Farmers Market. They didn't have a place to grow their food anymore and I knew a guy out there in Spencer, he sits on 14 acres and he's trying to lease that land and he has a training program, doing stuff with youth, and I had already developed a partnership with them to do some urban farming over there. Vertical farms and vertical towers out of shipping containers. So, putting them together. And then working with Pitts park over here with the city to basically operate the farmers market out of there. So now that's 1, 2, 3, 4 different places that's growing food and have a hub in order to sell that food right here inside the community.

Greg Brown is a guy that I met when I first came out here at a small Farmers Association conference held by a Black historical research project. That's where I met him at. He's a native from Oklahoma, he's from out here. His family has land in Boley. He loves doing farming. When we met, he was interested in the vertical farming. He didn't know anything about that. So, when he started to learn about the vertical farming, then what that did was introduce him to a different concept to what he was traditionally taught. So, he's kinda been like my guide out here as far as knowin' where's what and who's what and you know, a lot of the history that goes on out here. So that's my business partner. Working with somebody within the community, he's an example of what can happen to others in the community when they get a different piece of information. The possibilities of what he can do now with his land, he has towers now in his front yard.

Anna: Can you tell me more about vertical farming?

Alaric: Vertical farming is basically growing produce without dirt and a smaller amount of space. There's a few different methods, anywhere from aquaponics to hydroponics to traditional

aeroponics. I got into a new farm, which is a hybrid of vertical aeroponics in a modular system that's designed to be scalable. So, it's designed to specifically grow produce at a healthier and a smaller amount of space, and faster amount of time, with less resources.

Anna: Is the goal for individuals to do this in their yards or for a business to adopt it?

Alaric: It's scalable. That's the key with it. I can do something, from one person having a tower at their house—it costs \$100—to setting up you know, 300, 2,200 towers on one acre and growing a million pounds a year. It's a very scalable system. So, you can do it in a greenhouse, you can do it indoors, you can do it outdoors. You can do it on a rooftop. But here in an urban area, and you have about 90% of the population now moving into urban areas by the year 2050, you know. Food, and where food comes from, has to travel a lot further. So, it's always a continuous issue with logistics. When it comes to issues like we're having right now where you have a pandemic. If things get shut down, you know, depending on how things go. Food, again, becomes a key factor in where it comes from and how long it takes to get to where it needs to be where people are. So being able to intercept that with vertical farming and other innovative ways of farming that allow you to grow food continuously in different environments and allows you to control the environment in which you grow the food. So now, instead of waiting for strawberries to come from California, you can create an environment and grow strawberries right here in Northeast Oklahoma.

Anna: Do you believe this could create a lot of jobs or a lot of resources for people in the community?

Alaric: Both. It would create a lot of jobs. If you look at taking a lot, you know, just an acre. The amount of food that you could grow on that lot. The size of the facility, the amount of towers, and the amount of manpower it would take to harvest, feed, package, deliver...on an acre, you could create, you know what I'm sayin, 100 jobs.

Anna: That all sounds really amazing. How long have you been working on the farms/gardens on your property and on the property of the Science Academy?

Alaric: A couple of months. I've only been out here about nine months. I'm here on a permanent basis. I'm here because I think that this can be a place where these models can be developed. People can be employed and trained and deployed to other cities that have similar problems.

Anna: Is this the birthplace of this model or is this happening anywhere else?

