

KANSAS CITY LEGACIES: PUSHING BEYOND REDLINING

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by
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2020

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at redlining and blatant discrimination within Kansas City. Racial bias remains a fact of American life, and the Federal Housing Administration ultimately failed Black Americans.¹ Established covenants required home-sale contracts that prohibited future sales to nonwhites, which only set a precedent for persistent racial segregation patterns that still divide American cities. Many established post-World War II suburbs still play a significant role in maintaining the color line in urban housing. Historically underrepresented groups continuously find themselves plagued by overwhelming obstacles to find, finance, and purchase homes. This project compiles oral histories of individuals who provide their experiences of redlining and discrimination in Kansas City, Missouri. The seven chosen interviewees come from various backgrounds who are active in politics, activism, and community networking. The project also draws upon secondary sources on residential segregation and racial discrimination. Instead of using the distinctive and familiar “Troost

¹ There is an ongoing debate regarding whether to capitalize words relating to race. Some conventions have both “black” and “white” as lower case, some capitalize both, while others capitalize “Black,” but not “white.” This thesis adheres to the latter convention and uses “Black” in a racial, ethnic, or cultural sense, but “black” when referencing a color. The word “white,” regardless of context, is lower case. According to a July 2020 article, the Associated Press (AP) announced its use of this same convention. Exceptions to this rule are when quoting, whereby I keep the original punctuation. For a more detailed description and justification of AP’s decision (as well as mine for this thesis), see David Bauder, “AP Says It Will Capitalize Black But Not White,” Associated Press (July 20, 2020), <https://apnews.com/article/7e36c00c5af0436abc09e051261fff1f>.

Wall” case study, these new oral histories from Kansas City’s underrepresented areas broaden an understanding of the consequences of redlining in the city.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “The Red Line: An Anthology of Redlining in the United States and Kansas City’s Role,” presented by Kathrine Trevette Miller, a candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Introduction

On the morning of June 30, 2020, Kansas City’s Board of Parks and Recreation Commission voted unanimously to remove J.C. Nichols’ name from the fountain and adjacent boulevard, citing his troubled legacy of racial discrimination in the city. The fountain had been the focal point of Kansas City’s Black Lives Matter protests just weeks before in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd, which enveloped cities across the country and the world. Kansas City’s protests lasted several days and resulted in property damage, arrests, and a fair share of police brutality. By removing the Nichols name, Kansas City joined other cities and states in turning a critical eye towards divisive symbols. The fountain is temporarily nameless, and the boulevard is, for now, Mill Creek Park that it runs alongside.² Commissioner Chris Goode, creator of the proposal and a local Black entrepreneur, stood at the base of the fountain and stated, “Real solutions do not come by removal of names and symbols, but they tend to push us in the right direction.”³ In making this decision, Goode and his fellow commissioners noted how J.C. Nichols pioneered and actively promoted restrictive covenants and established homeowner’s associations within Kansas City, which they felt no longer represented such a diverse and vibrant city and therefore should be removed in order to help heal racial divides. Scholar Kevin Fox Gotham explained how “[Nichols’] property deeds always warned prospective buyers that none of the lots restricted might be conveyed to, used, owned, nor occupied by negroes, and other groups

² The Kansas City Parks Department is discussing how to handle renaming. A decision will take effect at a later date with a unanimous vote.

³ Chris Goode (founder of Ruby Jean’s and community activist), interview with Kathrine Miller, June 8, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library, University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

as owners or tenants.”⁴ Nichols set the tone for redlining neighborhoods throughout the city and influenced other American cities to follow his lead for decades.

The five oral histories in this project, including Goode’s, focus on every-day life experiences, unlike traditional narratives that tend to produce generalizations and emphasize broader understandings.⁵ This thesis provides in-depth individual experiences and recollections that allow for exploration of the broader historical narrative. The objective was to highlight a range of individuals who endured redlining and housing discrimination. Each oral history represents a vital section of the Black community in Kansas City to provide a clearer representation of where these individuals live(d) in the city. This project uses “Mapping Inequality,” an interactive mapping website, which brings a wealth of information together from files and color-coded maps from Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), a program created as part of the New Deal in 1933 that secured refinance and new home buying opportunities for Americans with the onset of the Great Depression. At the same time, the HOLC program helped codify and expand practices of racial and class segregation within neighborhoods. “Mapping Inequality” ensures public access to textual assessments and colored-coded maps that HOLC created. It is an essential tool when gathering data about redlined neighborhoods in Kansas City.⁶ The interviewees for this particular project live(d) in

⁴ Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race Real Estate, And Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2010* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 44.

⁵ I conducted five oral histories, but two of them were joint interviews with married couples, resulting in seven total interviewees.

⁶ See “Mapping Inequality” HOLC’s 1935-1940 colored-coded interactive map(s) for further details Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., “Mapping Inequality,” *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed December 28, 2020, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/>.

historically Black neighborhoods of Santa Fe Hills, Ivanhoe, and Blue Hills.⁷ The interactive maps provide access to areas by grade (“A” being “Best” to “D” being “Hazardous”), demographics, and area of description. “Mapping Inequality” points to HOLC redlining as a key factor in racial disparities in wealth and opportunity that continue to the present day.⁸

The individuals became essential to this project, including a small business owner, two couples, a neighborhood coordinator, and a local civil rights icon. Combined, these seven voices represent a wide range of perspectives that reach into the past and reflect present-day redlining problems. Historiography and methodology of redlining, as well as other primary sources, supplement their voices in order to better understand redlining and the role Kansas City played throughout transitional periods. More importantly, Kansas City still feels the effects of redlining today and is a hyper-segregated city due to J.C. Nichols’ actions over one hundred years ago. A common theme of redlining ties the individuals together, but distinct experiences separate them.

The scope of this work focuses on redlining from the 1940s to the present day. Interviews are of Black Kansas Citians who live(d) in redlined neighborhoods that J.C. Nichols once monopolized and the ways they work towards alleviating blatant discrimination in their communities. While Nichols’ actions impacted other underrepresented groups, this thesis focuses solely on Black Kansas Citians since these policies targeted and oppressed their group more than any others. Each interviewee provides powerful stories that capture

⁷ Santa Fe’s boundaries start at E. 27th Street, run down Prospect Avenue, to E. Linwood Avenue, and end down Indiana Avenue. Ivanhoe runs south of Armour Boulevard to 37th Street and Prospect Avenue. Blue Hills’ boundaries run just north of 49th Street to 63rd Street, and Paseo to Prospect Avenue.

⁸ Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., “Mapping Inequality,” *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed December 28, 2020, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/>.

individual experiences that are not collected within the traditional historical narrative. The individuals altered traditional Kansas City redlined areas over time. Collectively, these Kansas Citians broke barriers within redlined areas by hoisting up their communities and becoming voices for their neighbors. Their voices are representations of lived experiences that branched into activism, community networking, and neighborhood rebuilding within Kansas City.

Alvin Brooks, perhaps the city's most well-known Black activist, dedicated his life to service. Brooks' oral history provides historical significance towards redlining in Kansas City's, including several years of discrimination he experienced within the Kansas City Police Department.

Chris Goode is a Black business entrepreneur who made dedicated his life to educating communities on the benefits of healthy living after his beloved grandmother, Ruby Jean's, death. In 2015, Goode founded Ruby Jean's Juicery in the redlined neighborhood where he grew up. Three years later, he joined the Kansas City Parks Department as a commissioner and drafted the proposal to remove J.C. Nichols' name from city landmarks.

Marquita Brockman-Taylor has more than twenty years of experience in fund development, community relations, marketing, management experience in banking and finance. She is the director of development for the Urban Neighborhood Initiative and serves as president of the Santa Fe Area Council Neighborhood Association. Her neighborhood of Santa Fe traces back to an all-white covenant banning Blacks from living in the area for more than thirty years.

Alan and Yolanda Young dedicated their lives to activism in many forms. Both worked countless years in the Ivanhoe neighborhood, located in Kansas City's urban core.

They transformed Ivanhoe from disrepair into a blueprint for other neighborhoods to follow to reduce crime, vagrancy, and illegal dumping. The Youngs created numerous programs and community gardens that are still in use today. In 2019, voters elected Yolanda Young to the Missouri House of Representatives.

In 1971, newlyweds Warren and Carol Hodison moved to the Blue Hills neighborhood, where they raised four children and lived for nearly fifty years. Their perspective on living on the east side of Troost Avenue is vital to the overall collection. Their oral history adds direct links to blockbusting and white flight in Blue Hills. All of the individuals interviewed live and work within areas that J.C. Nichols once monopolized. From that point forward, their voices provide substantial evidence of lingering and nightmarish effects of Nichols' real estate ventures.

In 1905, Nichols embarked on a subdivision developmental plan unlike anything seen in the United States. Nichols safeguarded his development plan at any cost. His words implied shielding property values from the gradual encroachment of residents that, in Nichols' mind, led to decreased property value—namely Blacks and Jews. Subdivision protections, commonly called “deed restrictions,” were part of the deed and were binding on the purchaser and on anyone who might sell, lease, or assign the land in the future.⁹

To entice new property owners, Nichols used advertisements such as: “Have You Seen the Country Club District? 1,000 Acres Restricted for Those Who Want Protection.”¹⁰

In a 1913 brochure, Nichols extolled the virtues of his development, stating, “in the Country

⁹ William S. Worley, *J.C. Nichols and The Shaping of Kansas City: Innovation in Planned Residential Communities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 124.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Club District, you are given the *protection* that goes with a ‘thousand acres restricted.’”¹¹ Using these sorts of advertisements, Nichols became a pioneer in developing deed restrictions within the Kansas City real estate market, which he ultimately controlled. He became acquainted with local authorities who dictated zoning ordinances and new construction submissions to protect against competition. Cozy acquaintances led to Nichols controlling large sums of land, which he then used as forms of protections and ways to guarantee property values in his subdivisions. Nichols made membership in his neighborhood associations mandatory upon buying a home, which legally bound all members to enforce racial restrictions. To put it plainly: homes could not be sold, leased, or rented to Blacks, Jews, or Latinos. Nichols also ensured that restrictions renewed automatically, with caveats that made them prohibitively difficult to amend or remove.¹² Nichols’ advertisement tactics steered scared whites into his neighborhoods, away from what his ads called the “undesirables.” J.C. Nichols profited greatly from his fear mongering tactics as they intensified.

In 1954, Floyd Lowe, president of the California Real Estate Association, introduced blockbusting as a way to exploit homeowners. He amplified racial tensions of an impending “negro invasion” in his East Palo Alto neighborhood.¹³ This practice resulted in white families selling property at extreme discounted prices to predatory agents out of fear, who then sold the same properties to Black families at inflated prices. His creation became a

¹¹ Ibid, 125.

¹² G.S. Griffin, *Racism in Kansas City: A Short History* (Traverse City, MI: Chandler Lake Books, an Imprint of Mission Point Press, 2015), 61.

¹³ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation), 43.

domino effect around the entire country and turned into a normal racist practice that still reverberates today. In his book, *Some of My Best Friends Are Black*, author Tanner Colby provided a detailed example of the blockbusting process where realtors would “buy a house in a white neighborhood, rent it to a black family, wait a few weeks, and then start calling the neighbors. “The coloreds are moving in. Don’t you think you should sell? I can get you a good deal—before it’s too late,” he wrote. “Some would go into the ghetto and pay a few bucks to the biggest, scariest, right-off-the-chain-gang-looking fellow they could find. Then they’d bring him along, knocking door-to-door, politely informing white residents that “this gentleman is looking in the area.” The for-sale signs would start going up.¹⁴

The J.C. Nichols firm exploited white homeowners by using similar fear mongering tactics, which advanced the company’s interests. Nichols flaunted his racist ideologies for decades and passed them down to other generations until the Nichols Real Estate Company merged with the Reece Real Estate Company in the year 2014. After the merger, Reece Nichols & Real Estate Company rebranded itself and there are no Nichols family members on the Board of Directors or affiliated with the merged company to date. The merger bought out Nichols family members’ contracts to break away from old company attachments that clearly used discriminatory practices.

On the very grounds where the city dedicated Nichols’ name over sixty years prior, Commissioner Goode insisted that change was upon the city in 2020. Before Nichols’ name removal, Goode stated that “monuments and honorary namings are for exemplary character and the time has come for us to stop turning a blind eye towards racism of the past and

¹⁴ Tanner Colby, *Some of My Best Friends Are Black: The Strange Story of Integration in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 5.

present. We can make a collective decision to simply do the right thing, now.”¹⁵ The night before Goode announced his proposal, he sat down with me for an interview to add his experience as a Black entrepreneur who grew up in a redlined Kansas City area and now owns a business there. This city still deals with the effects of segregation and how gentrification is taking hold of areas with cultural roots for Black communities. In the past, Nichols and others in power pushed Blacks into these neighborhoods by building restrictive associations. The oral histories gathered represent a slice of what defines redlining. The goal was to capture every-day memories and Black voices on the matter of redlining. Bringing together the voices of Alvin Brooks, Chris Goode, Marquita Brockman-Taylor, Alan and Yolanda Young, and Warren and Carol Hodison fulfill this goal.

Segregating Cities Across the United States

Blacks endured the worst economic hardships during the Great Depression, and many flocked to the Democratic Party and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s promise of a “New Deal.”¹⁶ Many new programs, however, still deliberately discriminated against and marginalized Blacks. The Homeowners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), created in 1933, assisted homeowners who could not pay their mortgages and provided an opportunity for first-time homeownership. HOLC, however, created systemic racism in the form of redlining. In his book, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Richard Rothstein explained, “The HOLC created color-coded maps of every metropolitan

¹⁵ “KC Parks Requests Community Input,” Kansas City Parks, Accessed June 10, 2020, <https://kcparks.org/kc-parks-requests-community-input/>.

¹⁶ Richard Sander, Yana A. Kucheva, and Jonathan M. Zasloff, *Moving Toward Integration the Past and Future of Fair Housing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 62.

area in the nation, with the safest neighborhoods colored green and the riskiest colored red. A neighborhood earned a red color if Blacks lived in it.”¹⁷

The HOLC maps allowed for lasting patterns of discrimination and residential segregation. For example, the HOLC exercised prudence about its borrowers’ ability to avoid default. To assess risk, HOLC agents looked at property conditions and applied creditworthiness to potential borrowers. Motives behind past actors linger into the duration of redlining and discriminatory practices of today. On October 1, 2020, the Golub Center for Finance and Policy (GCFP) produced a new housing report “The Unequal Costs of Black Homeownership,” which stated: “Black borrowers pay \$13,464 more over the life of a home loan, with interest, mortgage-insurance and tax expenses higher than for their white counterparts, further hurting a Black individual’s ability to save for retirement.”¹⁸ Ed Golding, former head of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and co-author of the report, stated, “The biggest reason for the gap is the risk-based pricing found in most U.S. mortgages, which disadvantage Black borrowers because they tend to make smaller down payments and have lower credit scores. This results in Blacks paying more over a longer period of time.”¹⁹ The GCFP report provides the latest evidence that Black homeowners pay higher mortgage rates, insurance premiums, and property taxes. Without these additional financial burdens, it is clear from this report that the racial wealth gap could easily be eliminated. Black Kansas Citians still fall to predatory loans for reasons that the GCFP report

¹⁷ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 64.

¹⁸ “The Unequal Costs of Black Homeownership,” Golub Center for Finance and Policy Group, (October 1, 2020), <https://gcfp.mit.edu/mortgage-cost-for-black-homeowners/>

¹⁹ Ibid.

examined and gap disparities have deepened further with an economic downturn due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Life After World War II & Impact of Federal Housing Administration

Like many post-World War II suburbs, Kansas City played a significant role in maintaining the color line in urban housing, which continues even today. Blacks often felt compelled to accept sub-prime mortgage rates or found alternative financing, unlike white home buyers who received unprejudiced buying opportunities.²⁰ Blacks continuously find themselves plagued by overwhelming obstacles to find, finance, and purchase homes. In Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2014 article, "The Case for Reparations," he provided the familial narrative of Clyde Ross, who fled the terrors of Mississippi and ended up, like so many other Black southerners, in Chicago. Ross found it difficult to purchase a home due to predatory lending and sellers who created contracts and payment systems that remained in their hands, not the bank's. Ross could not escape the cycle that targeted many Blacks. Coates also stated how "Ross had bought his house for \$27,500," but—only six months beforehand—the seller bought it for \$12,000. "The seller kept the deed until the contract was paid in full—and, unlike with a normal mortgage," Coates explained, "Ross would acquire no equity in the meantime. If he missed a single payment, he would immediately forfeit his \$1000 down payment, all his monthly payments, and the property itself."²¹ Kansas City mirrored Chicago's housing patterns of whites looking to achieve the American dream by relying on a

²⁰ Susan Hamilton, "Barriers to Home Purchase for African-Americans and Hispanics in Syracuse," *Cityscape*, 3, no.1 (March 1997): 115.

²¹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 16, 2014, 9.

legitimate credit system backed by the government. Blacks fell to predatory lenders who took their money under unfair and deceptive terms.

In her 1997 article “Barriers to Home Purchase for African-Americans and Hispanics in Syracuse,” Susan Hamilton described many of the same obstacles that Coates discussed, instead focusing on New York. She included employment uncertainty, lack of understanding about the homebuying process, strict credit requirements, and cultural misunderstandings.²² As Coates stated, financing did not exist for people of color, thus creating significant barriers to homeownership. From the 1930s through the 1960s, legitimate mortgage markets across the country intentionally left Black people out of any opportunities.²³

According to urban historian Raymond Mohl, federal policies on slum clearance, urban renewal, public housing, and interstate highways initiated new forms of governmental action at the local level, not always with positive results.²⁴ Redevelopment and urban renewal, for instance, brought significant physical changes to central cities, shifting land uses, destroying entire neighborhoods, and damaging communities.

Black families find themselves displaced in central cities caused by urban renewal, which James Baldwin once dubbed, “negro removal.”²⁵ “Negro removal” attempted to clear out blighted inner cities and targeted the most disadvantaged—people of color. Many urban renewal programs fostered incorrect perceptions of what city communities should look like

²² Susan Hamilton, “Barriers to Home Purchase for African-Americans and Hispanics in Syracuse,” *Cityscape*, 3, no.1 (March 1997):115

²³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 16, 2014, 8.

²⁴ Raymond A. Mohl, “Race and Housing in the Postwar City: An Explosive History,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 94, no.1 (1998), 8.

²⁵ Jennifer Hock, “Jane Jacobs and the West Village: The Neighborhood Against Urban Renewal,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 66, no.1 (March 2007), 19.

by defining, controlling, and altering land use. Residents faced displacement for various reasons, such as the Eisenhower Interstate Highway Act of 1956, which made it easier for white commuters from the suburbs, but displaced thousands of residents in the path of this type of urban renewal project, typically Black and brown people. Large street system and mega-mall renewal projects took over low budget housing districts as well. Many federal bureaucrats viewed multi-use urban neighborhoods with a mix of older buildings, small streets, ethnic enclaves, and local shops as old-fashioned, inefficient, and disorganized.²⁶ Urban residents pinned their neighbors as deviants who lacked motivation to improve their lives and segregationists used renewal projects to operate as racial gatekeepers to keep Blacks out of white neighborhoods.

The FHA did not recommend using restrictive covenants, but often insisted upon them as a condition for granting mortgage insurance. It effectively standardized and nationalized the private housing industry to defend white householders' status. Fifty years after passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, the full weight of discriminatory bank practices is still evident in persistent housing segregation, making it clear that federal government, through the FHA, ultimately failed nonwhite Americans.