Alaric: Yes. Not like this. Vertical farming is a 28-billion-dollar industry by the year 2023. Right. You can't go to school for vertical farming right now. That makes it almost like a vocational trade. I'm on the small scale. What they're looking at is converting buildings, you know, 4 or 5 story buildings. 10 story buildings into vertical farms. In controlled environments. Being able to grow food on every one of those different levels. The concept itself was developed at Disney's Epcot center, between the Epcot center and NASA. It's called The Land, which is the oldest running hydroponic farm in the world; they've been running it out there for about 45 years. They grow tomatoes the size of your head down there. NASA developed a system to grow food in space. It's just about gettin' these systems out there, gettin' people to really understand it. Developing a training place for people to start to learn that and if you concentrate that in this particular community, I do believe that you create a whole new workforce that you can now deploy to other parts of the state to do training, to do installations, to set up these systems. Out here in Northeast Oklahoma City for example, prime example, Dollar General, Dollar Store, Family Dollar, what they call small box grocery stores. A lot of urban communities are developing ordinances against those stores coming into those communities if they don't have at least 500 square feet of fresh produce available. That occurred here, the city council passed it. So now, again, looking at the business model, those stores, when you start to look at you know, Dollar General, these are national stores. Where they dominate at is in urban communities. So, for them to have to change up their business model to accommodate that, that's a lot of money. That's a lot of changes. That's like telling 7-11, or telling McDonalds, you can no longer be 3,000 square feet, you can only be 1,500 square feet. That's a lot of money for a company to change their top-down organization structure. So, what they'll look for, even though they probably haven't looked for

it yet, because it's not really being offered yet, is outsourcing. Finding a way to outsource what they have to do in order to operate someplace to a business that specializes in doing that. That's what we've done with IT.

Anna: So, it's more important for the community to have control over the businesses coming in rather than for the businesses to have control in the community?

Alaric: Oh yes, absolutely.

Anna: Do you think that plays a big part, the businesses having a lot of control in how gentrification occurs in a community?

Alaric: Yeah, they're the ones that have control of those tax dollars. So, those businesses, because they generate tax dollars for that particular property, they have a lot more say-so in what happens over there. They're going to make whatever upgrades or changes to accommodate the gentrification that's coming into their area. They're not planning on moving. They just know they have to upgrade their location to fit into the urban plan for what's coming out there. That way they're not in the way, they become part of it. Right now, they want to buy up people because you're just in the way. There was a study done by this dude running for office. In the study, it shows that about 89% of the people who work in the Adventure district, which is considered to be the Northeast side, don't live there. That's an example of a business model, both in the government and in private, that operate within the community but doesn't feed back into a community. So even the fact that they don't give the people in this community first dibs at those jobs. Of course, you want them to be qualified, but trying to pull from the community. There are no job fairs or nothing. You go other places and communities; those businesses hold job fairs in those communities. There's been one job fair out in this community since I've been here that I've seen. That was by the grocery store that didn't come.

Anna: Why do you think they don't want to pull from the community?

Alaric: Because their patrons aren't people from that community, so they want people working in there that match the demographic of the patrons that come in there that's gonna patronize those businesses. I think it's a combination of the bias, they're saying "hey, most of the people coming to this zoo, to this science place

are either schools, universities, not a lot of Black folks.” So, it doesn't make sense to have a lot of Black folks workin' there. So, they pull from other areas. They want a certain look. You want a certain look in the cowboy museum, you know what I'm sayin', if a majority of the people coming in there are, you know, cowboys.

Understanding grocery stores is one aspect of it. Homeland has been sitting over there for years, across the street from that location where they're talkin' about puttin' somethin'. They've been there. It's just, when you start to look at planning, gentrification hadn't reached that part of the Eastside yet. It's just now in recent years that it's now starting to creep a little further down so now you can anticipate within 3-5 years you're going to have a whole different population over here. That was one of the battles between Homeland and Uptown. They're rivals. So even a lot of the behind the scenes business dealings and stuff that goes on has to do with that. Restore OKC is in partnership with Homeland, for example. So, you start to look at Homeland in partnership with the city and with another group, it's like a triangle group, there's a three-part group relationship between Homeland, this investment group, and the city of Oklahoma. So, the city of Oklahoma is making a certain amount of money off of that particular land because they're basically leasing the parking lot to Homeland so that's their benefit. They're getting parking lot revenue over there. That's also part of the TIF district, that TIF district was actually designed, and it's also part of the opportunity zone. So, it's an opportunity zone right now based off its current state. That's what makes that land and everything over there so attractive right now. There's a lot of tax incentives. And the Binkowskis are the ones who actually kinda put together this whole tax incentive based on that grocery store that they told the city they we're going to be puttin' in there. They know for one that Homeland is not the most cost-effective grocery store based off their price point. And then its location doesn't really serve that community. The USDA has a tracker system that you can go on where it will show you how many people in a particular area have cars and have access to grocery stores and food and stuff like that. Homeland is right on the edge of the Northeast side, where they're gonna be puttin' it. So, the people who still live in the heart of the Northeast side, which is over here, you know, 17th, 10th, and all of that area. How do they get to Homeland? You still have an access issue. It's not affordable and it's over a mile away.