Today, Blacks carry the burden of discrimination from past generations, unlike whites who benefitted from the government's helping hand. The GCFP 2020 housing report concluded that factors like lower appraisals in Black communities, less competition among mortgage originators in Black communities, and higher rejection rates leads to higher cost of

²⁶ Ibid, 17.

homeownership.²⁷ The gaps between Blacks and white housing opportunities are extraordinary. For example, at its inception, the G.I. Bill denied thousands of Black veterans of pension rights guaranteed their white counterparts. White veterans enjoyed the fruits of G.I. Bill benefits, which allowed them to save money, attend college, and pass down inheritances. Blacks received no G.I. Bill option and had nothing to claim after serving their country. Black generational inheritances are lessened due to decreased or nonexistent opportunities, unlike many white families who can pass down generational wealth. Blacks rarely see any equity return in their communities year after year. Without opportunities to build up equity or homeowner tax credits, Blacks lose opportunities to build personal funds. Both are significant reasons why Black Americans frequently lack generational wealth to pass onto their heirs. Rothstein identified how these patterns are the gateway to the urban core and the genesis of *de jure* segregation.²⁸ Together, federal, state, and local governments created a system using programs like the FHA, which limited Black options for home ownership. Moreover, living in segregated and confined areas within cities only estranged relations between races even further.

Racial Discrimination and Residential Segregation Issues

Kansas City found itself beset by barriers that stemmed from tensions over differentiations and urban space control. In Kansas City, the middle-class established an

²⁷ “The Unequal Costs of Black Homeownership,” Golub Center for Finance and Policy Group, (October 1, 2020), <https://gcfp.mit.edu/mortgage-cost-for-black-homeowners/>

²⁸ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation), 17.

identity around domesticity however, racist ideologies formed as well.²⁹ This meant that white Kansas Citians, both elite and middle-class, controlled spaces to protect their interests, which destroyed and scattered integrated neighborhoods in the process. Mass application of restrictive covenants assisted this process of distributing control. It gave rise to large-scale “community builders,” which reinforced control over private and public agencies to ensure the application of restrictive covenants.³⁰ It was not until 1960 that deeds began changing in Kansas City. Covenants established the practice of prohibiting home sales to Blacks. Mandatory homeowner associations became vehicles to promote neighborhood exclusivity.³¹ Associations operated as racial gatekeepers and success depended on the cohesion between neighbors who lived in neighborhoods with racial covenants. Restrictions that J.C. Nichols and other real estate companies implemented only set the foundation for discrimination still felt today.

Unable to secure equitable access to housing, many Black families turned to city homestead programs, independent home sellers, or loan officers willing to assist as personal brokers for clients in need. Prospective Black Kansas City homebuyers had a distinct area available to them but could not pass 27th Street, otherwise they could endure endless

²⁹ Sherry Lamb Schirmer, *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-1960* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016), 57.

³⁰ Richard Rothstein, *Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 11.

Besides local Kansas City examples, the most famous case that promoted restrictive covenants in the United States was the 1957 case in Levittown, Pennsylvania. See David Kushner, *Levittown: Two Families, One Tycoon, and the Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2009).

³¹ Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2010* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 50.

harassment or physical violence from surrounding white homeowners.³² The cultural mecca existed within the Vine Street corridor, but the community expanded into other neighborhoods within Belvidere, Hicks Hollows Hell's Half Acre, and between Troost and Woodlawn.³³ Invisible dividing lines quickly emerged between the communities and, as of today, they have not shifted. Alvin Brooks, Kansas City's longtime resident and distinguished community activist, explained how new focal points in the city existed. Brooks stated:

Majority of the Black population was between Independence Avenue on the North, 27th Street on the South, about Tracey on the West, and Indiana Avenue on the East. That was the cultural mecca of the African American community. That is where the churches were, that is where the schools were. We could not buy homes outside that area.³⁴

In 1960, the Brooks family became the fifth Black family to move into the all-white Santa Fe neighborhood. Shortly after their move, someone placed a defective homemade bomb on their property, a clear attempt at intimidation. This was common and Black homeowners routinely found homemade bombs when they settled outside of the prescribed Black part of town. Dynamite was the weapon of choice for whites who opposed Black spatial expansion.³⁵

³² See "Mapping Inequality" map of Kansas City for further HOLC detail on 27th Street redlining Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed December 28, 2020, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/>.

³³ G.S. Griffin, *Racism in Kansas City: A Short History* (Traverse City, MI: Chandler Lake Books, an Imprint of Mission Point Press, 2015), 46.

³⁴ Alvin Lee Brooks (political and civic leader), interview with Kathrine Miller, June 8, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library, University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

³⁵ Charles E. Coulter, *Take Up the Black Man's Burden: Kansas City's African American Communities 1865-1939* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 250.

Soon after his family settled into Santa Fe, Alvin and his wife, Carol, attended a neighborhood meeting to meet their new (all-white) neighbors and receive information on the area. Brooks felt compelled to question the lack of Black homeownership and the true intention of the meeting. He stated that, “They kept saying ‘if those people didn't move in our houses—the value of our houses wouldn't have gone down, so we're going to move.’” So, I kind of got tired of that. So, they had a microphone there on the floor for people to make comments and ask questions. So, I decided to go up to the microphone. My wife said, ‘Oh Shit!’” At this point, Brooks shamed attendees by questioning their basic understanding of economics and supply and demand. “What happens if there is a scarcity of an item that you're trying to buy?,” he asked. “What happens to the price? Well, folks said the price goes up and I said oh... that's interesting. I said, what if there's a lot of it? It goes down.”³⁶

Brooks further explained how white flight compromised Kansas City neighborhoods. At the same meeting, he again questioned his new neighbors, asking if a white realtor approached them and pressured them to sell. “Almost everybody raised their hands,” he recalled. He then asked how many had a Black person knock on their door and offer to buy their house, but “no one raised their hand.” With that, Brooks told his neighbors, “all those things fall upon on you white folks. We didn't create the problem.”³⁷

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 sparked protests around the country, including Kansas City. Widespread inequality, police brutality, housing segregation, and other factors, however, plagued America’s cities for years and decades,

³⁶ Alvin Lee Brooks (political and civic leader), interview with Kathrine Miller, June 8, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library, University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

³⁷ Ibid.

creating a powder keg for unrest. The protests laid bare much of this inequality and Alvin Brooks argued that the 1968 uprising prompted the city to push through a referendum instead of a delayed federal Fair Housing ordinance. Brooks' reasoned that the major reason it occurred was:

A group of tavern owners got together and gathered enough signatures to where there was another referendum. If the public accommodation ordinance nearly passed, I am knocking on your door and saying you better get out—you see who is moving in. Those people are going to cause your property values to go down. You would be scared, move out and the white flight took its wings and went.³⁸

The Santa Fe neighborhood, one of Kansas City's oldest established areas that originated as an all-white neighborhood, turned into a unified Black community after white flight of the 1950s. Another longtime resident and neighborhood activist of the Santa Fe community, Marquita Brockman-Taylor, recalled how driving outside the Black part of town "was an excursion; it was the most wonderful thing you could do." Kansas City's zoo was segregated and open to Blacks only one day a year. "You got to go to an area in the zoo called Watermelon Hill," she said, but "you could not go to any other places." She remembered Fairyland Amusement Park, open to Black visitors only on July 4th every year. Her father was "furious" about these racial restrictions. Because of his love of driving, she saw Kansas City and many other places. "I have lived here and witnessed it," she explained. "I have grown wiser and accustomed to what racism is and still is."³⁹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Marquita Brockman-Taylor (Santa Fe neighborhood community relations organizer), interview with Kathrine Miller, June 4, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library, University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

The Santa Fe neighborhood has become another example in the fight for housing rights across the United States during the Great Depression. Jewel Freeman’s 1956 thesis, “Santa Fe Place: A Study of Minority Movement in Kansas City,” is a standard text for historians due to its in-depth examination of inter-group housing problems between Black and whites. Freeman addressed the constant violence, conflict, and property damage plaguing the neighborhood by examining the inconsistency of discrimination in a fundamentally democratic society.⁴⁰ She gathered historical background and analyzed neighborhood trends. Secondly, she interviewed both identified groups to assemble experiences and opinions, and—most importantly for this thesis—evidenced white flight in response to Black families moving into the surrounding area using oral histories.⁴¹ Her in-depth research completed nearly sixty-five years ago provided an intimate connection to relevant issues today and provides a model for this thesis. Like Freeman, I use oral histories to understand continuous racial discrimination and intentional residential segregation.

A textbook example of redlining lies in the creation of Kansas City’s Country Club district in 1925. J.C. Nichols lured wealthy white Santa Fe residents out of their neighborhood to his new racially restricted developments and left Black families in a new redlined area. Before Nichols whisked them away, Freeman interviewed several white female residents about when Black families first moved into Santa Fe Place. They fell within three groups: hostile, passive-negative, and others who accepted Blacks as equal peers. One interviewee who fell into the latter category explained how she refused to sell her home or

⁴⁰ Jewel Virginia Freeman, “Santa Fe Place, a Study of Minority Movement in Kansas City, Missouri,” Master’s Thesis, University of Kansas, 1956.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 43.

sign the petition barring Black residents. Because of that, “I was accused of being a nigger-lover.” Another resident said, “I hated to see the Negroes move in here. We sided with the objectors and signed the petition. We were angry; the Negroes came down Victor Street like a black cloud.”⁴² Others detailed legal conflict and residents’ participation in it, “We gave money to fight the suits to keep them out,” one explained, while a neighborhood teacher stated, “I taught school in this vicinity, yet I knew changes were coming and heard about how crowded the Negroes had to live from other Negro teachers. However, I did not expect it to move so fast.”⁴³ This thesis builds on Freeman’s 1956 project by extending the narrative and highlighting contemporary issues with newer interviewees not part of Freeman’s research. These new voices and more modern takes on racial issues in Kansas City makes my work an important contribution to the literature.

One can feel the emotion in Jewel’s oral histories, including her interviewees’ solidified attitudes toward neighborhood change and difficulties Blacks faced. Jewel notated questions that whites inquired about, including “where and what kind of home shall we live in?” As she explained, “The problem is bound up not only with the family’s investment in a home, but with the type of school the children will attend and their playmates, the family friendships associations, and a whole complex of desires, needs satisfactions connected with the environment of which the home is a part.”⁴⁴

For this thesis, seven Black residents provided their oral testimonies and spoke of living in constant fear. As Black families moved into the neighborhood, many whites

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

responded with mob violence. An intentional house fire became another manner that whites used to steer Black residents out of the neighborhood. Several stated that they mistrusted white neighbors and always waited for them to interact first. Interactions were friendly between some white and Black residents, however. Over time, the oldest neighborhood succumbed to the redlining that encapsulated many city districts. Freeman's example correlates with these recent oral histories.⁴⁵

In a recent interview, Brockman-Taylor, the President of the Santa Fe Area Council Neighborhood Association, described the first residential district's shift from an elite white neighborhood to an affluent Black community. "Some families still maintain homes of first families who moved into Santa Fe when Blacks were allowed to live," she explained. "Because of its rich history; and of the people living and moved on, it still holds higher regard. You have homes, right now, that range anywhere from \$12,000 to \$300,000. You will have, you still have doctors and professionals, prominent ministers."⁴⁶ She also explained the distinctions within the neighborhood: "It has changed to a more diverse pool...There are still certain religious leaders; there are large churches and congregations and families...The larger houses are very attractive to social service organizations." Santa Fe experienced "pockets of crime because of the disinvestment that went on for so long. It makes it very difficult to hold onto all of the neighborhood as we like to."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Marquita Brockman-Taylor (Santa Fe neighborhood community relations organizer), interview with Kathrine Miller, June 4, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library-University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The Santa Fe neighborhood also became more diverse due to intentional planning by neighborhood leaders like Brockman-Taylor. They faced obstacles connecting with its younger generation, however, and Brockman-Taylor explained that most people living in Santa Fe “are seniors who are holding onto their homes,” but “we have some new younger families with small children.”⁴⁸

Brockman-Taylor reiterated that the essential element to her neighborhood was keeping long-term residents in their homes. The neighborhood faces an uphill battle to keep it on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural and historical importance, which also helps boost property values, as homeowners continue aging and more homes convert to rental properties. To ensure that the Santa Fe neighborhood remains in good standing in the National Register of Historic Places, it needs more help from state and local government, non-profit organizations, and philanthropists. In 2019, the neighborhood received a substantial lift from local filmmaker, Nico Wiggins. His PBS documentary *Land of Opportunity* focused on Santa Fe residents who endured redlining. Wiggins’ documentary educated a broad audience on the neighborhood’s significance, shined a spotlight on residential integration, and supported its residents.⁴⁹ Brockman-Taylor’s oral history in this thesis plays an essential role in building the legacy of a founding neighborhood that creates change.

The Ivanhoe neighborhood, less than two miles away from Santa Fe, endured similar experiences. Originally settled by German immigrants in the 1890s, Ivanhoe also saw a demographic shift due to white flight by the late 1950s. The neighborhood runs through the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Nico Wiggins, *Land of Opportunity*, produced/directed by Nico Wiggins (2020; Kansas City: Public Broadcasting Company).

heart of the city down Woodlawn Avenue. Crime plagued the area for years, but by the late 1990s, the neighborhood saw community efforts pay off and it became a blueprint for others. Finding themselves in the same neighborhood after a thirty-year real estate investment and being leading advocates for the Ivanhoe neighborhood, Yolanda Young recalled moving to Kansas City and living in an apartment before deciding to purchase some real estate. She and her husband bought several Ivanhoe lots at auction. They were relatively inexpensive since they “had been condemned, [were] ready to be torn down basically, or [were] almost in despair. We thought if we would invest in one of those properties—we could make the neighborhood look a little better. I believe in entrepreneurship,” she explained, “so it was an opportunity for us to fix the property up to rent or sell it. Then move on. But as you can still see – we are still here trying to battle.”⁵⁰

Middle-class whites predominated in the Ivanhoe neighborhood until the 1940s, with drastic change starting after the 1954 *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* decision.⁵¹ Many white families feared integration, leading to rampant white flight. White realtors labelled neighborhoods with Black families as “undesirable,” much like J.C. Nichols had done decades beforehand.⁵² Ivanhoe became another Black neighborhood after white flight occurred. According to the *Kansas City Star*, it took two “inadvertent activists” to turn the neighborhood around after a long battle to curb crime and build community networks. A

⁵⁰ Alan and Yolanda Young (Ivanhoe neighborhood activists and urban farmers), interview with Kathrine Miller, June 30, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library-University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

⁵¹ Nikhil Swaminathan, “This Kansas City Neighborhood Wrote the Blueprint for Transforming a Community,” *Grist* (October 11, 2017), <https://grist.org/justice/this-kansas-city-neighborhood-wrote-the-blueprint-for-transforming-a-community/>.

⁵² G.S. Griffin, *Racism in Kansas City: A Short History* (Traverse City, MI: Chandler Lake Books, an Imprint of Mission Point Press, 2015), 61.

1997 *Star* article recounted Yolanda Young’s work in the 1980s and how, ten years before, her family’s house was on the city’s demolition list. The grass was tall and the house was in bad shape, Alan Young remembered. Somehow it became home and the couple raised four children there. For several years, the Youngs fought to make their neighborhood better.⁵³ The Youngs stated how: “A lot of emphasis on what we started way back in the late ‘80s into the ‘90s has produced for the neighborhood. Back in the late ‘80s into the ‘90s, we had a horrible drug problem here in the neighborhood, prostitution, and a lot of crime.”⁵⁴ Today, Ivanhoe is a blueprint for transforming other communities. Alan Young recounted how, “We started by establishing what we called a beachhead—a central place, where we had residents organized from that point to try expanding throughout the neighborhood. As far as the residents,” he continued. There were “block captains or block contacts. We went door to door,” with a collective goal to have one on each block.” Block captains became field generals and organized their area. “We really modeled after some examples we saw in the Bible and other examples; we saw how the federal government organized it.”⁵⁵

Today, neighbors consider the Youngs as pioneers for revitalizing Ivanhoe and as inadvertent activists whose community surpassed their expectations. Yolanda recalled the dire situation they faced, stating that, “seniors on our block who had reared their children, reared their grandchildren, had really become prisoners in their own home, and others who walked around with a sense of hopelessness.” Black Ivanhoe residents did not have access to

⁵³ Mary Sanchez, “Inadvertent Activist Fights for Neighbors,” *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), June 17, 1997.

⁵⁴ Alan and Yolanda Young (Ivanhoe neighborhood activists and urban farmers) interview with Kathrine Miller, June 30, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library-University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

basic services that their white counterparts in more “desirable” neighborhoods “to the west of here” received. Unemployment and poverty plagued Ivanhoe, leading to houses in disrepair. “The city sidewalks were either broken and cracked, had extreme cracks, or just not present at all. The city lights...in this neighborhood,” she explained, “were not working. So, it was a very dark and bleak picture.”⁵⁶

Both Alan and Yolanda became voices for their neighbors in need. They felt compelled to advocate for their neighbors, believing their work to be a calling deeply rooted in the Bible. Alan pointed out that the blueprint formula for their neighborhood stemmed from “an admiration for the way our country was structured.” At all levels of government, he explained, “you have committees, you have people involved. It’s a democratic decision process and everybody has an important role to play.”⁵⁷

One Young idea that many other neighborhoods patterned were community gardens. Yolanda grew up on a farm and missed being around it, which prompted an idea of using their empty properties for small gardens. The Youngs shared their produce with the neighborhood and sold the excess. Yolanda also explained that they created urban gardens because Ivanhoe is in a food desert. “I can remember driving out to where we used to live when started rearing our children just to purchase healthy food...particularly healthy produce, fresh vegetables, fruit, and good-looking meat for my family.”⁵⁸

Alan and Yolanda still live in Ivanhoe and remain critical advisors. They are trying to connect with neighbors who will step up and make needed contributions as future local

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

leaders, however. Regarding Ivanhoe's future, Alan explained how, "we have made great strides considering the neighborhood these past thirty years. We are hoping and praying that the progress will continue." Their focus now is less on their own activism and more on passing the legacy onto others. "We can turn over the reins and the gardens over to the young people to the next generation."⁵⁹

The next generation of community activists and organizers has already begun in Kansas City. Chris Goode founded Ruby Jean's on Troost Avenue, historically known as the racial dividing line between Black and white Kansas City. Goode lived east of Troost before moving away in 2015. In 2017, he returned home to build his business. Growing up near Troost, Goode remembered "the blight...the homelessness, and prostitutes. I can remember all the images as a kid. But again, it almost seems for me like a distant world out the window of the bus or hanging out the window of my mom's car." Poverty did not define these memories, however, because he also remembered how "the love of my mother and grandmother was so abundant and so strong." He never connected to the racial divisions or blight, however, because "we stayed in our own bubble. I don't have any negative perspective of it." He still wishes that this area was more diverse, especially the gentrified sections, preferring to "see it like it is now rather how it looked back then. I wish it was more equitable—I wish there were more people to benefit from the gentrification."⁶⁰

Not only has Goode built a successful small business in a rapidly changing area, but he has also become an advocate by becoming a Commissioner of the City of Kansas City,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Chris Goode (founder of Ruby Jean's and community activist) interview with Kathrine Miller, June 8, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library-University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

Missouri Parks and Recreation Board. His legacy lies in change that comes with city policy. Goode is steering needed changes, such as removing J.C. Nichols' name from the memorial fountain and parkway earlier in the summer. Goode stands by five key principles, including having a purpose, being authentic, commitment to community, connection, and impact. Implementing these fundamentals led him to be a voice for the voiceless and carrying on his mission in a traditional redlined area that he grew up in to serve his community. "Our population of consumers at 30th and Troost is completely diverse," he explained. "Racially, from a socially and economic standpoint, age, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. Every way you can imagine, we have a very diverse consumer base." Instead of running away from the challenge and starting his business in an "easier" location like Florida, Los Angeles, or New Orleans, Goode decided to bring his juicery, Ruby Jean's, to Troost. In doing so, he insisted, "I think Ruby Jean's can make Kansas City a better place."⁶¹

Oral History Methodology

Embarking upon this massive research topic dealing with redlining, the churning question was whether to apply a traditional method or use a non-traditional format that could illustrate the topic's vastness without losing grasp of generating a worthy project. A traditional method relies on the use of multiple forms. Looking at the type of research material already available, there was no question that the project pointed towards recounting the every-day story of redlining in Kansas City.