Anna: What do you see happening to the community in the future?

Alaric: I'm trying to time it to where it's a nice little collision course. Where both ideas and models run into each other and they're forced to have a conversation. Now, somebody else is doing something else over here that you want to be over here. That you want to be a part of whatever you have going in here. I think being able to do that will help create a new kind of conversation. So, as opposed to Homeland, yah Homeland's coming. They're not going to come this year like they said. That's not going to happen. They haven't even broken ground. In the meantime, like just for me, I see the opportunity to do something a lit bit faster. I see an opportunity to do these micro farms and actually do our own grocery store. Develop and put together a grocery store model that fits what's needed in this particular community now and for the community that wants to move in here. The community has to have something to say something about. They have to have something that gives them power, they have to have something that other people want. I'm trying to develop something for this community that other people want. Responding to what's going on instead of reacting to what's going on.

Anna: What are the differences between reacting and responding?

Alaric: Reacting is not really thinking it out. It's like, man something's been done to me so it's a kneejerk reaction to being a victim. It's about being in this victim role. Reaction keeps you in that victim role out here. When you respond, you lookin' at the whole picture. This is what's going on, and you have to be honest about what's going on and where you stand in that. You have to upgrade what it is you do out here in order to address your own issues. You can't fight the same battle with the same tools if everybody else is using different tools and you're still using sticks and stones. There's an economy out here but other people are capitalizing off of it. The businesses out here, they work, they've been here for years. They're sustainable because they're the only thing here.

Anna: Do people in the community push back against having a victim role put on them?

Alaric: Yes. For example, the people in the community never started calling those communities food deserts. That's not a term they came up with. So, different terms are given and named different things that, for them it might have a demeaning effect. It

also puts them in the middle state where others' responses to that, the governor's response, the state's response to this being a food desert now is to increase the amount of people having access to food stamps, for example. That's their response. By doing that they increasing the amount of dependency that those people have on that system now. So, it's not teaching any type of independence, it's just teaching a recurring of dependency. Instead of helping pass down a generation of wealth or anything, they pass down this whole generation of welfare to a point where the standards of what they expect for themselves are so low that it's hard to change their situation.

...We've been protesting—Blacks and Whites—have been protesting. Where are the results? When have those protests turned into a solution? That should be the narrative—developing a solution and understanding how to even get to a solution. Being able to really identify, here is the problem, and how do you address these particular problems? And, actually come up with a comprehensive solution. That's where your funding should be poured into if you really want a solution.

Anna: Thank you for with speaking me and answering my questions, have a great day!

## Greg Brown Local Farmer and Partner of The F.A.R.M

*Highlights: During our conversation over the phone, Greg discusses his work as a farmer in the Eastside of OKC and his passion for bringing food sovereignty to the community. He talks about the struggles the neighborhood has faced with lack of access to quality food and produce, and how vertical farming can offer new opportunities in restoring autonomy for the Black community while gentrification occurs in the area.*

AUGUST 14, 2020

Anna: can you tell me about yourself and your relationship to the city?

Greg: I was born and raised in the Northeast quadrant of Oklahoma City. I'm 55 years old. With the exception of six years in the military, I've been primarily here in Oklahoma City all my life. My father is from a small town in Eastern Oklahoma called Holdenville. That's where my agriculture roots come in. All my life we've had a farm down there where we have 120 acres and spent most of my time growing up, outside of school and sports, there. As I've gotten older, agriculture has become a passion of mine. I was mostly growing for my family and a few neighbors, and I met Alaric at a farmers' conference and what he was doing with vertical farming, and the situation we we're having with the grocery store issue, you know, I met him and took an interest in what he was doing with building out the grocery store and started getting' involved that way. We collaborated and put together our grant projects that we have to go around the political rhetoric and everything to create, not only food, but economic opportunities in the community. I've never gotten involved in politics because I know what politics are about. This was an issue really close to my heart because our community is suffering. We have to take our economic dollars to somebody else's community just to eat. You know, that to me, that's not fair from a governmental standpoint any way around. And they play politics and good ole boy systems with the governmental and city official support. If they don't support you, if you don't get their blessing, their gonna make sure it doesn't happen [laughs]. They put up red tape, or they gonna do

something that prevents you from doin what you're doin. Because it's not in their interest. It's been like that forever.

Anna: Can you tell me about how you've seen the community change throughout your life to where it is today? How did it get to the point of having no grocery stores?

Greg: Well, from the grocery store standpoint, it's not just here, not just Oklahoma City. You look at the majority of Black communities in major cities around the country, and it's the same thing. To where the system will force us to take our economic dollars and gentrify the surrounding communities. Where I live, Belle Isle station is the closest food center to me in any direction. Ok? That is 5 miles away. That's just me. You move out to the south part and it's even further than that because you have to go all the way out to Midwest city to a Wal-Mart. No Crest, no Homeland, no community family-owned grocery stores. They wiped them all out in large due to the gentrification. My experience with the gentrification is, they take the Black communities and they use the governmental system to impoverish the communities. I live over in the Adventure district of the Northeast side of Oklahoma City, by the zoo and Cowboy Hall of Fame. So, what the government do, what they've done over the years, they'll bring in and allow Section 8 into the Black neighborhoods. You're bringing the more impoverished people, Black people, into your better neighborhoods. Then the people don't take care of, or care about the properties like the people that lived there, and then goes the neighborhood in 5-10 years. It drives the value down and everything. And then what they do is come back behind them, buy it up for pennies, and then gentrification is being done. Then they take us, now out where you are, the North Highlands area, the Northwestern quadrant. That's becoming the new Black section of Oklahoma City. They're pushing everything that way. They take Deep Deuce and they're working that way, all the way across 23rd street, and force us out into another area as a whole. You'll still have Black families there, but when it comes to businesses and all of that, none of that will be ours. Just like Deep Deuce. That hospital area [OU University Research Park] they took, they've taken all of that. And none of that has benefited the Black community. I'll put it that way.

Anna: Do you think that's more of the responsibility of the government making decisions or is it the responsibility more on businesses and different industries?

Greg: It begins at the governmental level because the government is the one in charge of all of the policies and all that side of it. If the government says that you can't do something here, I don't care what you are as a business owner. You can't win. The business owners usually bow down to the demands of the government. Once again, the government has allowed everybody to come into the Black community and assist everybody to come into the Black community and become business owners and everything, but us. You see what I'm sayin'? Because if you come in the Black community, all you gonna see is foreigners owning everything.

It's just a cycle that takes place. It's been a pattern, you startin' down in Deep Deuce and you can look at who predominantly lived and owned everything in that area. Look at how it's been pushed to the North. How the Black community has been pushed to the North from those areas and what those areas look like since that has been done.

Anna: Did you see the effects of putting the highway through the community?