This project grew into a non-traditional thesis focused on compiled voices from Kansas City residents who fit the redlining narrative rather than emphasizing traditional

⁶¹ Ibid.

sources. This research pieced together oral histories—stories that societies have passed along in spoken form from generation to generation.⁶² The vital oral histories connect to redlining’s historical past and then plunge into today’s core issues of redlining within Kansas City. The oral histories of an entrepreneur, community organizers, inadvertent activists and a civil right activist add an informal history and significance towards preserving created memories. These important voices are part of interconnected neighborhoods that belong to Kansas City. Moreover, their Black Kansas City voices provide history of living through redlining experiences and ways their lives navigated around redlining in the city. These new voices and more modern takes on racial issues in Kansas City makes my work an important contribution to the larger narrative that proves redlining is a direct result from discriminatory practices.

Using oral histories as the foundation, this project dissects how redlining still plays a significant role in various forms through these stories. Extraordinary circumstances from COVID-19, however, triggered less-than-ideal ways of obtaining oral histories from seven interviewees, who provided their personal redlining experiences in various ways. In normal circumstances, it is best to interview in person, but this was not an option in March 2020. The entire project also hung in limbo due to the lack of technology capabilities, schedule conflicts, and inability to conduct necessary research during the pandemic. In the end, I conducted all five oral histories via phone or Zoom, with all recordings deposited in the LaBudde Special Collections Library at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

⁶² Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.

Implementing oral history methods means understanding what was thought, felt, and experienced by important figures to everyday people. Each interviewee has a direct connection of either living or working in a redlined circumstance, however, it is their individual effort to change their circumstance is why they became part of this project. These vital tools outline the very reason to use oral history methods as the project's format to tell a portion of redlining's long story.

Conclusion

A pivotal point to reiterate is the role oral histories can play within the structure of projects such as *Kansas City Legacies: Pushing Beyond Redlining*. Unlike a traditional written documents, oral history narrows its focus to memory's core idea. Donald Ritchie, author of *Doing Oral History*, states that, "it is not simply someone telling a story; it is someone telling a story in response to the particular queries of another." In addition, "oral history is recorded, preserved for the record, and made accessible to others for a variety of uses." For Ritchie, an interview becomes an oral history only when it has been recorded, processed in some way, made available in archive, library, or other repository, or reproduced in relatively verbatim form for publication. Availability for general research, reinterpretation, and verification defines oral history.⁶³ He goes further, explaining that by preserving the recordings and transcripts of their interviews, oral historians seek to leave a complete, candid, and reliable record as possible.⁶⁴

Oral history also grounds itself within the history field and establishes its significance and value as both method and source. According to Linda Shopes with the Oral History

⁶³ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 15.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 19.

Association, “It is perhaps clichéd that throughout human history, most knowledge of the past has been transmitted orally, in cultural forms ranging from epic poetry to conversation around the dinner table.” It is indisputable that “this was true before the advent of widespread literacy...yet remains true today for many people, in many parts of the world.” She rightly argued that “historians have long used oral sources for their work, either conducting interviews of their own or drawing upon first-hand accounts recorded and preserved by others.”⁶⁵

Plunging into redlining, providing a historical evaluation of its long history within the United States, and capturing ordinary people’s voices was imperative. More importantly, this thesis draws upon first-hand accounts from Kansas Citians instead of national sources. Each interviewee encountered local redlining, whether they represent one part of the city or one part of the story. These every-day people had different backgrounds and encountered redlining in different ways. The interviews centered around a long-tenured community activist, two “inadvertent activists” who turned a neighborhood around, a passionate entrepreneur, a marketing specialist who advocates for one of Kansas City’s oldest neighborhoods, and a couple who still lives in the same home nearly fifty years after white flight occurred. These first-hand accounts offer an independent look into an informal history and incorporates into the larger historical narrative that explains redlining, the past, and the present. Brooks best compared his experiences in the 1960s to the present, saying that, “unless we deal with the systemic changes, institutions will be ping ponged back and forth. Some small systemic changes in police or courts take place...it’s a known fact if you don’t

⁶⁵ “Mellon Project on Folklore, Ethnomusicology, and Oral History in the Academy.” Oral History Association (The OHA Review, 2020), <https://www.oralhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/Mellonpaper-with-appendix.doc>.

educate people, you'll not change poverty. And if you don't change people and poverty—you'll have violence."⁶⁶ Brooks' words may surprise, shock, or sadden people upon reading them, but they are essential to understanding not only Kansas City's struggles with race—both past and present—but the nation's as well.

⁶⁶ Alvin Lee Brooks (political and civic leader), interview with Kathrine Miller, June 8, 2020, LaBudde Special Collections Library-University of Missouri-Kansas City (Kansas City, MO).

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TRANSCRIPTS

PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

The manuscript may be read, quoted from, and cited for purposes of research only by scholars approved by the University at such place as is made available for purposes of research by the University.

INTERVIEWER

Kathrine Miller

INTERVIEWEE

Marquita Brockman-Taylor

DATE

June 4, 2020

LOCATION

Zoom Interview

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Marquita Brockman-Taylor has more than twenty years experience in fund development, community relations, marketing and special events for several non-profit organizations in the community as well as management experience in banking and finance in the corporate sector. Taylor is the director of development for Urban Neighborhood Initiative; serves as president of the Santa Fe Area Council Neighborhood Association; holds appointments on the Jackson County Memorial Wall Commission, Neighborhood Tourism and Development Fund for the City of Kansas City Missouri, Chamber of Commerce of Kansas City, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and as board member of Project Equality.

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Community Organizing & Development

MILLER: The area is best known for being a neighborhood for upper-and middle-class Americans in Kansas City during the Great Depression. The area became known for its small stylistically cohesive multifamily apartment homes. Does the neighborhood still fit this portrayal?

TAYLOR: Um, upper-middle-class. I will say...to an extent. Because there are families who still maintain they're and that were some of the first families who moved into Santa Fe when African Americans were allowed to live in the area. In the larger homes and the well-kept neighborhoods. So, there are several families and family members hold onto the home even if the original owner is no longer there. It is still being recognized in that way and being considered that way in the city hall and other places. Because of its rich history and because of the people living and ones moved on, it still holds higher regard. When you mentioned the Depression, the African American community started moving into the area during the 1950s. So, I wanted to keep that upfront, but yeah, that is what makes Santa Fe special. You have homes, right now, that range anywhere from \$12,000 to \$300,000. You will have, you still have doctors and professionals, prominent ministers. So, it is still happening.

MILLER: Is the neighborhood a community for Kansas City's Black's political, business, and religious leaders today or has it changed over to a more diverse pool of younger African American and other demographics in the neighborhood?

TAYLOR: I am going saying it has changed to a more diverse pool. I think there are still certain religious leaders, there are large churches and congregations and families. We certainly are seeing changes that other communities are seeing. The larger houses are very attractive to social service organizations. They are very attractive to newer homeowners who may live in Brookside or Waldo area previously. They're really interested in the structure and the soundness of the homes. So, so we are certainly seeing a lot of that. But we are seeing areas where we have pockets of crime because of the disinvestment that went on for so long. It makes it very difficult to hold onto all of the neighborhood as we like to. There are several apartment buildings that are part of Santa Fe. Initially, people may not realize that when they think of Santa Fe, they think of these great big houses. When Santa Fe was developed, by uh...Lockridge and others. It was Victor Bell—it was, not all of the houses were the same during construction. The blocks and trees are still significant to show that the impact that supposed to have in Santa Fe, remains. It is just a matter of how we get back to where it was, how we keep what have, and how do we keep it on the National Register of Historic Places. Keep people interested and excited about that. Get the neighbors involved and excited about their neighborhood. That is my biggest task—we have to love where we are. The impression out in the community is that Santa Fe is an interesting neighborhood. Absolutely. We have to join in with those who are already carrying that flag and lets all work together and keep as it is recognized.

MILLER: Does this mean that there is a shift in demographics of white people again in the neighborhood that has been historically African American?

TAYLOR: I am really cognizant of how that is said. I welcome families. I think our neighbors' welcome families. Um... We have no thoughts of being this is just going to be an

African American community, and nobody can come in or back doing the exact thing that happened to us. That is not my focus and I am sure I speak for a lot of the neighbors. What we want are families who will be invested in the neighborhood. Most really, my work consists of helping my neighbors who are still there, stay in place, and keep their homes. It is not our goal to keep others out but help save the ones who are there. Those larger homes cost a lot more to maintain and recognizing that and doing what we can. Because we are the keepers of the history and of the homes. If this continues to be a historic neighborhood, we need the support and help from the city, state, non-profit organizations, social services, and as well as philanthropists. To think about how we keep this rich history of Kansas City which is Santa Fe alive.

MILLER: Can you speak of the neighborhood's current condition from its design of order, refinement, and harmony? Misconceptions from online and personal viewing? Can you talk about Santa Fe's status being on the National Register of Historic Places concerning this issue?

TAYLOR: Um, based on my research on there's a local registry and there's a National registry. And we're on the National Registry and I have the documents that were submitted to get that designated. It is a matter of the style of the homes and the people who lived in the homes that give us the capacity to uh...to supply any significance. So, it still on the National Registry, yes, there are some homes that need a lot of work...um because of the disinvestment...because of the care that wasn't taken...um...the lack to get loans, to bring the houses back to standard. So, there is some of that. But I guess what I see is...I see the capacity of coming back to where it was. Again, the trees remind me of that, the streets remind me of that, and I will say that the neighbors coming together--it has seemed have grown. The end of last year and this year where everybody has come together. I recently requested letters from neighbors about home repairs they like to see, and I got eighty-three letters. I had to give a cut-off date. So, there are that many neighbors out of Santa Fe, which is not a large area, it's 27th Street to Linwood, cuts to Prospect to Indiana. To get eighty-three homeowners to take the time. A couple of the homeowners were in their nineties to the younger ones to take the time and just get these things fixed. If the neighborhood could help support our trash pickup and all that. You know, our neighborhoods are ready to bring it back. I hope I answered your question.

MILLER: Yeah....um...

MILLER: What are the expectations of keeping up with the architectural and structural integrity of the neighborhood?

TAYLOR: There are no protections per se...as far as the neighborhood has been for years. Where whoever wants to move there can. No guidelines for what you can do and can't do. The National Register, it is looser than the local register, so there is no anything to say that's legal—you can do to your home or not do. Now, certainly...we call codes we have as in any neighborhood. But we have nothing to say who or what, there is a lot of rental property in Santa Fe now. I'd say the last estimate I saw was about 35 percent is a rental property. And because we are like any other neighborhood in the city—anyone can come. We have several

houses and I try to keep track of them. There are several homes owned by social services organizations. One home service's former prostitute(s). There's another one for...a half-way house that's coming into the fold. There are several of those because of the large houses and can accommodate a lot of people. There are no city regulations that say over or up to five people or whatever it may be. You are welcome to go where you want. So, I understand the need for social service organizations. Absolutely. I worked for one and worked them for twenty years. Um...I see the need for families and homes as far as what Santa Fe is supposed to be. So, when you have no control, you don't have the option to say—no you can't...What you can do is welcome them in. Anybody and everybody. Whether you rent, you own, if you're in the home because of the social services organization—welcome them to the meetings. Welcome them to participate and build ownership in the neighborhood. Hopefully, it will instill pride and will make you want to clean up in front of your home. Make sure the dumpsters are taken care of and all of those things. All we can do at this point is hope.

MILLER: The next question would be if there are no protections to change the architectural and structural integrity of the home?

TAYLOR: There are some stipulations about changing the outside structure which could be the roof and things like that. Since we're not local yet...there more stringent but when you compare the National register against the local register—the National register is much more open for interpretation. But there are some...yes. I do know there is a large church in our area that wanted to put a roof on but had to get clearance from the National register folks in order to put the new roof they wanted opposed to wanted they could have as a standard. So, there are still some.

MILLER: Locals spin is the shirtwaist house and um...for someone to come in maybe wanting to do something different—um...this is something I think that neighborhoods would want to touch...?

TAYLOR: I can tell you—we have not seen any new development in Santa Fe...none. And I think that's okay. The homes that we have, I would love to see rehabs done. We are not really excited about bringing brand new homes. If the new homes can carry the rich character that we believe have, great! But we're okay. It's an interesting place to be and not all neighborhoods are like that. We're not dying for new; we want our vacant lots to be filled with homes that look like the homes next to them. We love for those homes that are in tremendous disrepair to be acquired and brought back to resemble some of the homes not of the homes in Santa Fe were these large mansions—they were regular homes. Bring them back to that standard.

MILLER: Yeah. I had that question in mind because I did a huge project on the Westside and how gentrification has taken over. It's ridiculous to see these huge mansions next to little bungalows. They keep tearing down and the facade of what the Westside is supposed to look like. I did not know what entails in your neighborhood. Can you describe?

TAYLOR: I spend a lot of time seeing what is going on. Any vacant lots or any homes being torn down—I want to know what's going in. We are really working hard at the Satchel Paige

house and I notice behind it. There was...I did not know this was happening until I drove through there—a big area being developed. So, I am doing everything I can to find out what is, who has it, what are you trying to build here. My neighbors are very, very involved that goes on. They will alert me on things to look into.

MILLER: That's good.

MILLER: How does the neighborhood preserve its heritage with so many rapid changes that have taken place throughout the years?

TAYLOR: You know it's really easy when you have someone like Nico who come and remind you about the history. When you have neighbors like Rosemary Lowe who has been one of the first black families to move into Santa Fe, who was President for a number of years and is still a fighter. I think she is ninety. Who have neighbors like James Broch, who is the historian for Santa Fe and keeps that information for us. Rosemary's son, who can tell when, what and who from the very beginning. You have those people around you all the time. We are never short at our meetings when we don't talk about the people and the long history. In my experience, knowing that... Wallace Hartsfield, he recently passed...his family still lives in our neighborhood and knew his civil rights record. I think about some of the doctors that once lived in Santa Fe and still hold it close and near to their hearts. Judge Gray, he was a judge a period but now retired. You can hear the stories...you can feel it...you know it. When I look at the markers that face at each of the entrances in Santa Fe, I know the neighborhood is on its way back. I recently got a grant to put up new signage. We're going to do everything we can but it's really for the neighbors to instill pride and love in the neighbors. It's to show we are still on the National register and yes, we are own neighborhood! We're putting in a—we have an area of land we own. If COVID hadn't hit...we would be further along but an area that is just vacant land and we are going to use it as an artist area. Where artists can come for six months and put their own art on display. In that same area, we plan to put an um...a board of some kind that would serve as a drive-in theatre. People can pull out their chairs and watch movies, they can walk back home. We are trying to do things like that. Um...but if I can get, we can all get, I have a strong board...if we can get the neighbors to love on our neighborhood, love on our us...we all love...we protect our neighborhoods. We have folks who call codes all the time and that a great relationship with the police officers, we have committees that go and take care of things that need to be done. And it is growing and growing. So, my hope is that um...again, what I do for a living is fundraising and grant writing. So, my hope is to resend proposals that were submitted...if awarded, it would allow the neighbors to have home repairs. Because we are the keepers of history and this neighborhood and help them survive the high cost to maintain their homes, so they don't move out of their homes. So, we got a few things, a few irons in the fire, and feeling very positive about it.

MILLER: So, you're a grant writer huh. I just do a fundraising/grant writing semester classes, this last semester and it was brutal.

TAYLOR: Yeah.

MILLER: laughs.

TAYLOR: I have been doing this for twenty-five years so. It is brutal.

MILLER: Yes...it is brutal...learning all the lingo and everything...anyway...moving onto the next question.

MILLER: Has the neighborhood downsized to control all elements mentioned above in other questions or keeping as-is for now?

TAYLOR: Years and years ago, Santa Fe Place was from 27th Street to 31st Street from one side. Indiana and grew to encompass over to Linwood, so it grew to 3 for 4 blocks. Um...and I think it may have something to do with Buck O'Neil's house is on 32nd Street who was the famous baseball player. I am glad, cause that's the neighborhood I live in. Now I am in Santa Fe. We haven't downsized no... we grew a little bit. I think the boundaries have us set. I wouldn't want to make it smaller. We're not a very large neighborhood anyway and wouldn't help for any reason. It wouldn't help to reduce the crime we have. It wouldn't help to um...anything can think of. When I really, really think our major focuses are if we can do a better job. If the city, the police department, and others do a better job with our pockets of crime. Our pockets of prostitution and those pockets have been around for years. I think we're on our way. We're on our way.

MILLER: okay.

MILLER: Let's see, I already talked to you about the National Register. On that note of the National Register, I was looking at the register...I could not figure out what date that was done. Um...I think it was in the 80s?

TAYLOR: Its was 1985 or 86'. I think.

MILLER: It was not very clear but um...there were two questions...I am not sure if you're the right person that can speak on this. They talked about um.... they spoke of substantial contribution and exceptional importance to Kansas City's Black community. The National Register's responsibility of supplying data on Kansas City's blatant racism that dominated the neighborhood. Can you speak of this statement?

TAYLOR: What I thinking they meant is knowing the history—knowing how it came about. The court cases. Which the doctor had to go through. Even in order to live in Santa Fe, which is racism and knowing. Knowing that nobody could move past 27th Street into that neighborhood. I think that's where they were going with that back in that time. Um...other than that, it's really nothing different than the rest of the city when it comes to racism. Those things I do know. Um...I remember when I was young, I actually lived in um...in the oak park neighborhood—which is walking distance. I went to the same high school, which is right next to my house in Santa Fe. I moved walking distance where I was raised. I have been in this house twenty-five years. But um...same kind of racism and discrimination that was going on when I was growing up—you know. Going down Benton further was an excursion;

it was the most wonderful thing you could do. Going to the zoo, you could go one day a year. Um...you got to go an area in the zoo called Watermelon Hill, you weren't allowed to go anywhere places. I am old enough to remember that. I remember Fairyland Amusement Park; African Americans were only allowed to go one day a year and that was the 4th of July. I remember that. I remember my dad being furious. He would always drive, go and take us to a lot of places. We'd cry and say "please" "please" "please" and would make him so mad if we would ask. I've been there and remember when my mother sent me to the store when Martin Luther King was assassinated and being at the store when the riots began. Um...so, I've lived here and witnessed it...I've grown wiser and accustom to what racism is and still is. And I do know our community. My hope is to have the city and others contribute more to the areas that have not seen attention that should have for years. Um...I am hoping all that has happened is the catalysis for change opposed just let's just talk about it. We're past the stage of talking. So, I am going down a rabbit hole but yeah...

MILLER: He.... it's okay.... I understand it. It is a crazy time right now.

MILLER: I did catch you on the news about the Urban Core Cleanup program and I thought that was interesting how that came about and um...is it still being done?

TAYLOR: I wish I could say that it was better. When I said still pockets um...right now during COVID--it's not as prevalent.

MILLER: Yeah.

TAYLOR: We still have pockets. If I think I remember...If that's the one, we were shot at or not?

MILLER: Yes.

TAYLOR: Okay. Yeah. We as neighbors we know where those pockets are. We tried—how about we start the cleanup in the worst areas—maybe the neighbors in that area see us; that they would join with us and we could start something moving. We got the neighbors together and bought the brooms and everything we needed. We went to the designated spots and had to run because there someone who was shooting, and all ran to hide while we were trying to clean up. I will say because of that we haven't tried to do an attempt since. We still have our neighborhood clean-up; we still have those that are every three or four months. We will try to get the neighbors to clean up and I haven't felt it a great idea for our neighbors in certain areas until we can get something done about that. I think the worst part of that experience was the amount of time it took the police department to even show up.

MILLER: Right.

TAYLOR: We're still kind of reeling behind that. We're still kind of reeling behind the police department telling us there was nothing they could during one of our meetings. So, what I tried to do is stay in touch with them and um... we got such and such going on—what are you going to do about it. When are you going to show up? Those kinds of things. I don't stop and

our neighbors don't stop. We're not going to get anywhere until we get others to hear our pain. We can do as much as we can do but they have to kick in and help us. The owners of the apartment buildings and rental areas have to kick and take some ownership of the neighborhood and we haven't gotten there yet. We have to figure out some strategies but it's great that its pockets. We have identified where they are and not the entire Santa Fe district.

MILLER: That's good.

MILLER: Um...Is it that you imitated this program?

TAYLOR: the cleanup?

MILLER: Yeah.

TAYLOR: Yeah...I think it was one of my second year of the President, I guess. Every meeting the neighbors would come and say—that area is just filthy, 'what are we going to do about it. Doesn't the city own it'...over and over again. And we decided to try. The police come to our meetings every month, and we decided we'd clean it up ourselves and just do it. I'd buy the brooms and the dustpans and that. So, yeah...we decided and set the date, and that was the outcome.

MILLER: I guess this is kind of a dumb question, but I guess the city has not offered any support for this program like Quinton Lucas' office...?

TAYLOR: Support for the program...Well, it really wasn't a program per se. We're going to clean up. I will say that our mayor—prior to him being mayor he was our third district representative. He did come out and support us on occasion. Since that time, we've have tried. We've had barbecues, brought all the neighbors out, we've had where we distributed masks, handed out fruits and vegetables. So, we're not stopping, we're still trying to find ways to wrap our arms around our neighborhood. Saying your all welcome, here you go, and come to our meetings. City support, city help...yes and no. Um...to a certain extent. They have a tremendous amount of other areas as well. Um...and I think that what we ask for we've been certainly recognized for asking. They know who we are—I make sure of that. I spend a lot of time at meetings and talking with them about the things that would benefit Santa Fe. So...um, it's just a matter of being in the right—having the right relationships. Uh, getting the most attention on what you're trying to get done. The police department, uh...I think that is my saddest thoughts on what they could do.

MILLER: Yeah.

TAYLOR: And haven't done and make promises to do. It just doesn't seem that hard for me. Um, if you know where those pockets of prostitution are, and we tell you and tell you. We give you pictures and all that and you tell us there is nothing you can do. Or tell us you'll pick them up, but they'll be right back out tomorrow. So, we're in this catch-22 when we're trying to develop, trying to bring our neighborhood back but can't seem to get the support we need from those types of initiatives

TAYLOR: Makes it hard.

MILLER: Yes...makes it hard.

MILLER: I guess my next question would be um, are able to make connections to the younger generation, of African Americans in your neighborhood?

TAYLOR: That's a great question and I have been asked that, I would say twice this week and that is something we haven't done. And we need to. I will say the majority of the people who live in Santa Fe are seniors who are holding onto their homes. We have some new younger families with small children that I have been able to identify—not a lot of young families but at least not in the age range seventeen or high school range up to twenty-one. So, that is what I have been able to identify. But those who are here, we have not... and um, I think recently we were awarded a grant from Community Capital Funds...that's who gave us the funds for our banners that we're putting up and we have a radio program called 'Welcome to the Neighborhood' where I get the opportunity to speak to others that are providing services in other neighborhoods. So, they are funding that but the recommendation from them was—'do you have anything setup for the young people?' So, I am foreseeing the one of the ideas that was presented to me was—when we talk about this art uh...gallery per se...we are putting up. How about having places in our neighborhood where the young people are displaying their art. Nothing stops graffiti and trash more than art—something pretty.

MILLER: Something for them to do.

TAYLOR: Yes...

TAYLOR: Yes. Something for them to do. But those who are tearing up the neighborhoods and such recognize art and tend not to destroy it. Tend to appreciate it.

MILLER: Yes.

TAYLOR: We're going to work on and try to make it so where its weather resistant. It gives them an opportunity. We're going to do a lot of that. I am excited about that idea and happy to bring it back to our board next meeting.

MILLER: That's awesome to hear. I guess the next question would be...um, can you name some of the core aspects of the neighborhood that make it unique to you?

TAYLOR: I would say the history to me. The structures, the homes, and the tenacity. I mean—the tenacity of the neighbors makes it very rich and very strong. Um, and I would say, the due diligence of the board that I have. You know...everyone has their own strength. They all exercise that great capacity. It is special that I get to be President and I am loving this. Um...I was Secretary for a while then Vice President, then President for almost five years. We have made some great strides; we have a bank account with some land and other things. All my life it's been community. Everything I have ever done, all my career...when I

got out of college-everything. So, this fits right into what I do full-time I work for Urban Neighborhood initiative—which is about neighborhoods. This is just is just everything about me.

MILLER: Wow...okay.

MILLER: Can you describe why long-term residents stay in the neighborhood? Was it that keeps them there?

TAYLOR: Its home. Its home for like for anyone else. I can certainly speak for myself—I could have moved...you know. I could have moved out South when there was a big rush to move out South. I could have moved. I want to be here. I like my home. I like the homes that are here. There are some days I wished I had but you know I really glad I've stayed, and I think others feel the same way. It's our home and we want it protected. We understand, you know it's not the best areas, but we have been busy trying to make it into that. We are fighters. We want the best, it's not that we couldn't do better. We want to make this better.

MILLER: I think there are two more questions for Ms. Taylor.

MILLER: In your opinion, has the documentary “Land of Opportunity” brought more influence of why this neighborhood is vital to the African American community from outside sources (neighborhood funding and outreach programming)

TAYLOR: Well, I think we brought out some things we already knew. Certainly, our own community—we already knew. The Kansas City already knew but not quite all the details. Um...we were already a path to do better things. However, it did put the spotlight back on Santa Fe and those who had forgotten. It reminded them again. If there's a negative at all—I would say—it brings attention to Santa Fe of the homes and the richness and all that. It probably has brought developers to take a look—wanting to come into Santa Fe would not normally come in. I take that into two ways. I think I mentioned this earlier- Families. All families are welcomed in Santa Fe. It's the history that will still remain. What's really, really, really important to me is who already here—that will be able to stay in place. Those who really carry the history of this area. So, it's something to watch. What I am using it as—certainly the documentary as, again...I'm in fundraising...how can I show the impact this neighborhood has been for years. How can we get the things we need in the direction we need going forward to improve and not lose it? By using that, it gives more credence to—of no idea of...the history, of Walt Disney and all these other people who have lived in Santa Fe You know...maybe we can help. I am using it as that capacity.

MILLER: Good answer.

MILLER: My final question, is there anything you would like to add to this interview? Is there anything I did not ask, anything you would like to offer?

TAYLOR: I would miss a tremendous opportunity to not expand—wherever this information goes to extend an invitation for the community in the city or not to um...to learn more about

Santa Fe. Um...support the work of the neighborhood association. Help us live in place in our homes that took us years and years to be allowed to come into. Um...and support our efforts. Help us grow the history in whatever capacity you can do. If it's by word of mouth, by getting documentaries, by philanthropic dollars, by city, federal and state support. Please.

MILLER: Good answer.

MILLER: Well, I really, really appreciate your time Ms. Taylor. Um, if you have and anyone that would be willing to talk to me. You could just them my email-that would be great. Um, I just appreciate your help and um, I will send you a copy of my thesis once it done. It won't be done until November. You'll probably forget but I'll send it onto you in November.

TAYLOR: Will the questions for—I just kind of wanted to know what direction you're going to go—more historical? Or more....what does the future hold?

MILLER: Um...well...it's like an all oral interview master thesis and I am collecting all different questions and that kind of basis. I am interviewing Mr. Brooks and I am interviewing another couple who has lived in South Kansas City for over fifty years. So, I am collecting all sorts of questions and seeing how they connect. I am giving an overall historical synopsis of what redlining is all about.

TAYLOR: Wonderful. The reason I ask is to um...if its historical information...Mr. Brock. James Brock would welcome the opportunity to talk with you.

MILLER: Okay.

TAYLOR: I would probably start there and send him an email and copy you on.

MILLER: That would be fantastic.

TAYLOR: see if he would take a few moments to speak with you.

MILLER: Okay. I really appreciate it.

TAYLOR: Once your thesis is done...and its printed and goes to the library and all that...we loved to have a copy of it—in some form.

MILLER: Yep. I always send everyone a copy of everything I do, so you have a hardcopy for yourself.

TAYLOR: Wonderful.

MILLER: Okay!

TAYLOR: Alright...Wonderful. Thank you very much

MILLER: Well. Thank you so much. You have a good day.

TAYLOR: You too.

MILLER: Bye. Bye.

TAYLOR: Bye.

PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

The manuscript may be read, quoted from, and cited for purposes of research only by scholars approved by the University at such place as is made available for purposes of research by the University.

INTERVIEWER

Kathrine Miller

INTERVIEWEE

Chris Goode

DATE

June 8, 2020

LOCATION

Zoom Interview

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Mr. Christopher Goode is the Founder of Ruby Jean's Juicery based in Kansas City, Missouri. Mr. Goode is a passionate entrepreneur who started his company in 2015 to honor the early death of his Grandmother Ruby Jean, who fought a short-lived battle with Type 2 diabetes. He has made it his life's work to educate youth and communities and integrate the juicing culture in his hometown by locating the flagship Ruby Jean's in a food desert he grew up near. In 2019, Goode joined on as one of the Kansas City's Park and Recreation Board Commissioners.

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Background

MILLER: Hello! Can you hear me now?

GOODE: I can hear you now.

MILLER: Thanks for taking the time Chris.

GOODE: No problem...how's it going?

MILLER: Good. Nice to see ya.

GOODE: You as well.

MILLER: I know you're super busy and I am sorry I kept bugging you... I just know I am under a deadline and I have a thesis that's due in November. And you know school is really tough. I am graduating in December. My thesis is on redlining and I picked you as one of my core guys because you are an influencer on Troost right now. I thought you're a young guy that people look up to and making changes on Troost and I thought I need to interview this guy. I thought if I can get you and I interviewed Alvin Brooks today and he is long-winded, I got him and Marquita Taylor of Santa Fe Area Council.

GOODE: Okay, I know I won't be too long-winded—I got dinner almost done...so I'll try to be concise.

MILLER: Sure. Uh...so I will get right into it then...um...

MILLER: I did a little bit of your background but it's really hard because you're a younger guy, there's not a ton of research on you yet. So, I just wanted to get in a little bit of your background. But before I ask any of these questions, I just need to get your permission to use this interview and archive it at the LaBudde Special Collections Library at UMKC. If I can do that and get your permission and that I can do that.

GOODE: Sure thing. Yes.

MILLER: Can you describe growing up in Kansas City and approximately where and some background on that?

GOODE: So, we can kind of jumped around a lot, um...early part of life wasn't that stable. Um...I'd say the earliest portion was or anchor was 39th and Wabash. But our duplex was at 42nd and Wabash. Um, so right off Prospect, so we spent time there. We moved over to E. 46th Street, spent time a good amount of time there. And then, we ended moving out South, you know kind of for better opportunity. So, I lived in South Kansas City for a while, um then moved from there and ended up finishing high school in Lees Summit but stayed at Ruskin High School for graduation. I graduated from Ruskin High School. So, I have lived quite a few places in Kansas City—much different areas and now I'm back in the city.

MILLER: Okay, um.... So, this leads me to your grandmother's house on Wabash, um...

MILLER: Can you tell me if your grandmother owned that house and if it's still in the hands of the family?

GOODE: Interesting question. My grandmother never owned the house that sits on Wabash. It's still there today and looks the exactly the same. My great uncle actually owns the home. Um...he's in his nineties, he's still alive and good health but his kids control his estate. So, it is still in the family. I have asked them. I have attempted to purchase it. Not for any other reason but to keep it intact except the precious memories that came form that place. To make it a kind of a memorial for her but they have other plans for it but yeah.

MILLER: Wow. Would be able to anything from the house? Are they trying to deconstruct the house or something?

GOODE: No, I don't think they're going to tear the house down. They had...At first, they were talking about turning it into an adult daycare. Now, I believe they have tenants in the house. I just want the house to; you know everything we've built stems from our memories there. We lived at 42nd and our grandmother lived at 39th. It was almost like we lived at her house--we were just back and forth so much. She watched a great deal of the time.

MILLER: Well. Ok.

MILLER: That's a great answer because I could not anything on that.

MILLER: And growing Chris, can you recall facing blatant racial prejudices that impacted you/your family/housing situations?

GOODE: You know what as a kid...my mother and my grandmother did such a great job of uh...filling us with abundance and love. I am sure we did but I guess I was so removed from it...I don't think I really understood racism personally on a personal level until I got into high school. I mean I ran into, I really don't recall as a kid, like this landlord did this or that. It wasn't until I was in high school faced it head on.

MILLER: I know for an example for me, I lived in Midtown at 31st and Armour Boulevard. The area is completely different from when I grew up and I am forty-five now. In my opinion, the area has become or becoming gentrified. I currently live in the West Plaza area and some areas are troublesome then some are very high priced. How do you see Kansas City today where you grew up and live now?

GOODE: You know...my memories of growing up of riding down Troost or Prospect. I can see those images in my head. You know, I can remember the blight and remember the homelessness, and prostitutes. I can remember all the images as a kid. But again, it almost seems for me like a distant world out the window of the bus or hanging out the window of my mom's car. My mother. The love of my mother and grandmother was so abundant and so strong. So, I didn't feel connected to it, we stayed in our own bubble. While I have those

images in my head, I don't have any negative perspective of it. To present day, seeing it now...I think it's...if it were more diversely populated—those areas that have been gentrified, that would be amazing! I think, I rather see it like it is now rather how it looked back then. I wish it was more equitable—I wish there were more people to benefit from the gentrification.

MILLER: Hmm.... Now, uh...Kansas is known for its awful racial divide. Have you ever thought about taking your business and plant it somewhere else that is more diverse?

GOODE: You know honestly...when the idea hit me-I was living in Los Angeles and I decided to come home to do because I felt it like it was something that Kansas City needed. I knew it was something that Kansas City needed. So, I made the decision to come home intentionally. I always wanted to place it in an area where a diverse population could access it. We started it in Westport and then we were blessed to have the opportunity to come over to Troost. And to have it in my own background. I went to Operation Breakthrough; well it was St. Vincent's—back in the and I went there as a small child. Having that in my background, um...from that area-there was a reluctance in my mind. You know, if it was something that I should do. But when I prayed and sat on (it) a while...it was like ooh...' it is exactly who you are and why exist and go for it'. So, nature and how segregated it is...um...it actually inspires me. Because our population of consumers at 30th and Troost is completely diverse. Racially, um... from a socially and economic standpoint, age, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. You know, every way you can imagine, we have a very diverse consumer base. So, as opposed to running from it and saying you know, this would do great in uh...I don't know...somewhere in Florida or Los Angeles or New Orleans or somewhere like that. I think Ruby Jean's can make Kansas City a better place.

MILLER: That took a lot of guts. Because what you call a food desert.

GOODE: Yeah.

MILLER: There was nothing. It took you to bring others in. Others are popping all over now.

GOODE: Yeah. You know. I lead with my heart. I tell you...I was reluctant myself. I was like...I was like it might be too early you know. It might be a great gesture, but I don't want to fail and do the right thing. But I am glad I let the fear take a backseat to the passion and purpose. Um...cause' had I not, as a city.... we would have missed out on something special. I am not saying—Ruby Jean's is God's gift to Kansas City. I am saying in a way I know for a fact that we have been able to provide something important to the most diverse audience that Kansas City's seen. From arguably any establishment, the fact—it's a healthy establishment. It makes it more impactful in my mind. It's almost, almost too comfortable to natural to tie it to Ruby Jean's for that to occur that people forget how segregated Kansas City is. You know.... you might see a guy roll up in a Maserati and you have a person that is barely getting by—stumble in with their kids and grab something less expensive from our cooler. So, I am glad that I did it.

MILLER: It just reminds me--I moved to 29th and Campbell...and you were not there. It was so different. There was nothing there--nothing. I go to Ruby Jean's all the time and --I think, this is so different.

GOODE: It's like people don't even realize it and have that perspective of that area right. We went in there when it was the Bale Bakery. I remember it as a kid...it was right across the street from the daycare. I almost scratch my head because it is so natural now. I don't think they even realize now--it's special to me. It's special to me to build something on the Eastside of Kansas City that has not happened before.

MILLER: You describe over and over, the love for the community. Is this the reason you decided to build your company on Troost Avenue?

GOODE: Yes. It's disruptive in every way. You know... you can find a lot of places to eat but can't find any places to eat that's actually good for you. And you know, there's still a gap in between—my ability to feed every person in that area that needs what we provide. We aren't a non-profit, so it creates a difficulty- I am a very small business. While my heart is like come get this nourish(ment)--we've got to be intact for the long haul. So, we can have the ability to help more people. So, there's a barrier even for me—to really tap into the intention of my heart. But I know that our presence alone shifts the conversation. We still have a long way to go and really, really doing what we set out to do when we located there. We are off to a good start.

MILLER: My next question would be—has there been anyone in your past—when you've tried to build this business, tried to convince you not to build on the Troost corridor, and had to convince them of your approach?

GOODE: Um...just myself. just myself...my former self. Before I rested with the idea. Um, felt like God said it was alright. At that point in the business-I was beyond, seeking approval. My first location, for sure. Tons of people said, don't even do it period. People very close to me. Um...by the time we were set to open on Troost, I was beyond, seeking approval. It was more an eternal battle. You know, for mindset was--don't do it and uh...I am glad I didn't listen to myself. Um...nobody but me.

MILLER: Wow...okay. The last couple of questions I have...um...

MILLER: This was a big risk building a brand-new company in a food desert. Can you talk about this decision that left you in a redlined area instead of making the more practical choice of the crossroads, downtown, Westport areas?

GOODE: I always knew that...when I fell in love with juicing and juice bars and encouraging to be healthy. One of the things I noticed quickly was that—I was not the typical customer. The wildest part of the though is I had a decent income at the time. But just because of the way I looked, I never fit the bill that should be respected and really served with a little gratitude. Which we should with all people, which we try to. I can always tell I was being looked passed—like "what are you doing here". It just felt like that. So, I always knew that

when God put it on my heart and this what I have for you--my heart would be different for it. I just felt I wanted to do this from a genuine perspective. Instead of like juice bars being fufu and exclusive and all posh and bougie. I just didn't, I wanted to be completely opposite from any experience I have had at a juice bar.

MILLER: I think I came across five key aspects you stick with and correct me if I am wrong. You have the following: having a purpose, being authentic, committed to your community, connection, and impact. Does that sound right?

GOODE: Yes.

MILLER: Okay. And, I guess my last two questions are before I let you have your dinner would be...Is the business considered your only business or employee family members work along with you??

GOODE: My cousin, is my right-hand man. He was a professional basketball player, retired. And he, you know—decided to come on board and help me grow the business. I am the sole owner on paper, but my cousin is certainly, you know we couldn't do what we do without him. I would like as we become solvent financially, to bring the family in but we are still laying the groundwork to make sure we're financially healthy as a company.

MILLER: Okay. And my last question, I always ask my interviewees, is there anything you would like to offer to the interview? So, anyone looks at, that you have the last word.