Greg: This is me personally. I don't believe that gentrification is bad, by no means. Transportation and everything, that's how everything runs. The thing is, who benefits? Who are the beneficiaries of the highway system coming through there? The property values going up? They already do these things in advance before we even know anything about the plan. You see what I'm sayin'? When we find out about the plan, it's a year or two out and they're goin' around gobbling up all the property for pennies on the dollar because it's run down and everything now. Those areas used to be beautiful areas. Those older homes and everything. Then they created this Section 8 system where they started putting these impoverished people in these neighborhoods and run the neighborhoods down over the course of 10-20 years and then, like I said, they just come back and take it back up for pennies. Then you have the Thunder arena. Big hotels in there [laughs]. And then, once again, the property owners benefit from it largely, probably because of eminent domain.

Anna: What would be a better way to approach gentrification that doesn't whitewash spaces and push people out?

Greg: Take input from the people. Set up a gentrification forum, where the people, the homeowners, everybody can participate. If they don't participate and don't get involved, they can't complain. But if you put it out there to where the community can be involved and give the community first opportunity to take advantage of the opportunities in their own communities, versus, for instance, I have a lady friend who wanted to buy—it's right on 23rd—it's a post office. Old post office. She wanted to buy it to make a community center out of the post office and she was going to pay cash for it. The city wouldn't sell it to her, said they we're holding it for corporate...You have the Blacks in the community that they allow into the governmental positions and they don't support us, they just do what they're told. The thing about the Black community is, we have been conditioned with the disenfranchisement that we support any Black candidate, no matter who it is. It could be Satan. We have that mentality. That's the sad part about the whole thing. I say that to say this: when it comes to who I am, and what I do, and what I am, politics have no bearings. No politician or anything stops me from achieving what I need to achieve, you see what I'm saying? But you have the majority of people that really depend and listen and give grievance to the government. This past year I have been more involved on the political level, gettin' in there and making my voice heard and that kind of thing. Me personally, I'm going to do what I got to do, I'm going to make it. It's just the people in our community that it hurts to see go through this kind of stuff. When I leave my house, it's like I have to go on a cross country trip just to go get some lettuce. Some quality. And they put these Family Dollars and these Dollar General stores in our communities and all they feed the people is just crap. Once again, like I said, it all ties into the system. It's done on purpose to keep people ignorant and keep their thought process at a low vibration.

Anna: How would you describe the personality of your community?

Greg: Very—I don't know if it's the right word—complacent. There's no enthusiasm, we've gotten crap sold for so long from the politicians that they put in office that they don't expect anything. There's no accountability. When I was growing up, it was a guy, Kevin Cox. He represented our district for 20 years, and I cannot tell you one thing that I put my hat on that he did for the community that the community can be proud of. It passed on. Mike Shelton came in after him and he stayed nice 2 or 3 or 4 terms and

there is not one thing in the community that I can think or show that he's done that makes a difference for the all, for the collective. And now, Jason Lowe and these other guys. They come out and make promises, and then you elect them and then you don't see them no more. They're public officials, state representatives of our community. Nothing tangible that the community can say. Even our historic Freedom Center, and different things like that, we have to use secondhand buildings and that kinda thing to house things. Other communities, they erect brand new. Do gentrification without hurting the community, and the gentrification in our community does not suite us.

Anna: How do you feel about the Homeland coming into the community? They're saying this Homeland will solve the food problem, but people are complaining about the location and price point not being suitable for the overall community.

Greg: Right. It's not conducive to the community. If you want to make a store community-based, you put it in the heart of the community. You don't put it on the edge of the line where the economic district change jumps about \$25,000 across the street [laughs]. When you keep people in a certain state of mind—when you wake up every day, if the only thing you can think about is clothes, and food, and shelter, you can't expand your horizons to think about anything else.

Anna: Right, your basic needs have to be met first.

Greg: Basic needs have to be met first and they keep us in our communities, they keep us in that state of mind. Clothes, and food and shelter. Let our community worry about all that, and then, like I say, we don't know the laws, we're not educated—Look at the ballots, look at what we vote on. You almost have to have an interpreter to go vote with you. Because of the language in the voting.

I have lived at my home almost 30 years and I have had not one political candidate come to my house, come to my door [laughs]. We conditioned to where, here's a Black guy running against a White guy, and I don't care if he's the devil, vote for him. That is just that way.