GOODE: Um...gratitude. I have been blessed enough to create a platform that Kansas Citians support. Alright. This is something that was in my heart and then into the mind and then to my lips, then I spoke it. Then it became a reality and then people supported that reality. And, I am just so grateful for that. I never want to be detached from that and gratitude. To be honest, to be working on your thesis...and to be working on a topic that is so near and dear to my heart...um...tomorrow—I can't really tell you. The interesting thing about your thesis, I am making a gesture to our city that um...that's BIG! It's disruptive. It will have ah...you know...it may have an opposing viewpoint. But it's right. So, for you, I'm talking about you specifically, to identify me as somebody that you want to weigh in on a very, very important moment for your life. A thing you have to complete that have obviously dreamed of and worked hard for; it leaves me very grateful. Um...I get pulled on a lot...I probably did five different media things last week. But I never wanted to detach the gratitude in my heart. So, I am grateful for you identifying me as someone that you wanted to talk to. Um...tomorrow evening...I will be able to share with you what I am talking about...I think it could be really, really cool for your thesis. You'll see exactly what I mean.

MILLER: Well, I am all ears man...

GOODE: It's going to blow you away. So, your timing impeccable. So, I appreciate you and grateful for you—remind me tomorrow...Say, you had something.

MILLER: I'll send you a quick text.

GOODE: Alright

MILLER: I appreciate your time sir. I know you're extremely busy right now.

GOODE: Alright, good luck.

MILLER: Alright. Bye, Bye.

GOODE: Bye.

PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

The manuscript may be read, quoted from, and cited for purposes of research only by scholars approved by the University at such place as is made available for purposes of research by the University.

INTERVIEWER

Kathrine Miller

INTERVIEWEES

Alan and Yolanda Young

DATE

June 30, 2020

LOCATION

Phone Interview

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Alan and Yolanda Young have dedicated their lives to activism in many forms. In 2019, Mrs. Young was elected to the Missouri House of Representatives. Prior to her being elected, both of the Youngs worked countless years in their neighborhood of Ivanhoe. They were the pioneers who transformed the neighborhood from disrepair into a blueprint for other neighborhoods to follow to reduce crime, vagrancy, and illegal dumping. The Youngs have created numerous programs and community gardens that are still in use today.

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YOLANDA: Good Morning, Kathrine?

MILLER: Good Morning, how are you?

YOLANDA: It has been crazy around here...I got my family here of four grandchildren here all under the age of five.

MILLER: Oh, my goodness...

YOLANDA: There is a set of twins in the bunch. That in itself is uh... a day to day talent. I would say, we're trying to keep up with them.

MILLER: I really appreciate you taking the time out, um...this morning. So, I won't take too much of your time. So, I just really appreciate it.

YOLANDA: You're welcome.

MILLER: You got the questions prior and so you could take a look at it?

YOLANDA: Well, in all honesty an opportunity but I think we'll be okay. You're, my understanding is that you're ask us about our life and work here in the neighborhood.

MILLER: Yes. that is pretty much of everything to do with your work of bringing Ivanhoe to what it has come to be.

YOLANDA: Yes—and let me introduce you to my husband. Uh...hold on one moment...hold one second.

MILLER: Thank you.

YOLANDA: (Yolanda had to get Alan-silence is on purpose) Okay, sorry...there is a tree man that is here that is pulling up and trying to get into the driveway. So, a lot of things happening, we will try to assist with project as best as we can. Hey, Alan...say hello to Kathrine.

ALAN: Hello...

MILLER: Hi Alan, thanks for taking the time out to talk me.

MILLER: Before I get started talking to you guys. I wanted to make sure I have your permission to record our conversation. To record and to be able archive it at the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the UMKC Campus. If you both could just tell me that is okay?

ALAN: Sounds okay to me.

YOLANDA: Yes.

MILLER: Okay, thank you very much. I didn't want to forget before I got started.

YOLANDA: Now tell me this Kathrine....I've got my grandchildren here. Can you hear a lot of background noise?

MILLER: Just a little bit but no problem. It's fine. It's no problem at all.

MILLER: Before I get too deep in your work in the Ivanhoe neighborhood—I just wanted a little bit of background because I could not locate much within my research, um...where you lived prior to your purchase in Ivanhoe?

YOLANDA: Well, we we're married in 1986 and uh...we met at a community college prior to that. I was from a small town—right on the border of Texarkana in Texas, a town called Nash. Nash is basically what Raytown or maybe Blue Springs is to Kansas City. So, it's just right on the border of Texarkana, east Texas there. I moved here. I had family here and had moved here at the top of 1980. I met my husband at community college—got married in 1986. We moved to uh...to suburban Kansas City right on the Raytown border. So, we lived on the typical apartment. Went to work, went to school and so forth. And um...decided we would venture into real estate. So, we moved into Ivanhoe because we bought a piece of real estate—actually we bought several pieces of real estate at an auction. Properties that had been condemned, ready to be torn down basically, or almost in despair. We thought if we would invest in one of those properties—we could contribute to make the neighborhood look a little better. Um...and I believe in entrepreneurship, so it was an opportunity for us to fix the property up to rent or sell it. Then move on. But as you can still see – we're still here.

ALAN: where we lived before? Well, like she said before we lived in an apartment in Raytown and before that—I lived in South Kansas City.

MILLER: mmm...um...

MILLER: With this investment opportunity you had with this auction. Were you able to see the property or have hesitancy of buying before moving?

ALAN: We did but as far as timing was not a lengthy period. Basically, we wanted to get into buying and flipping—it has become really popular today. This was before it was really popular back in the late 80s and 90s—at least in the urban core.

MILLER: Okay...um...Alan this question is for you because I have seen quite few articles that um... you have been labelled the “inadvertent activist” when describing the work and the long years doing this. Do you see yourself being labelled or has it just a long process?

ALAN: I am sorry, I didn't hear the first part of your question. Do I see myself as what?

MILLER: Do you see yourself as an “inadvertent activist” or has it been a long process where you worked at?

ALAN: The initial start was inadvertent, and the process came as we lived through it. Things don’t happen quickly, and change doesn’t come quickly. It takes a lot of work and a lot of people. It takes...uh...momentum um...it takes time for things to change. So, we had no idea how long the journey would be when started on this journey back in the late 80s into the 90s. I don’t know if that answers your question.

MILLER: Right...because its 2020 and you guys started in the 80s and still changing.

ALAN: The journey is still going.... the journey is still journey going. It’s been a life-long pursuit or a life-long uh...I can’t think of the word...uh...

YOLANDA: A calling...more or less really.

ALAN: That would be the biggest thing. A life-long calling.

MILLER: Okay...um...Mrs. Young, do you agree with this label that has been put upon Alan because all these articles I have found are from the 80s and 90s about Alan. About how he found his calling putting his neighbors of his together and um...and leading the way?

YOLANDA: Well, I think the question can be answered yes on both counts because in some respects –yes and in some aspects no. Um...he nor I ever planned to do this work. You know in life things just pull you or call you or charge you. It appears.

MILLER: Yeah.

YOLANDA: Some things just fall into your life. When we moved into the neighborhood, what we saw on a day-to-day basis was nothing like had ever experienced before. As we mentioned, we we’re living in an apartment in the suburbs. I grew up in a very small town where everyone knew everyone. He grew up in the suburbs—what was called the suburbs then in South Kansas City. So, our backgrounds...uh...you know...our communities, where we came from was so different than the community we moved into. Um...the thing that tugged at my heart the most and I think his was there were so many seniors on our block who had reared their children, reared their grandchildren, who had really become prisoners in their own home, and others who walked around with a sense of hopelessness. Um...there was just no access to some of the basic city services that um...that neighbors across the way—let’s say to the west of here were receiving. And uh...unemployment, joblessness, or if people had jobs, they weren’t making enough that kept up with the cost of living. So, um...it was you know...(inaudible). The houses were in despair. The city sidewalks were either broken and cracked, had extreme cracks, or just not present at all. The city—the lights...on this block, there were virtually no working city lights and uh...you could say that for a lot of the blocks in the general area in this neighborhood. So, it was a very dark and bleak picture. Um...and we felt like—“why isn’t anybody doing something about this?”

MILLER: Right.

YOLANDA: So...we just sort of fell in love as we got to know uh—particularly the seniors. Felt like my neighbor next door who is still my neighbor right now—who is in her late eighties—Mrs. Gardener, kind of fit the role of like my mother. And so, to have left and not addressed the ills of the neighborhood that we were seeing would be like, you know—kind of like your mother without support or assistance. And so...

MILLER: Um...

YOLANDA: Yes...go ahead....

MILLER: Um...my question would be...having the want to do all of these things—and um...leading the way-making these changes. How did you come up with these ideas to get the changes? I have seen some of the ideas of coming up with prayer vigils, enlisting neighborhood watches, and mobilizing foot soldiers on the ground for cleanups. How did you really come up with these um...things to reinvigorate your neighborhood? To make your neighborhood the blueprint for other neighborhoods to come in and follow your neighborhood? That's my number one question because—others want to come in and follow your neighborhood.

YOLANDA: We get that a lot, but we will start with Alan here.

ALAN: Uh...a lot of the strategies and the message that we used to organize our neighborhood really are rooted in our faith. Uh...and the teachings that the believe are true in the Bible. And also, an admiration for the way our country was structured which was regarded to um committees—our federal government, our state government, you have committees, you have people involved. It's a democratic decision process and everybody has an important role to play. So, we looked at uh...our neighborhood, some four-hundred and seventy-four blocks, we felt it was important that as many people as possible get involved. Um...we knew that with increased participation, increased voting, and increased pushing, our city elected officials—we could petition them for things we as a neighborhood couldn't do for resources that are supposed to be coming to the urban core but were not getting in. Now as far as the residents, we assembled them in a structure which we called block captains or block contacts. Yolanda and I approached—in the beginning, actually went door to door in this neighborhood and included people who were interested. Our goal was to have a block captains or block contact on each block. That person was like what we considered to be our uh...field generals and they were the ones who organized that area. So, whether it was one block, two or three blocks—uh...they we're the first ones to work with to disseminate information and receive information from those who lived in that area. So, we really looked at it strategically of how you would win a war; we felt we were at war against the blight, the crime, and the drugs. So, we started by establishing what we called a beachhead—a central place, where we had residents organized from that point to try expanding throughout the neighborhood. So, we really modeled after some examples we saw in the Bible and other example(s) we saw how the federal government organized it. And but we tried not to reinvent

the wheel. But to use the examples that already worked and reapply them into our neighborhood. I hope that makes sense.

MILLER: Right...It sure does. And um...I am just fascinated of how you came up with these things to keep your neighborhood um...just organized um...to keep connected, it seemed how other neighborhoods were not able to organize as well as the Ivanhoe neighborhood has and I did not know how you guys did that.

MILLER: So...my next question would be um—I was fascinated of how you came up with Young Urban Farm? I think this is a genius idea how you brought your neighbors together and this question is for either one of you.

ALAN: Well, the urban farm and the farming came later—it was a long journey. Now initially, I believe it was 2005 we came together and drafted a plan and part of that plan was to help residents who wanted their backyards bargained—yet we forced them into training to do that. (Baby in background, sorry) And So, um...the urban farming came out the growth of that. Uh...and I am going let Yolanda speak to because she has info on that.

MILLER: Okay.

YOLANDA: Well, as Alan mentioned, neighborhood wide we you know...we started an initiative to support gardeners or Ivanhoe growers. Uh, on a personal note—for us um...we both have had families that have handed their hands in agricultural gardening; I came from a very small country town and so both sides of my family owned a bit of land that did farming. So, that's something I missed dearly when we moved into the urban area here. And so, for me—starting a backyard garden uh...at the time was a time to bring my southern roots to the city. The other thing is Kathrine—this area was known as a food desert. I can remember driving out to where we used to live when started rearing our children just to purchase healthy food uh...particularly healthy produce, fresh vegetables, fruit, and good-looking meat for my family.

MILLER: Right.

YOLANDA: And so...um...that alone set the tone for the great need for access to good food and healthy food. And so, I started a garden right away, um and over time we were able to purchase more vacant lots again contributing to the or trying to reduce the blight in our neighborhood. But also, it would be able to provide room for our children to play because the lots in the city are generally very small— there's not a lot of yard space.

MILLER: mmm....

YOLANDA: we purchased over time oh...about four or five lots behind us that once been a dump. We organized a cleanup along the way that we knew was illegal (inaudible)—that picture was painted many times in Ivanhoe. We were able to expand from the backyard to the lots and um...the garden grew into uh...a pretty significant size and we were organizing with the neighborhood to bring um...you know the self-initiative to the neighborhood. We

decided ourselves that we would establish an urban farm business right on the site. So, I think everything came together so fluid. Um...I don't know if we had a goal of starting an urban farming business—our goal was to be able to have healthy food for our family and then we shared so much of it with our neighbors.

MILLER: mmm....

YOLANDA: We still do. Again, it was healthy food for our family and to contribute to producing and reduce the dumping in the vacant lots and a repurposing it. Whichever you decide.

MILLER: Okay. I guess this leads me to um...to Alan's interview that I listened to recently—it was done last year KCUR's Sam Zeff, I don't know if you remember this but it was called-*Human Cost of Reassessment*, and you talked about your neighborhood and the cost of the reassessment. And I was wondering if you could a little bit about if your heavily involved with the assessments that are taking place or the petitions that are being done?

ALAN: At the moment, the appeals process I believe is concluded. Uh, however I think there are some stipulations that the county often regard to lowering practices and still working through the process. But in general, back at that time—uh...the increases, the quick, multiple increases in property value was and is an issue. In my opinion, is the first step towards gentrifying this neighborhood. And I was really appalled at the fact that the county was a part of facilitating gentrification.

MILLER: And um....

ALAN: It went up three to four hundred times—went up two hundred percent what they were in 2018. And this policy that was pushed all this at once. And I don't think it was fair to the community and the residents who lived there during the time with the drugs and the blight. Now, these people own their homes and most of them are on fixed incomes. Now the county is going to triple or quadruple. In our case, we had lots that went up two thousand percent in value in one year. To me, that defied common sense. Uh...so that problem is one we continue to fight. You may or may not be aware that during municipal meetings, one of their representatives of the county mentioned that will be continued until next year since property values went up and revaluations are being contested.

MILLER: Now um.... my next question would be are your personal lots from the urban farm seeing um...a reassessment from the county? And having a negative effect on the neighborhood?

ALAN: Are you speaking on or questioning regards to what the neighborhood owns or what Yolanda and I own?

MILLER: That you own and that you farm?

ALAN: Well...it has increased individual lots and we are fortunate that we can afford the increasing taxes unlike some who are live on an assistance level and any increase will require them to make choices. But at the moment we are not at that point—if we continually get two thousand or five thousand increases year after year. It will come down to where we will have to decide—can we afford to keep this land and are we making enough money in regard to sales to justify it.

MILLER: Right.

ALAN: So... some of our taxes went from eighteen dollars or twenty dollars a year to two hundred and fifty dollars a year. And now, then the talk back then was people would be actually worse off from twenty to two hundred and fifty.

MILLER: Wow.

ALAN: Okay...so that is what we're looking at. And that is what we were contesting. Uh...if you cross the nation—a lot of counties are restricted as to how significant increase of a reassessment value per year. I don't know why they don't have those constraints or not but in Missouri we don't have those constraints.

MILLER: Right. Um.... I was just interested because I just did another project on the Westside area and I see very similar patterns in Ivanhoe that follow into the Westside. So, I was very interested in your response to that.

MILLER: Um...my question would be... has Ivanhoe seen a significant contribution from the younger community to continue the work that your family and other long-term residents have applied already over the years?

MILLER: I am sorry...I didn't catch that.

YOLANDA: Can you repeat the question Kathrine?

MILLER: Has Ivanhoe seen a significant contribution from the younger community to continue the work that your family and other long-term residents have applied already over the years?

YOLANDA: Well...like many neighborhoods...not just neighborhoods—organizations um...across the city. There have been challenges in recruiting the younger generation. However, we have been able to—the neighborhood council offer some programming through some grants we have received over some time to get younger people involved. We've offered um and worked with universities such as the one your attending UMKC, and KU, offering internships, service projects or service time for students that needed it. I'll have to say that it's a challenge getting the young people involved but what I have found out is that a lot of thousands of them over the years because I managed youth and family programs at Ivanhoe for many years—the younger generation, they say that their voices are not heard. They're not really welcomed at the table were older are at. And see I am an older adult now and tend to

say we want youth involved but I don't know in the actual um...circle of engagement of actually trying to engage them, we allow them to have their voice, utilize their fresh ideas and perspectives. That's the negative side that a lot of young people don't feel that they're being heard and that they should be. But the other side is we have had a lot of youth involvement over time, but retainment is a big challenge. You get young people you know, that come through the ranks and have enrolled—and participated in programs and they graduate from high school or maybe go through college and moved out the neighborhood early rather than staying to contribute to payback. So, that's the way I look at it.

MILLER: Yeah...that's definitely a challenge I have heard from different neighborhoods.

YOLANDA: Yeah...

MILLER: And... my question would be how has the neighborhood changed since the "Renaissance" of the neighborhood around 1997? Can you provide examples positive and negative?

ALAN: A lot of emphasis of what we started way back in the late 80's into the 90's has produced for the neighborhood. Um... back in the late 80's into the 90's we had a horrible drug problem here in the neighborhood, prostitution, and a lot of crime. 39th and Prospect was the number one talk of service of the city into the police department. And uh...within the span of thirty years we have closed somewhere between seven hundred to nine hundred drug houses that were here in the neighborhood—within the span of some thirty years. The city instituted programs to tear down a lot of the vacant houses that were in the neighborhood that needed to be demolished. The county once had two-thirds of their vacant land trust properties in this neighborhood. That went through a change. A lot of these properties have been sold, a lot of them have been rehabbed and uh...the neighborhood has experienced a lot of success and growth in the past thirty years. Uh, we still have problems in certain areas. There are still pockets of blight, but our problems simply are in a specific area verses the entire neighborhood. Uh, we have been able to bring millions of dollars of resources to the neighborhood to the city from the federal government which regards to minor home repair to houses. And uh...furnaces, roofs, new kitchens and new bathrooms that we were able to do the last fifteen years. And we also—the neighborhood has branched out to commercial building to duplexes and senior housing with much more planned in the future. And uh it was about fifteen years ago that Wells Fargo Bank deeded over uh two hundred and fifty lots that they owned to the neighborhood itself. So, we do have some land in use for development in the future. In addition to having a neighborhood center, we have now, thanks to James B. Nutter and his family. So, we have made great strides considering the neighborhood these past thirty years. We are hoping and praying that the progress will continue into the future. And as far as to our focus now, to identifying young people—we can turn over the reins and the gardens over to the young people to the next generation.

MILLER: Can you talk about some of the problems such as absentee landlords and um...abandoned housing issues, Alan?

ALAN: Yes...over the years, the LLCs that were out of state and owned properties in Ivanhoe—I mentioned briefly Nutter Bank and Wells Fargo that owned property and vacant lots have had an issue in the neighborhood not only in Ivanhoe but also in the urban core as a whole. And part of the effort the urban core residents is getting updated policies established for rental properties came out of the negative effects of these properties. And...now those who have rental properties or vacant lots—they have to be registered. We also in order to eliminate the problems we have built relationships with the city inspectors. And uh...in Ivanhoe, one of the inspector's is housed in one of our buildings. Uh...so we have tried attacking the problem from several advantage points. We also tried reaching out to landlords—number one to let them know that the property is a problem and the people who live there do care. We do expect them to get their property to a certain standard and it has a negative on the neighborhood as a whole. I don't know if that answers your question.

MILLER: Yes sir. The next question would be interested in asking. This was a big risk of staying in this area and taking action. Can you talk about this decision that left you in a redlined area instead of making another choice of leaving?

ALAN: Yolanda or me?

MILLER: Either or.

ALAN: For us, uh... a big part why we stayed is based on our religious beliefs. And for me personally, as a child and a young adult I learned—If God is for you, he is more than what is against you. And the belief is—if God answers prayers. And God will be there during battles, through problems in life. The Bible says were supposed to be a light in friendship. How can you run and hide when you are really being put to the test? And so, I felt—how could I tell my son, he was a baby at the time, it's important to stand up for what you believe in. When in fact, I myself did not stand up for what I believed in when my time of testing came. So, that was the root of me struggling with the fact of it would be great if we could move; we could have moved if wanted it but the people in this neighborhood needed someone to be advocates for them. You know, Yolanda and I looked at ourselves as being the ones to handled that role.

YOLANDA: And again Kathrine, it wasn't that we had planned to do this work. It seemed as if was by default and became ours. We just could not think of leaving the neighborhood and leaving the good people behind who we had developed relationships with. A lot of them were seniors, which I mentioned earlier...who had reared their children already and rearing their grandchildren. And uh...they needed support, we really felt like we would be leaving like your own mother or grandmother here um...unsupported.

ALAN: Yeah. For several years...would talk amongst ourselves—why doesn't somebody do something about it and we would call the police. They would speed down 39th Street going 100 miles an hour going somewhere else and we felt the crime was right here. And finally, one day we looked at each other and I believe it was Yolanda that said, rather saying why doesn't somebody do something about it, perhaps God has us here to do that something. That is when we had a major shift in our thinking and began praying ourselves of what would be

the first steps and locating the residents on this block that we knew and did not like the conditions and wanted to help the situation. I will say, we both got flak from our families which regards to—why don't you move and leave. Why are wanting to fight and they were concerned for our safety which was justified. So, we did have to shoulder that also, but we felt God was there to protect us. We initially started meetings...I'll just tell you this story really quick. It was so bad, we were having meetings at our house and the people on our block were so scared of the drug activity that they would actually get into their car and drive from one end of the block down to where our house to almost to the end of the block instead of walking. Uh...there were they would come out and a couple times where tires had been stabbed.

MILLER: mmm.

ALAN: So...it was not an easy time to start the process.

MILLER: Wow.

ALAN: Both, my wife and I have been threatened by those who were dealing those drugs. Uh...I know it's not part of this and it's whole another story—I would tell you at some other point.

MILLER: Yeah. I am sure it's a long story.

MILLER: My last question, is there anything you would like to add to the interview that has not been discussed or relevant to questions? Or something that I totally missed. Please---I give all my interviewees the last word. So, when others come and do research, it isn't my voice---it is yours.

ALAN: I would say uh...is just as important in the beginning is that we instituted or achieving small goals in the beginning and celebrating those goals with the residents as we went along. Also, this could not have happened with the help of partners who were outside the neighborhood and the list is too long for me to tell you. But I will say initially Mr. James B. Nutter was a major partner, Kansas City Power and Light was a major partner, the Kauffman Foundation was a major partner in the beginning, and Kansas University was a major partner as well. Without major partners, we would not have had the success we have had.

MILLER: Okay...I really...really appreciate your time Mr. and Mrs. Young and I know you are very busy. And I know we've had to reschedule a few times but I really...really appreciate your time. Um, I will make sure this gets archived along with the others and um...I am sure other researchers will be appreciative that this has been archived for a local perspective. So, thank you so much.

YOLANDA: Well you are welcome and glad we were able to assistance in some way.

MILLER: Thank you and you guys have a really good day. Thank you. Bye. Bye.

YOLANDA: Bye.

PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

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INTERVIEWER

Kathrine Miller

INTERVIEWEE

Alvin Lee Brooks

DATE

June 8, 2020

LOCATION

Zoom Interview

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Alvin Lee Brooks was born May 3, 1932 in Arkansas and moved to Kansas City as a small child with his adopted parents. Brooks has dedicated his entire life to community service at many capacities. During this interview, he discussed his early childhood, his experiences of segregation in schools and within Kansas City. Brooks also discussed his experience in the Kansas City Police Department, his involvement with Kansas City local riots in 1968 and compared it with the riots of 2020.

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Kansas City Demographics

MILLER: Hi. How are you?

BROOKS: How are you doing?

MILLER: Just fine sir. Thanks for meeting with me.

BROOKS: It's okay. This is a new laptop that my daughters gave me and its very touchy and if you sneeze

MILLER: Yeah...

BROOKS: And if you sneeze, it will do some things that it has never done before. So, I am going to keep my hands off it and not try to widen the screen or nothing.

BROOKS: So... welcome and good to meet you. And tell me again what your writing on?

MILLER: Well, I have done a little bit of research just on you sir. And uh...um...My focus...

BROOKS: Well...am I still wanted somewhere, and they haven't found me yet?

MILLER: Well...it took a long time because...you...you have a lot of research on you sir. You have been around awhile.

BROOKS: Yeah...Eighty-eight years.

MILLER: And so... you're a man that Dr. Davis said that I might speak to be able to speak to because of your knowledge of the city. My overall thesis is about redlining and discrimination within the city. My focus is becoming a local historian within the city. I am in the Public History program at UMKC and I am going to graduate in December.

BROOKS: Oh good...Congratulations.

MILLER: Thank you. And I am trying to finish with a strong thesis on redlining in Kansas City. This is what I have a passion about—telling the stories about local people their stories fighting discrimination or their family's past being redlined. Or any redlined discriminations. I just love writing about that stuff. Just being able to get that out there written and for people to read. I love anything about the law on housing discrimination.

BROOKS: Sounds like the young lawyer that I have dealt with in the past. She will blow your mind. We've been on a panel three times, I think. It amazes me how much work she has done, and she goes back awhile. I will try to help you as much as I can, but she has done the research. Mine—mine is living.

MILLER: Yeah...

BROOKS: Is participating in the marches. Helping to get two city ordinances passed. One part of accommodation and the other housing. After the housing ordinance was passed—

there were referendum put in place. But you go ahead and ask what you and I can integrate some of this if you don't ask a particular question.

MILLER: Uh yeah that is what I am trying to get is people's ordinary stories, their background, and you have an extraordinary story. So, I really am glad we got to meet up. So, I will start firing and you just tell me what you know and don't know. I have ten questions that are kind of concise. Just tell me what you know.

BROOKS: Okay.

MILLER: The first one. I kind of went through your background and I um...there was some stuff I could not find. Your childhood background and I get in-depth on that because I think that tells a lot um...about redlining-where it stems from. And um...my first question is--can you tell me, what it was like growing up on the east side of town— during the 1940s-50s. On Linwood & Brighton areas?

BROOKS: Um...I am just completing my memoir....so I talk about some things in there. But uh, as a kid, a black kid growing up in the area called Lees Dunbar. The school was named after Paul Laurence Dunbar, an African American writer. Lees was kind of the addition and was divided by the Little Blue River. West was black and East was white and working-class and poor black. I went to segregated Dunbar elementary school. Then went to um...1946-47 ...graduated from seventh grade and went to RT Coles Junior and Senior High. There were two black schools at that time and ten white. In 1954, not long after I graduated...I went to both RT Coles and Lincoln. Lincoln is still at the castle on the hill, as we called it. There were about seventeen black schools in the nation. But, so...because of segregation, racism, we could not nothing with the white schools. Everything that we did...in terms with sports or debate, whatever the case it may be. We had to deal with only the two black schools in Kansas—Northeast and Sumner. We go to Northeast and Sumner. We'd go Sumner, St. Louis, and Oklahoma to do sports anything else we did like that. But what was interesting of the two black high schools-we had more Ph.D.'s and master's degrees than the white schools I have been told. Then, the junior college-when I graduated from high school, I went to junior college, which was on the third floor of Lincoln High School. Because you couldn't go to the white junior college that was located at 39th and McGee in Kansas City. So, when I graduated that June, in September when school started...If you wanted to go to junior college, just went up to the third floor. And you already knew the teachers because some of them taught in both schools. And um...all of the teachers...great teachers, all administrators were black. So, when people start talking about Black history, we had it every day we went to school. Um...there were boundaries...the majority of the black population was between Independence Avenue on the North, 27th Street on the South, Troost on the, not really Troost, about Tracey on the West, and um...Indiana Avenue on the East. That was the cultural mecca of the African American community. That is where the churches were, that's where the two high schools were, that's where several of the elementary schools were. Now several of the elementary schools were around. There was one school near the Saint Luke's Hospital if you are familiar with Kansas City. Called Penn School. There was mine that way out of those boundaries and several others. But they were all black. Uh...we could not buy homes outside that area. Let me mention a couple little pockets, I mentioned around Saint

Luke's Hospital, there was pocket of black families that lived around in there. And around 51st and Belafonte. And then was area where we lived at around Lees Dunbar area. And then there was an area around Bruce School. It was over-it sat at Jackson and about 14th Street. Uh, and there was another group called Round Top—it was between like 27th Street to 29th Norton I think to about Cleveland. So, all those are examples of pockets. But the largest segment of the black and brown community is the area I just described to you earlier. And it's interesting—when I joined the police department in June 1954, the black officers were relegated to ride just two districts. The patrol districts were—one was Troost to Paseo—12th to 23rd. And other was Paseo to Brooklyn- 12th to 23rd. And the other was Paseo to Brooklyn- 12th to 23rd. See you could make calls out of that area but yeah couldn't ride in that area. You didn't ride one of those cars outside in that area. White officers, if the black officers were off, the white officers would ride that area. And a white officer could ride with you in that area if it were a two-man car, but you couldn't in the other area. Just prior to that, a few years priors to that, black officers could not arrest a white person in the 1940s. One of my mentors, who has since passed away—looked after me. At that time when you joined, you went in front of the police board to be interviewed. And so, Lloyd went there, Lloyd who is who was educated, went to North Carolina, I think State, and taught, been a principal, and a football coach. Um...after he had been interviewed by the police commissioner-someone else asked him, Lloyd, 'is there anything else you would like to ask us?' So, Lloyd said yeah, 'can I arrest anyone?' Lloyd said that they looked at each other kind of strangely, and they said why don't you excuse us for a moment. So, he left, he left the room, when he came back, they said 'yes Lloyd you can arrest anyone'. So that broke, in my book, I give him credit for breaking that color line. So, um...and now in 1954, Brown vs. the Board of Education, I was a sophomore in the junior college in Lincoln Junior College, at Lincoln High School. I was a sophomore; it was my last year at Lincoln Junior College. May 17th, 1954, the warden on the court- handed down a nine to zero decision on Brown vs. the Board of Education. Saying that shall be desegregation within schools at deliberate speed, well that has really never happened. Well, what really happened there was—that's when the white flight began in many of those schools or districts. So, in 1955 there was no longer a Lincoln Junior College, so we could go to the white college. If we lived close to one of the white schools, it was hell, but we could go in terms of how we were treated. Now, I was lucky because I lived at 2623 Park, which was located right there on the Eastside, just a half a mile or so from Lincoln and RT Coles. And uh...I went to the police department after June after finishing my probation, I went to Kansas City University, it wasn't the University of Kansas City like today, it was private, and I went there. But the time I graduated; they had gone into the Missouri system as the University of Missouri at Kansas City. But the housing was discriminatory. So, what happened is that white flight created a vacuum. Let me put it this way, we had white flight...white people had to have somewhere to run to. And so, this is where these little suburban areas began to pop up for the white population. And then you have...in 1963-1964, there was a public accommodation ordinance. The city of the Kansas City of Missouri passed an accommodation ordinance, it shows and ties in and the council passed an ordinance when tavern owners got together and got enough signatures to put that initiative on the ballet and it was called a referendum. Which meant, if you got ten percent of the signatures of the last mayoral election, it becomes an um...becomes public booked. An organization founded called Freedman in 1963, mobilized the black community, the Jewish community, in particular, but whites, in general, did not support it. It nearly passed. Keep that in mind.

(Brooks had to step away from the interview momentarily). So, this barely passed. So, let's fast forward to now 1968. In 1968, the federal government passed the Fair Housing Law and the states, many of them went along with it. The cities, the cities did the same thing. Well, Kansas City passed, I think it was January 1968 the Fair Housing ordinance went into place. The same group of tavern owners got together and gathered enough signatures to where, uh.... there was another referendum. The election was supposed to take place, in April of 1968. So, you know if the white community opposed public accommodations.... where it's not as personal-its far as personal. If you don't want to eat with me at restaurant A, you can go to restaurant B, C, D, E, F. If you don't want to go, my barber, or my beautician, or whatever is public like amusement parks, you go elsewhere. But housing was a little different. And so, boy it created a lot of problems. And I am convinced Kathrine, I am convinced, that if it had not been for the riot that started on the 9th of April 1968, that ordinance that went to the public, that ordinance would have failed. Because keep in mind, if it nearly passed, if the public accommodation ordinance nearly passed, which is very personal....and the housing is personal... I am running on this block and races are coming and knocking on your door and saying you better get out—you see who is moving in. Those people are going to cause your property values to go down. And so, what do you and your husband and whatever—you better sell while you can before the market goes. You would be scared, move out and the white flight took its wings and went. And so...what happened to the schools, they became blacker, blacker, and blacker. So...the institutions had to have somewhere to run to. So, what they did...the infrastructure, they annexed areas and built homes by developers. They ended up selling. You're the only white person living in the block that I would move into...so you would put your house up for sale. And then you would look up and the whole—everybody's house on that block is for sale. And then, what happens to the market? I'll never forget, a little antidote, um...we moved into 3336 Agnus the 13th of October 1960, my wife was pregnant with our fourth child, and uh...we were the fifth black family to move in. At thirty-one homes on that block and um that was 1960. By 1964, all the white families had moved out. Our house still stands, and a third generation lives there and caught fire back this past Winter. My grandson is restoring it and living there. It was the most beautiful house. But what happened, that they would go to you, a white homeowner and say that. And then market...Oh...I was talking about this meeting. There was a meeting conducted on Saturday, at one of these white churches, at 28th and Prospect. To remind you, at this time, it was predominately a white area. And oh...around one-hundred and fifty families or white persons there and about twenty-five black persons. And, I guess if we weren't present, the n-word would have been thrown around pretty good. I was a detective in the police department, and they kept saying of those people didn't move in our houses—the value of our houses wouldn't have gone down, so we're going to move. So, I kind of got tired of that. So, they had a microphone there on the floor for people to make comments and ask questions. So, I decided to go up to the microphone. You'll have to excuse this—but my wife said, "Oh Shit!". So, I get up to the microphone and say my name is Alvin Brooks and I am a detective in the police department, the Kansas City police department, and I live at 3336 Agnus. I still had a few white neighbors left but I don't know why they moved. Because, Carol, my wife, sitting back there is as good as you as neighbors. I said, may I see the hands who have had Econ 101, and I think three or four hands raised their hands. And the rest hadn't, so let's play this game, those you had Econ and not, what happens if there is a scarcity of an item that you're trying to buy? What happens to the price? Well, folks said the price goes up and I

said oh... that's interesting. I said, what if there's a lot of it? It goes down. I said, may I see the hands of those who had a white realtor. And these real estate folks convened with me on the neighborhood association; they were on the panel with me. I said, how many have had white realtor knock on your door and ask you about selling your home, or do you see who is moving in? Almost everybody raised their hands. I said okay, you fell into my trap, number one-I asked this question, how many have had a black person come up and knock on your door and say they want to buy your house, no one raised their hand. I said, has anyone come up to you with a gun and say you're going to sell me your house, no one raised their hand again. So, all those things fall upon on you white folks. We didn't create the problem. So, if you would have stayed there, you wouldn't have lost money on your house. So, don't be fed this that we created this situation, you created it yourselves. These folks sitting at this table our part of that creation. I said, there are cases where some relatives have bought a house on your block and moved a black family in and then caused the price to go down. Then the losers are you and the black family. Because your family, let's say...we paid \$15,900 for our house, your house is appraised at \$15,000 and yet you have to sell it for \$11,500 or \$10,000. I said the black family moves in under a different loan um... a different percent than a white family, then it balloons. This means after five years; it starts out at five percent and then after five years—it has to be refinanced and now it goes up to fifteen percent. And if you can't make that, you get evicted. So, I said...the losers not...so it's two people lose—the seller loses, and the buyer loses. So, I hope I've taken you to school enough, so all got up and left. That still didn't stop white flight. Um...so, the first black families that moved to 2700 block of Paseo, which is South at 2704 and 2730 Paseo I think, were dynamited. But the person who did it did not know what they were doing, it just shook the foundations on them...no one was at home. All these areas that sprung up around...annexation took in. The city had to do that because white people had to someplace to go. So now Kathrine, you have this suburban, suburban area that we used call suburbia is are now urban. It's just sprawled and expanded. Center School District, uh...which we used to call an urban school district is now a suburban district. It now has six percent black, it just hired its first black superintendent, Dr. Yolanda Cargile, who was with Hickman Mills. Grandview was the same way, Hickman Mills, the same way, and Raytown, the same way. Many middle-class blacks and some non-middle class are moving into Lees Summit. And then, what happened in Independence, uh...they had schools in their area, but they were part of Kansas City School District. They were de-annexed if you will. At least succeeded from the Kansas City School District and now attend Independence School District, which means, the number of blacks that were in Independence and counted within schools; are now mostly all white because blacks that went there are no longer. So, I have given you, just off the top of my head, a monologue of um, oh...HUD played a role in that. Um...the area in which we lived at 3336 Agnus, they talked about HUD coming in with loans and they had a meeting, apparently, that had only whites there. That this HUD representative stated that, as long as he was there at HUD, that he would never put money into those districts, the Westside, which was Hispanic, and East of Troost. He said that. HUD was one of the greatest contributors to segregation and discrimination. And uh... you know that's kind of, all those institutions played into that. The school district, when the first black superintendent came in, right after Robert R. Wheeler, I worked for him. Then I left the police department...that's who I worked for when the riot was. The city of Chamber and um...city council pulled away, did not give the same kind of support during the white superintendent. So, when you have had the white flight...you had all these districts

behind. All black and you pretty much got that right now. Schools I just mentioned—Center, Grandview, and Hickman Mills. I am on the Hickman Mills School Board. You got ninety percent black and one-hundred percent free lunch. What does that say, we've got a sixty percent mobility rate, which means...people are renting, moving and eviction. There was a study done about two years ago on eviction and where does it occur in Kansas City school districts—Hickman Mills. So, all of these things contribute to housing, education, and employment.

MILLER: Wow...

BROOKS: Now, that's your first question. Now...I will not be that long on your other nine questions, I can assure you. I wanted to give you some background.

MILLER: mmm.... huh...

BROOKS: I want to mention one other thing, I think I mentioned this. But if it weren't for those kids marching on April 9th, 1968. And... I ordered the first bus...I'll go a little further—there was bait for bussing of kids in the Kansas City School District. The gentleman, who was like my mentor, Mr. JD Williams, owned a cab company, a consolidated cab company. Well, he won the bid to transport the kids and bus the kids in the Kansas City School District. Well, he goes out to buy buses. They would not sell him a bus in the Kansas City metropolitan area. So, he had to go right outside of Chicago to buy buses. Had his cab drivers drive the buses back to Kansas City.

MILLER: Wow.