Anna: I feel like that speaks to the level of distrust in the community with White politicians.

Greg: Yes, like I said, and it's just my opinion, but it's all by design.

Anna: What, to you, does agriculture symbolize for the community? While there is so much that is abstract and intangible with politics, agriculture seems to be this very direct, tangible solution for the community.

Greg: Two words. Food sovereignty. No matter what, if you have the ability to feed yourself, you cannot be controlled. That's my personal target behind doin' what I'm doin'. The key is the children. The crap that's in these Dollar stores, and I see these parents goin' in and buyin' baskets full of junk for these kids to eat. Like I said, how can you expect anything out of children if, first of all, their nutritional needs are not met. Those two things have been my driving passion in trying to get this grocery store issue solved. First in my community, and I hope it catches like wildfire to other communities.

Anna: Can you tell me about the kind of farming you do?

Greg: I specialize in Plasticulture. You have a machine that connects to a tractor and comes in and lays down plastic sheeting over the soil and creates plastic sheeted beds and you plant inside the sheeting to help keep out weeds and things like that. You have an irrigation system connected to it and keep your plants irrigated. It's located in Oklahoma City. What [Alaric and I] did was collaborate. He specializes in vertical farming, and we collaborated the two to create what we call a micro farm. What we wanna do is build out these micro farms, dot them across the communities in the city. We have plenty of empty lots around the city. What we're lookin' to do is pickin' up some of these abandoned properties with nice sized lots, and put them in different communities and build out these greenhouse farms and be able to grow produce year round. If there's a house or structure on the property, convert it into a community produce hub where the people in the community can simply buy their produce right there. It will grow for the needs of the community. You see what I'm sayin'.

Anna: Is the work that you're doing in the community well-known amongst the community?

Greg: No. Another thing about the community is continuity. There is none. The vision all over the place. You have cliques and if you don't adhere to that agenda...it's crazy. You take the religious community. They can't come together collectively because nobody's in charge. Your religious community is splintered into cliques. The political scene is splintered into cliques. The businesspeople are splintered into cliques. That's how they keep control, they keep everybody divided and that's the biggest problem in our community. There is no consensus of community collaboration on anything and the outside people like that. That's the way the political realm likes it. If you get the people to come together, well guess what, they're going to figure out your game [laughs].

Anna: When I talked with Tammy Gray-Steele, she mentioned when she first brought the idea for her Sustainable Science Academy to the church community, they rejected it. She attributed part of the reason for that to a strong distrust with outsiders because there's so much history of people coming in and making promises and never coming through or trying to take from the community. Would you agree with this?

Greg: That's all a part of the equation, that's for sure. There was no lie told on that. Once again, it's a power thing. The way the system is designed, there's always a power struggle, even from within the system. Even on the business standpoint, without calling names, there are certain Black business owners that are very successful within the community. But they are disliked by the other side of the Black community because of the connections. Political connections for the most part. If they can control you politically, you will succeed in a community. There are a few Black entrepreneurs in the community that are successful, but once again, if you get to talkin' around the community and mention those names in the community, you'll have a lot of sour grapes being pulled out by the community as a whole. That's largely because those successful entrepreneurs do what the controlling political party tells them they can and can't do, you know. They're not going to buck the system on behalf of the community. Or act in the best interest of the community.

We have to reverse the political system. We have to bring it back and remind the politicians that they work for the people not vice

versa. Until we start to grasp that, and hold people's feet to the fire, we gonna get what we always got.