BROOKS: Then he found out, none of the dealers would work on the buses or mechanics. So, he had to send his folks up to this place in Chicago to learn how to work on these buses and they weren't certified, mechanics. But they did the best they could. So, on the 9th of April, well on the 8th of April...that evening...I just took my son to Memphis. We heard and participated in a symbolic march, heard, and met Mrs. Coretta Scott King speak. So, we came home that evening and my wife said that Bob Wheeler called because I worked for him and under him. he wasn't the superintendent then—he was the Assistant Superintendent of the Urban Education and all those schools. He said there was a meeting and wanted you there, I said fine and went to the meeting. And Dr. Edie Cameron; a brilliant man, Wheeler, and I, the only three blacks, with seven or eight or older white men, and the superintendent had us on the phone, we didn't have a speakerphone. He was in Washington, saying 'should we open school tomorrow and the three of us said don't open schools. Kansas City, Kansas already said it's not going to open tomorrow and paying tribute Dr. King. We shouldn't open either. Well, the superintendent said, we're going to open. "here is what we're going to do—we just built a new school at 42nd and Indiana and we will name it Martin Luther King Jr. and we will fly all the flags at half-staff". We said that will not work. They did it and all these kids will come from Kansas and plus—they will end up having um...filling like they were left out. So, that is what happened. They had the march—about a thousand kids or so and I was the last speaker. There was a young man, who was aired on the black radio station, got the microphone, and said he was contacted by Father Givens over at Holy Name Catholic

Church, and every Friday Saturday night, they had teen nights down there. They had a bowling alley, a jukebox, snack bar, and things like that. He said he talked to Father Givens and the kids could come there. It was very tense.... all the state troopers were coming in and the local police had the place cornered off. And um...I had called Mr. Williams, I said, Mr. Williams-something is about to pop off. Can you send about half a dozen buses here? Because I am afraid something is going to happen. He said, "Brooks...I am going to have to call in my cab drivers". I said okay. As soon as the first bus arrives, we begin to load up the kids and turn East on 12th Street, southside of the police station I believe...a police officer threw a tear gas canister in the bus.

MILLER: Oh my gosh...

BROOKS: The kids and the driver abandoned the bus. The tear gas started because someone threw a Coke bottle at the foot of an officer that was directing traffic at 12th and Oak. And then all hell broke loose. A white priest and a black priest were gassed and beaten by police because they tried to get to some of the kids who were gassed. And the following morning, (inaudible) both were taken to the hospital. Well, then we heard these sirens and everything. Bruce Watkins was on the city council, we decided to go to Holy Name, we got over there and the police had thrown tear gas in the basement of the church. And the kids were all out couching and everything. We went inside and there were at least five canisters of gasses I recall inside the church. So, that evening, all hell broke loose. The fire started and everything. That day, one black man was killed on 19th and Vine for stealing liquor. On the 10th, there were five black men killed. Four at 30th and Prospect. One, a fifteen son of Mr. McKinney. One was killed for driving with his lights out through a barricade, trying to get out of all this, he was shot and killed. Nothing was ever done. This report on the civil disorder, can you see it...that report was written, August 15th, 1968, the only black member was Charles Wilkins, a brilliant psychiatrist. This report...grr...this report, it laid out, talked about the areas we often dealt with. But one thing you forget about, it did not call, it did not criticize the police. And they are the ones who killed six people and none of those six folks had guns. None of them. And it said in this report, it was unknown whether they were shot by the National Guard or by the police. Now, that wouldn't be hard to find out. They made an excuse for everybody. My good friend, Dr. Wilkins, I said...I testified...and none of that testimony was in this report. So, um...I am convinced that if it weren't for the riots. That ordinance, that vote that was supposed to take place in 1968, it passed as a referendum vote. The city then passed under the leadership of Ike Davis, the mayor—an emergency meeting for the health, welfare, and safety of the city. So, it nullified the referendum. Okay. Now, I'll shut up and go through the rest of the questions.

MILLER: Well, now that you're talking about the 1968 riots sir. Can you tell me, in what ways that these riots today that you see similarities and differences?

BROOKS: Police. Uh...there was a forum held at the Jewish Community Center at 82nd and Holmes, two weeks before the riots. I was the chair of the CORE of equality, my counterpart on the other side had the mayor, NAACP, and representing on Kansas side as well. We had this forum at the Jewish Community Center...I was the last speaker and they questioned me if they thought there would be a riot in Kansas City or not. Everybody and the other black

people had said the exact same thing. They tip-toed around the tulips. I said, listen...let's be honest, the same thing that occurred in these other cities in New York, Chicago, and St. Louis—can happen in Kansas City. We got the same ingredients on both sides of the Kansas side and Kansas City, Kansas. They're smaller populations but in Kansas City Missouri. But I got booed. Two weeks later, we had a riot. So, um... I am going to say it...if we had not that riot...I am sorry swayed away from your question...um....the similarity...the same thing...if the police officer had not had his knee on the of neck Floyd, we wouldn't be having all this happening. But the good thing happening about this, I guess—some good comes from a bad situation. You've got white, that millennial white involved in this, and I made this statement the other day. Salt Lake City has all three black persons and they all come from the same family. And in the UK the young people took that statue of uh...the slave trader and dumped it in the river. So, so...the cause is still there, and you have a man in the White House, whew!

MILLER: That's another whole other story.

BROOKS: But contributes to everything that is happening. With his rhetoric and tweeting and comments. So, so...everything is the same. When Lyndon Johnson appointed that (inaudible) Kerner committee, if, this man will never do it in the White House, he'll never appoint anyone to look into this. But if states do it, you'll find out the same issues that came out of the Kerner Report, the same issues that came out of the city report, as ineffective as it was and are the same things that are happening now. The only difference is that you didn't have white young people that you call millennials which are in their 20's and 30's; white, black, and all involved, maybe something would have happened. Now, how much I don't know.

MILLER: Right.

MILLER: Yes... It's going to take everything we have to change, and I don't know—it's a long process. It's taken a long time and it's a big question I know. So...

MILLER: I think my next question would be to move back towards your early career um...More like a police officer. Living in this kind of town that is segregated I guess, um...I guess I was a little perplexed about how you made the decision to catapult your career into the police force. That was really brave what you did back then.

BROOKS: Well...that's people say. My dad had asked me....in the fall of 1953...I was a sophomore at Lincoln Junior College. My wife and I had talked about me going onto the police department. We had three kids and she said," that's what you really want to do but I really don't know why but I'll support you. But you better go out and talk to your dad." So, I go out and talk to him. I said, dad, you know I am thinking about going onto the police department and uh...he said boy.... why would you want to join that mess? You know how they treat us. I said, you know, I don't have to be in there and really have to be in there. But he made an example. You'll have excuse what he said. He said boy if you're fooling with folks that are wallowing in shit, some of it is going to get on you. I said, dad...not necessarily I think I can wash myself off every night and go back with a clean slate the next day. I didn't tell him I had already signed up and was supposed to take the test. I kept putting

it off until June because I wanted to finish my sophomore year. I didn't tell him that. Later on, I finally told him in '54 that dad, listen...I took the test and passed. I am supposed to start at the academy first thing, and he gave me his best advice. Um...after I had got there. I saw how bad things were-internally. How black officers were treated by their peers as well as externally how white officers treated black folks. Um...arresting black men. On three cases-three charges that did not exist; they were called. One was called for an investigation to check on recent activity, the other was vagrancy and the other was uh.... loitering. Vagrancy and loitering were both of those that were called unconstitutional. Uh....so black men suffered. So, it does not surprise me that Floyd had all these charges, like black men in America. Uh...so, the things I... Kathrine, I got...a fella out of prison who had been convicted of murder, he was innocent. I went all through my chain of command to try to get him out and everybody said the SOB needs to be there as a dying declaration. They asked do you know what a dying declaration was, I said yes. So, I eventually went around them to where I got into this mess. I got a letter from the police commissioner, but my superiors never wrote a letter. Nobody ever came and said, hey Brooks, this is a good thing. It was like I had got a cop killer out who was guilty, and I had gotten him out. And I would make calls at times with my white officers but keep in mind, I could not ride in white districts but would ride with white officers. The n-word was used with me present and I have to check somebody, which means that I became more militant and known to have a chip on the shoulder. Uh...when I left the police department, the 31st of October, I chaired a group called Conservation Equality, that's how I became part of the panel I was telling you about two weeks before the riots. My wife had been arrested a couple of times while I was with the police department, protesting the public accommodation, never booked but arrested and then let go. But when I was organizing, they called me everything when I left the department because I stood up against police brutality. Oh, the things they used to call me, but I made it and never looked back.

MILLER: Has the police department, I don't know...tried to...reconcile and make ties with you over the years?

BROOKS: Well, I came full circle...you know. I was a cop for ten years. And then in 2010, Jay Nixon appointed me to the board the Police Commissioner. So, I did come full circle. I came full circle by choice. None of them were around during the period I am talking about.

MILLER: Yeah.

BROOKS: So, when I talked about segregation and all that—they could separate themselves. But the same things exist in the police department, not as...we can ride anywhere, we work throughout the department but recruiting black officers is difficult and every time there is an instance like this (Floyd) the chance is less and less. Because they don't want to be part of that, they don't want to be part of the action to stand there and follow orders to this and that. They say, sometimes the more things change—the stay the same.

MILLER: Right.

MILLER: I just found it really interesting how you began your career like that, and it took a lot of bravery and just mention that.

BROOKS: There was an incident, I was sixteen years old. My cousins, four of my cousins moved to Kansas City and my dad owned a little house on this adjacent lot between ours. And so, my mother's nephew had uh...just uh, had a divorce, so his new wife and his four kids moved to Kansas City and lived in that house. Um...we always had horses and cows out there in Leeds, in that farm area...back when you had outhouses if you know what outhouses are.

MILLER: Yeah!

BROOKS: Okay.... that's the house when the main house burns down, you still have a place to stay. But um...where the Veterans Hospital is now...there was nothing but pasture. My dad used to farm part of that. Anyways, we had three horses and we let them graze over there. I think there were five or six of us. Raymond was the oldest of us, he was two years older than me, we there just leaning on our horses and I was sitting on my horse leaning back—here comes this police car, it pulled up into the weeded area. One officer gets out, his head to cocked to the side, and a glove on his left hand. The other officer just got out, looked like he was about fourteen months pregnant, he got out and stood by the door. The officer said, “where did you niggers get these horses?” So, I raised up off my horse and said this my horse and that is my horse also. Richard Smith, who died in Korea, said this is my horse. They said, “let me see some identification”. At that time, your social security card was your identification. But I was driving at that time, so I had a driver's license. Richard had a driver's license. My brother-in-law, Raymond, didn't have a driver's license. So, the officer asked him “where was his selective service card was?” At that time, when you turned eighteen, you had to sign up for the draft. Raymond said, I just moved to Kansas City, I just turned eighteen and I am going down to get. He grabbed Raymond threw him across the car, twisted him that made his eyes bulge, and he started crying. Raymond was a stocky guy and strong as an ox. And I was saying, Raymond, please don't, don't push him off, he'll shoot you. So finally, he had this stick in his left hand and his right hand—he was twisting Raymond's collar; saying- “you see this stick.....next time, you know what I will do with it”. Raymond could barely say yes. So, they left. Six years later, I was in the police department. Lord behold, guess who came on my shift? That same police officer. I said mmm. So, after a while, I caught him by himself and said officer such and such...You remember me? He answered, “why should I remember you?” I said, did you ride around 35th and Elmwood with another fellow that was heavy set. A potbelly fellow. He said, “yeah...that was such and such, he retired a while ago”. Do you remember stopping five or six black kids with three horses? I repeated what he said at that time. He said it wasn't him. I said, oh yes it was, in fact, you're still wearing your glove on your left hand, you still wear your hat cocked. I said I remember your name and nametag is the same as it was then. The officer said....”no, no, it wasn't me”. I said, don't worry about it, I gotcha back. So, we had to make calls together. The next night...I learned he was not his back up and he was not my backup.

MILLER: Oh, mmm. WOW! wow...

MILLER: Well there was another part of Kansas City I was interested in--research said that you lived on Denver Street? And there was a barn that you lived in as children, is that right?

BROOKS: When my parents first brought me to Kansas City, I was adopted by the Brooks' in late 1932 or Spring 1933. We lived with my aunt Mittie, my adopted father's sister. At 3405 Denver and then my daddy built a house 3421 Quincy and it burnt down. We did live in a barn for a while and then he rented a house for a while on Colorado the next street over. Then eventually bought a house on Quincy, which was a poor white area.

MILLER: It talked about you lived in a poor white neighborhood and I don't know if you want to talk a little about that. How...did that influence you at all living in a poor white neighborhood?

BROOKS: Living in a poor white neighborhood, after we called each other names and fought. Um...we made friends and then, of course, they were made fun of. So, I had to fight other whites because of what they were being called. Um...we got harassed by the police. On one occasion, they, uh.... the police picked us up because one of our white neighbors called about some boys throwing rocks at a dog in a backyard on Brighton. We all lived on Quincy and Brighton is one block west from us. So, they were all white boys and the lady came out and said to them, "would you please stop throwing rocks...my baby is in the playpen, stop throwing rocks". They cursed at her and ran off. She called the police and they picked us up. But it wasn't us, so the police brought us back and um...she said, "oh, no I know all those boys". "Alvin, his mother, and father, live right over there on the next block. He goes to the store for me, my mom, because I have a paraplegic brother to get prescriptions down at the drugstore for me". So, she told them it was them and we started to walk off. They said don't walk off, get back in the police car. So, it was four or five us and we got back in the police car. He drove us around and one of the officers who was not driving, had been drinking, we could smell that. He brought us back to the foot of Brighton Hill. While he was driving, he was saying-he uh...calling us "little peckerwoods, little trashy peckerwoods. All though your white trash-you're still going to associate with niggers...we don't want to catch you with this nigger or if we do, we will kick your little ass". They just kept saying, Alvin is our friend...Alvin is our friend. He can't be your friend! Cause' your white and he is a nigger". So, all this occurred while they were driving us around in the area, and then they came to the bottom of Brighton Hill and yelled—"everybody, out of the car"! This one officer got out and the driver stayed behind the wheel. And he pulled out his gun and cocked his gun. He said, "okay nigger--you see that hill...if you can make it over that hill if I shoot your black ass, you're a free nigger". "Get to running". So, I am just backing up and screaming and hollering... "please don't shoot me...please don't shoot me". Billy the youngest, he was six or seven, jumped up onto the officer's arm and the gun went off and we just ran, ran, and ran. We got up the hill and just laughed and everything. We had this thing anytime something would happen to us, we get a piece of glass and cut our finger, and bleed meant we were blood brothers, you know. I guess they never thought they get contaminated with my blood, but we did anyways. But Billy....was a kid, couldn't keep anything. Somehow...he slipped from us and went and told my mother that these white officers shot at me. So, my mother called us over and we said nothing happened. Billy told her everything already and we finally broke down. She called the police station and about a half-hour to an hour later, they sent a

sergeant to come out. He interviewed both of us independently; no pencil or paper, he didn't ask our name, I told him the same thing that happened. He said, "I'll get back with you". Never did.

MILLER: mmm.... wow.... did you guys remain friends?? Like your parents didn't try to separate you or anything like that?

BROOKS: Oh no...no...not at all. That is the life that you're living in. It's interesting Kathrine, about two weeks ago...it was before my birthday, I turned eighty-eight. I was eighty-seven then. I was going in this store and I had my mask on and gloves and I looked and saw this security guard--you know what I did...I put my hands up to my face like that, subconsciously...so he could see my face, and then I was thinking what the hell am I doing. I was eighty-seven years old thinking that. Know what I am saying?

MILLER: yeah...just your subconscious.

BROOKS: Yeah. yeah...And I was telling some of my black friends and they started laughing. You know...subconscious. (inaudible).

MILLER: It's in your head.

BROOKS: Yeah.

MILLER: Gosh.

MILLER: Gosh, I feel terrible. that's terrible. Well....um...I have a few more questions if you have a few more minutes sir?

BROOKS: Go...Go Ahead...

MILLER: Well...this concerns your foundation. Um...ADHOC. If you could talk a little bit about your organization's role in neighborhoods in supporting redlined areas-with home repairs and assistance and canvassing. And making sure that they get the support that they need for the areas that are really redlined right now in Kansas City.

BROOKS: Well, Kathrine...I am not involved. I have been gone for six years. And so, all that is new initiatives with canvassing for information on homicides. I started it in 1977 after the death of Tim Winters and area prostitutes. And volunteered up till 1988 with a federal grant and we had staff. I left and went to the city and became an executive director. Then merged with another group and then I left in 2000 and that group folded, that new group folded in 2007. I ran for mayor in 2007, when I lost to Funkhouser. I restarted ADHOC with prosecutors, police, judges, community groups. Then in 2011, I said it's time for me to go, so we began to look for my replacement but did not find one until 2014-2015 and that's Damon Daniels. So, all the initiatives now are his.

MILLER: Okay...it's no big deal. I did not know how much you were involved. There was not that much out there.

BROOKS: Just a consultant sometimes...but other than that, no.

MILLER: Okay. Um...um... I just wanted to say...um...

MILLER: Going back to living in Kansas City nearly your entire life, you have this broad perspective. Can you tell me how much the city has evolved, or has it really shifted demographically in any way? Or has it remained the same when you came to Kansas City as a child?

BROOKS: Well...Kansas City is a segregated city. Kansas City has three hundred and eighteen square miles. And I suspect that seventy-five to eighty percent black people live between the river and 95th Street, Troost, and 435 (Interstate). That's about fifty square miles, that's about two hundred and sixty-eight miles right now. What does that say--it does not cause' we love each other so, it's because of how institutional it is. Kansas City actually is in three counties and we're part of the fourth North of the river is in Platte and Clay, and south of there- which is the majority of the population is in Jackson and little space at the air force base and Cass County. The mass majority is south of the river. The majority of the land is north of the river but it's growing rapidly. Matter of fact, when I ran for mayor, I beat Funkhouser by 10,000 votes this side of the river but he picked votes and beat me altogether by nine hundred and fifty votes because north of the river voted for him and not for me. So, really...there has been some change, some breakthroughs but as a whole—there are issues that still exist since I was a kid.

MILLER: What do you think about um...the Troost corridor, it has changed or is changing. Is evolving...I think and where you see you see the Wonder Bread Factory changing into apartments—right across the street from the daycare and the Ruby Jean's Juicery that are the apartments that the everyday African Americans cannot afford?

BROOKS: It's all good...all good. The only thing about it is... happening is, it has caused the taxes of the homes in that area to go up. Mrs. Robinson, one of my proteges on the city council, she lives on Tracey and Melissa isn't only thirty-five or thirty-six, she is having to think about moving. And you think about those people who have lived there who in their sixties or older and can't almost afford to live there because of those couple of \$500,000 or million-dollar homes. And so, you don't want that to happen and calling it regentrification. Its whites moving in because blacks are moving out. Even in rental properties, you go down streets, you see three or four houses...all painted the same color –renting but the option to buy. The majority of those who are moving in are white and not middle-class whites in most cases. (inaudible) Not downtown but the area where had a lot of kids from I'd say about 19th Street on the north to 43rd on the south, and maybe to Paseo, over about to Hardesty. That's changing.

MILLER: Especially like...I did a huge project on the gentrification on the Westside. Where the gentrification is astronomical and people who have lived there fifty years plus are being pushed out. What do you think about the Jackson County Assessment Office and their role in making sure these people can stay in their homes?

BROOKS: Well...all sorts of lawsuits have been filed and I hope they win. A lot of people don't know about making an appeal. I had a Hispanic lady call me when this first happened, and I worked with her son back some years ago. Matter of fact, they were homicide victims. And they asked what they should do, I said to appeal it. They were living in a house that was worth about \$40,000 dollars and had a \$2,100 property tax. I appealed a tax on a lot on which I owned. I have been paying sixty-one dollars on the lot and it went to over four hundred dollars. So. institutions tend to attack who are in need awful a lot.

MILLER: Well, um... I really appreciate your time. Taking the time out. You're probably extremely busy during this time...

BROOKS: Trying to complete my book...

MILLER: The only else I need to make sure that um.... the legal standpoint for UMKC is to make sure, I am recording this for the LaBudde Library, is to make sure that um...I have you're okay. If you could tell me okay?

BROOKS: Yes.

MILLER: Okay... you know the standard, you 've been interviewed a million times. And it's okay to archive this at the LaBudde Special Collections Library.