To solve the issue in the community, the solution has to come from within the community. Not organizations or groups outside of the community. To me that's like a band-aid. You see what I'm sayin'. You're covering up the sore, you're not healin' it. Don't get me wrong, the help is much needed, but until there's a grassroots response from within the community to solve its own problems, it's never going to be solved. The push for us is the awareness and teachin' how to make farming economic. When the average person thinks of farming, all they think is dirt and tractors and work. They don't think of money and supporting yourself with it. We started reaching kids in the really deeply impoverished areas in Oklahoma City and we've come up with a message to where we can equate farming with selling drugs as far as a price point. We're like "hey, everybody don't do drugs but everybody got to eat." We get them to thinkin' on the levels that they are standing on because a lot of them, that's their end game, is to sell drugs. We're creating a model to teach these kids and show them, you do the same thing with food. The economic side of it is the same. It's amazing how some of these kids' faces light up when they actually feel like they're being taught something. You know, we're going to take this food issue and we're going to try to use it to develop all types of awareness within our community. If we get those grant funds [through USDA], that's when we are due to start the groundwork on our projects. We're waiting to see who the recipients are right now. I think there's 500 applicants that apply for the grant. We have other ventures we're collaborating with other community entities right now. There's a school curriculum tied to the vertical farming project and we're getting the word out to schools and everything and showing them there's a curriculum to what we do, but COVID threw everything out of whack. We do have a non-profit set up and we will be collecting funds to assist in the progress as well. It's called The F.A.R.M. It's the food access reclamation model. Right now, we're going to take the project to five different locations. What they are is Northeast Oklahoma City, Spencer, and then we have three historical Black towns that we are working with their jurisdictions to work out projects on their places and teach the citizens of the community about vertical farming. We would like people in these areas to get involved. Once we're able to create entrepreneurs, to create jobs—the outsource, the product, is the least of the worries. We have a supply issue. If you look on the Northeast quadrant of Oklahoma City, there are several food brokers right there in Northeast Oklahoma City. The

food distributors that distribute produce and everything to grocery stores. Local produce, out of season, local produce for this region is 400 miles.

Anna: Do you see agriculture as a main economic source to restore autonomy in the community?

Greg: Absolutely, once again, food sovereignty. The controllers of the system have taken that away intentionally from the people. I don't know if over the years you've heard them talk about farmers being welfare recipients and this and that. Well, the government has set up a system where they're paying farmers not to farm. The farmers that farm are corporate controlled. It's everywhere. Just go to a nice sized small town, 5,000 people area in Oklahoma, and you would be amazed at the lack of fresh produce, fresh food in the grocery store. You would think a town, small like that, in the rural farmland area, you would think that the produce in the grocery store would be supplied by the people around the community. You wouldn't think it would be shipped in from Texas or California.

Anna: Why is that?

Greg: Because corporate control. The government has made it to where it's not economically feasible, not economically sustainable for us to do it. Not to mention, taking the responsibility away. You know 10-20 years of that, you have people that it's not even in their wheelhouse to think about it any longer. I've watched it over my lifetime.

Anna: Growing up in that area, how have you seen people talk about the changes occurring in the community?

Greg: Once again, it's just to the point to where, it's the norm. They're going to do it anyway. There's nothing you can do about it. You don't have any power. The people are in that frame of mind, and when you're in that frame of mind, there's nothing going to be done about it if you don't have no fight in you.

Anna: Do you see hope for the community?

Greg: Well, I got a fire under me and I'm going to do my part, that's the only thing I can say. I'm gonna do what I can, and if I'm the only one standin' in the end, then that's just how I see it. I'm trying to wake people up, and even in the political process, I've taken to a

candidate in the district to support, he's a Persian guy. He's a very successful businessman in the community and he understands what it's like being a minority, you what I'm saying?

It was my understanding that a group of Black business owners came into the neighborhood when they first closed the grocery store and they came in wanting to open up a grocery store in the community. They ain't got none. They went and tried to do it anyways and they lasted a few months. Like I said, when you have no political support from the leaders in the community or businesses, period, in the community, you ain't gonna make it. It's a lot to digest. But the solution is simple. But through greed and power, it makes it highly complicated. If people come together collectively and control the community collectively, it doesn't matter who own what, see what I'm saying? Your economic dollar is staying in the community. Everybody is prosperin', nobody's trying to take anything, you don't have to lock up your air conditioner [laughs].

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