BROOKS: Kathrine, let me just say this. Um...You're going to hear this a lot from me, and I am going to offend a lot of people, especially in the white community. The Kerner Report said...that white society.... OH...that's a beautiful deer back there in my backyard. Beautiful doe deer.

MILLER: Oh man...

BROOKS: Um...she's beautiful and there's a herd of them around here. The Kerner Report said that the white society created the ghetto. Everything we do; I taught classes at UMKC and Penn Valley-seminars—I used a paradigm or graphic. At the top I put systems then in parentheses I put systemic, others called institutions called: education, economic and so forth. Now we can continue check police, offer job opportunities in education but that is not but is just dealing with the symptom not the cause. But America's got to admit that your ancestors of White Anglo-Saxon's created a system of racism and bigotry. Ran out Native Americans, brought in slaves and anyone who wasn't a white Protestant, and Jews came, they had their own issues. Catholic up until a while, then they were accepted. Jews...a degree but they were Caucasian but had issues because not of Christian faith. Until we that our white ancestors created this system...I am going to everything I can do in my power to dismantle it. Starting with the system itself. If you don't deal with the institutions, you'll never solve all the problems. We have been doing this as long as there have people. But there has to be an acknowledgement of what happened. In the whole bit of Columbus discovered America—he actually got lost and the Native Americans actually found him. He thought he was in the West Andes. And from that time on, the slave trade...it's a manifestation of what took place of what took place—over 400 plus years ago. Unless we deal with the systemic changes, institutions will be ping ponged back on forth. Changes, some will...let me use the

words...small systemic changes in police or courts or whatever. Sometimes I think its planned...a conspiracy because it's a known fact if you don't educate people, you'll not change poverty. And if you don't change people and poverty—you'll have violence. So, what happened...you don't educate people and there for you have poverty. There for you have crime and violence. In terms of physiology, except for color...we're the same. Color is the issue. Sometimes religion is the issue. Now there's Muslims...and I heard someone say this...excuse me for saying this...excuse the expression... 'those Muslims have become the new nigger.' To some degree that is true. I don't like the term nigger. I criticize my people for using it and they say they use for endearment. I don't see that way. But unless we deal with the systemic changes---at the top and the institutions change—I don't know if we will ever get out of this. Cause' at first...we got to admit it.... Yes.... Yes. Yes! And how do we deal with it. Because everything else is man-made cancer.

MILLER: Well said Mr. Brooks. ... I really appreciate your time.

BROOKS: Sure. Sure. Welcome. Take care...God Bless—have a good week.

MILLER: thank you. You too. Bye. Bye.

PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

The manuscript may be read, quoted from, and cited for purposes of research only by scholars approved by the University at such place as is made available for purposes of research by the University.

INTERVIEWER

Kathrine Miller

INTERVIEWEES

Warren and Carol Hodison

DATE

July 9, 2020

LOCATION

Phone Interview

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Warren Hodison was born in Topeka, Kansas of 1947 and his family moved to Kansas City when he was a youth. Carol Roberts was born in Cleveland, Ohio of 1949 and her family also moved to Kansas City when she was a small child. Warren and Carol met in 1970, got married and moved to the neighborhood of Blue Hills the following year. The Hodison's raised their four children in Blue Hills neighborhood and have maintain the same home for nearly fifty years. Their prospective of living on the eastside of the infamous line of Kansas City is vital to the overall collection. Their oral story adds direct links to blockbusting and white flight that occurred in Blue Hills.

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Childhoods and moving to Kansas City

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Neighborhood White Flight & Discrimination

31:25-34:06

Kansas City Evolving

MILLER: I'm here...

CAROL: Can you hear me?

MILLER: I'm here...

CAROL: I can't hear her now.

MILLER: You can't hear me now?

CAROL: Can you hear me Kat?

MILLER: Yep, I'm here.

CAROL: I couldn't hear you, so I was putting the speak on. Can you hear me?

MILLER: I'm still here.

CAROL: We're ready.

MILLER: Okay...I got all my questions for ya and it's for both ya'll and so I will be going back and forth. Before I get started um a little statement to give to guys because before I start—I am going to record this interview and I am going to submit to the Archive at the LaBudde Special Collections at UMKC.

CAROL: Do you want to do this on the Grandpad?

MILLER: Um...I can't do that because I don't have way to record it on my side.

CAROL: Okay.

MILLER: Um.... it's going to be archived at the Special Collections Library for future researchers and I just want to make sure I have your permission to add it to my collection. And if you both can tell me yes.

CAROL: Yes.

WARREN: Yes.

MILLER: I just need to note the date of July 9th 2020.

CAROL: Yes.

MILLER: Okay...so my first question is that I tried to get a little background on my own and I used a little help from your daughter.

CAROL: Okay.

MILLER: The first question is for Warren. Um, I just want to get a little background from your perspective.

MILLER: Warren, can you provide some background of how you ended up in Kansas City from Topeka and length you have lived in Kansas City?

WARREN: Okay...so. We came to Kansas City in the early 60's and uh...the early 60's—about 1962. And, uh, I was born in Topeka, Kansas, so have been here ever since then. And uh—went to, graduated high school from here. And after that I uh...moved into a working career and a family later years in the 60's-- 68' started a family.

MILLER: Are you meaning you started a family with Carol? You moved here with Carol?

WARREN: Uh...Huh...

MILLER: So, you jumped quite a bit on me there.

WARREN: Huh?

MILLER: You jumped quite a bit on me there.

WARREN: Laughs.

MILLER: Can you talk about your experience of living in Topeka during the time of Brown vs. Board of Education?

WARREN: Yes.... mmm...Yeah...In Topeka, the Brown vs. Board of Education, that was in the 50s' and I was born in 1947. So, we were living in Flint Michigan at the time (in 1947) when that decision came down. And then it came back, we moved back here (Topeka) kind of like the late 50's and I stayed with one my grandparents during the 50's. So, I grew up with the Brown vs. Board of Education outfit—he was the pastor of our church, so I grew with the—I knew all the family, the daughters, Linda Brown—her name is on the case. Oliver Brown—he was the pastor—so I grew up with all of them you know. So, uh...it was time where you knew how it was, in even in Topeka you knew certain things. You kind of lived accordingly. When I grew up, I had white friends and uh I played sports, so I remember things happening, they just happened. I had a classmate uh in junior high and I'd be the only black in the class, and he make a little joke. That's the way it was and he didn't necessarily mean any harm—that was the it was and the way people grew up then.

MILLER: Um—can you talk of knowing the Browns, can you talk about that further and Oliver Brown's (the pastor) role in Topeka during and after decision was handed down on the community

WARREN: I was probably too young, but I remember the case. Like I said, we lived in Michigan in 54' when it came over the news, but I remember that part. But when we moved back there (Topeka) uh...I went to junior high there, so that's kind of my younger years of thirteen or fourteen age so. I can't necessarily remember anything after that except for happening I went to a segregated school. This is before 1954 and I went to integrated school called Curtis Junior High. That's where I went to school. For elementary school I went to a school called Grant in Topeka. So, uh...I can remember my grandmother on my dad's side walking me to school to kindergarten. So, I remember I went to an all-black school. So, that would be before 54' so it had to be 1952. Yeah...I started kindergarten when I was five, so that would be 1952. I remember grandmother walking me to kindergarten class.

MILLER: mmm.... Wow.

WARREN: Yeah, it was uh, in those days it was, you just knew how it was and knew where your place was.

MILLER: And how did your family feel about this ruling? And did you attend segregated before & attend integrated schooling?

WARREN: I don't remember. I don't know if they shouted or got up and rejoiced or whatever. I am not sure that ever happened. I don't have the knowledge of that happening.

MILLER: Yeah. Probably still to young. I guess my next question is for Carol.

MILLER: Carol, earlier in schooling—did you attend segregated or integrated forums?

CAROL: (Warren and Carol spoke to one another) I guess it wasn't segregated...I didn't really think about it at the time. But no. In Cleveland I went to a mixed school...in Cleveland. What's the name of the school? Um.... can you hear me okay Kat?

MILLER: Yep, I can hear you just fine.

CAROL: School in Cleveland, Ohio—my memory isn't too good when it comes to those early days. Um, but I went to school with white and black kids in Cleveland. I went to school here called Norton Moore- that was mixed. I will never forget it because I had a crush on a white kid name Bobby, tall and skinny.

CAROL: Laughs. Yeah...And when I went to Central, it was mostly black at Central High School.

MILLER: Okay.

CAROL: Yeah.

MILLER: To go backwards can you provide some background of how you ended up in Kansas City from Cleveland and length you have lived in Kansas City?

CAROL: I was born in Kansas City, Kansas and when I turned three, my dad had a different job then moved to Cleveland. We moved back when I was about ten and my brother was born there in Cleveland in 1955. So, I...I am trying to remember. I did go to a mixed school in Cleveland and had a teacher named Ms. Clang and will never forget it because of her thick southern accent. So, um...I am trying to remember in Cleveland, what street. Everybody who could remember it is gone now and I don't remember. If I remember right, we lived in an apartment building where a medical student lived, I remember that. We would go to school and pass them. I lived in a fourplex and it carried a lot of interesting characters in that fourplex. Um...it was four families that lived there and um it's kind of vague for me because I don't remember you know—that was a long time ago. Um...I remember this one lady; she was from the South and she talked kind of funny and we had a friend named Delphine that lived next to us that made fun of her and we got in trouble for that. We got spanked and punished.

MILLER: Can you talk about some of the differences that you can remember between living in Cleveland and Kansas City? Can you remember any of those things?

CAROL: Well, um.... There were not a lot of differences besides race. Do mean as racial stuff?

MILLER: I mean...anything as demographic things or anything things like racial things, because Kansas City is still very segregated to this day.

CAROL: Yeah, it's hard to remember because as a child—you don't think about it. I was a kid in Cleveland and um...I didn't feel the difference until I was a teenager and came back here (Kansas City). Yeah, I didn't really notice as a child as much, some things but not a lot.

MILLER: Sure.

CAROL: But when we moved here...when we were looking for a place to live the areas were kind of urban ghettos weren't really nice and obviously not beautiful. It was the early 60's and I wanted to live over there because they were whites lived but this was the dividing line and I didn't know this was the dividing line. I noticed there were some areas we never went as a kid. I know my grandmother lived at 34th and Clark—in the 60's, it was really nice. It was beautiful and had nice grocery stores. You know it was like the suburbs but like in the inner-city. 31st and Troost had the Isis Theatre was there before the riots. In 68' yeah.

MILLER: Okay.

CAROL: In Cleveland, I used to be able to go to the store like as an eight-year-old—go to the store quite a bit. It was different then as far as crime. I remember that.

MILLER: mmm...

CAROL: So...I remember random things. It was such a long time ago. And we didn't have a lot of things happen. I wish my parents were around, they could tell you more.

MILLER: mmm...

CAROL: more than I can.

MILLER: I have the same question for Warren um...about his childhood about Topeka versus Kansas City?

WARREN: Uh... basically, it was kind of the same kind of like uh...in Topeka uh...when they started integrating. Certain, like swimming pools, I don't know when that changed but you couldn't go and swim in Topeka. When got to Kansas City, it was mainly it was Swope Park they used for black people and swim, you know. If you went other places, you'd be looked at kind of funny, you know. So, even after uh, integration, like the right to vote, that's been less than, since 64'. So, black people only had the right to vote legally just a few years in our lifetime. And we registered in 72' or 76'. So, the ability for black people to vote hadn't that long ago. Yep, just in the Johnson administration...yeah...signed that in effect.

MILLER: mmm...

WARREN: But yeah...I do remember being, I had an aunt on my dad's side and St. Joseph Hospital used to be on 31st and Troost; 31st and Prospect—and there was a Greek restaurant that used to be over there and we went in there to get water and he told my aunt: “we don't serve the n-word here.” And even in those days Kathrine, she came out all fired up, got all fired up. (inaudible) So, yeah...I can remember incidents of discriminations—it is outright discrimination, you know. And like we said, around town—the only certain places they served blacks and you couldn't sit at the counter. That was still going on till' the 60's, the late 60's, you know. Even after the Birmingham where they had the sit-ins and stuff, you know. Yeah...they were doing that in Kansas City. They were doing it downtown Kansas City. A place called Dixon's Chili; we still don't go there. They wouldn't serve black people.

MILLER: Oh yeah.

WARREN: Things, you know. Things have changed but they haven't changed that much except their more hidden—right now it's not even hidden its just what's new is old (laughs).

MILLER: mmm....

MILLER: I guess my next question would lead up to um...the two of you coming together and how you two met?

WARREN: Okay, how we met was...uh ...I had a friend. Well, how was it (Carol had to remind him). Okay...Can you hear her Kat? Okay.

MILLER: Not really.

CAROL: I was with a friend named Corrina, Corrina Devoid was her name and I was at her house. There was another guy I liked and then Warren walked in and I thought he was really

cute, and he didn't see me—he walked straight ahead. I asked my friend who he was, and she told me and everything. But he liked this other girl so, I am trying to remember. Another guy called me, what was his...another guy called me—named Damon and asked me for a date and I thought it would be Warren and it wasn't. He called me after this one guy, and he called me after and we started dating. It was like in 67'. I guess Warren had saw me on film before I had met him, and he wanted to date me but knew Damon went on a date with me. So, to settle it Warren flipped a coin with Damon and Warren won the coin toss and went on our first date in Spring of 67'.

MILLER: So, you won a date on a gambling? He wanted to flip a coin. He won the toss and as they say—the rest is history.

MILLER: Laughs. Wow.

CAROL: And um... So, before that my dad would interrogate the guys who would come to the house. Before I met Warren, one guy came to the house in shorts because he was on leave. One guy had on jeans and wanted me to date someone pristine, I don't know. But he (Carol's dad) didn't do anything with Warren, he was pretty nice. Guys would call my dad deacon because he would lecture them on how treat me and keep me pure. So, everyone called him deacon and he was a deacon in church actually and uh...not at that time but eventually. But when I met Warren, he was different, I knew that. Yep...it's lasted fifty-something years.

MILLER: Okay. My next question would be—did you guys immediately move into your home where you're at now (Blue Hills), where did you guys move into?

CAROL: You mean before we moved here?

MILLER: Yes.

CAROL: On Hardesty. 11th and Hardesty, an apartment 1123 Hardesty, apartment three. It was a mixture of people who lived there black and white. And um...it was an interesting place to live and um...the walls were very thin, you know. Angie, Angie was born when we lived there.

MILLER: About year was that?

CAROL: In 71'. New Year's Eve.

MILLER: About year I'm sorry?

CAROL: Back in 71'.

MILLER: 71'.

CAROL: In 71'. New Year's Eve. We moved when Angie was like two and David was newborn—an infant. So, we moved in 71' here on Wabash.

MILLER: Okay, so either one of you can talk about my next question. Can you talk about era of purchase of your home in Blue Hills now, your home now in Blue Hills? The drastic changes, and gentrification that your seeing around you?

CAROL: The changes since 71'?

MILLER: Yeah?

CAROL: Well, the house itself or the neighborhood? Yeah...the older neighbors we miss them and would come over. It was a lot nicer than now. We changed the house. It was a one-story bungalow when we moved in and we didn't know we would have two more kids and uh...we had to make it a little bigger. But yeah, the neighborhood has always been a pretty good neighborhood. We never had a lot of trouble over here. So, mean not a lot, not a lot. Um....so we always had decent neighbors here.

MILLER: When you moved in did you know if there were any white families left on your block or surrounding area upon moving in?

CAROL: Yeah. A few and a house down the street where a young minister moved in—he was white. (Carol, talking to Warren...asking if he remember that) There were a few whites when we first moved in.

MILLER: Yeah...because the late 70s' it was 95% African American, so I did not know if you had very many white families still left in your neighborhood or not. So that's why I asked.

CAROL: It thinned out pretty much.

MILLER: I guess my next question is for both of you in each of your opinion(s), how has Kansas City evolved or has it over time? Both respond to question.

WARREN: The violence has gotten worse and the places that black people had aren't like that now. There aren't enough black homeowners, so it's different now. It's more violent.

CAROL: The family is not like it was back in the 50's and 60's. In our family, all the older people are gone, and I only have one uncle who is left—he'll be ninety in October and that's my dad's younger brother. And that's it. On my mom's side, there's no one past eighty besides my cousin, Barbara Allen and she is eighty—that's my dad's niece. And so, family was a big deal in the 50's and 60's—your grandmother, aunts, uncles, and your cousins, things like that. And we used family gatherings for holidays and different occasions. My grandmother, granny, Eves was her name, but everyone called her granny on 34th and Park. Grandkids would gather at her house and uh...she would have us sit in a row and if anyone

of us would talk—she would spank us. Granny was a tough old woman and took care seven children all by herself in Oklahoma. And uh...yeah, my mother was the youngest daughter.

MILLER: Can you talk about living in a food desert on the east side? And when your daughter Taryn tried to setup Hy-Vee grocery delivery service on April 20th 2020—when COVID pandemic set in—entering your home address into the service portal-it denied it and how you felt?

CAROL: Yeah...I don't understand it because I have seen the Hy-Vee truck deliver across the street. Across the street for something—I was shocked seeing that. I have shopped at Hy-Vee for at least fifteen years and um...I have seen the Hy-Vee truck over here, you know. I know when I have ordered Pizza Hut, it was terrible. That kind of stuff doesn't offend me, and I don't like it, it's ridiculous. That kind of thing has been going on and it shouldn't be a thing anymore. So...

MILLER: It looks like Taryn (Hodison's daughter) got service flipped where your area does get service actually it was restored through the Kansas City Star's help, so—it did help. But it doesn't mean it's not happening in any other areas. It took her action to do that. I just wondered how you felt about that.

CAROL: I don't like it because they have always done that in the black community and um... (inaudible). This isn't the worst community. It's been okay over the years—through the years and there hasn't been a whole lot of trouble. I don't have a lot of deliveries here for one thing. Uh...so.

MILLER: This is a side question. Do you know if you have other elder um...residents? DO you know that?

CAROL: Our age?

MILLER: Yes, or older.

CAROL: Um...yes, there is a lady across the street named Betty who is older than us. I can't think anyone who is older than us. So, we are about the oldest about now after her. Down the street there is older guy, his name is Mr. Williams, he's probably the same age, yeah. Most of the people are the same age as us. Um...so there aren't a lot of kids in the neighborhood either.

MILLER: I guess my next question would be is I looked on the Blue Hills Urban Neighborhood Initiative that they have on their website and I don't know if you have ever looked into that or their Facebook page. Their leadership spoke of trying to create same neighborhood as the Ivanhoe has been able to create. And I don't know if you know if you know what Ivanhoe neighborhood?

CAROL: What has the Ivanhoe neighborhood done again?

MILLER: It's where they have created block captains, block contacts and recruited residents to try to uh... to connect like crime watch. I don't know if they have tried to do that with your neighborhoods, have they tried to do that with you guys?

CAROL: We did have an organization at one time. A long time ago but we have not had that for a for long while. Years and years ago, down there on Prospect. 72nd and Prospect that you could go in. Taryn was a teenager when we had that. So, we haven't had a neighborhood organization in a while. It's good to have that but we haven't had it in a while, you know.

MILLER: Do you guys know anything about the community gardens that they supposedly have at 49th & Olive.

CAROL: At 49th & Olive, I don't know about that. A community garden is nice to have. I see them. (Warren in the background said there is a community garden behind Arthur Bryant's Barbeque) I know there's one on Linwood.

MILLER: Supposedly, there's one at 49th & Olive, if you volunteer--they give first grabs to volunteers work with the gardens but then they hand out who actually lives in the neighborhood for free—have you ever received any produce from your neighborhood gardens that they offer to the neighborhood? Either can answer question.

CAROL: Okay. What is it again? They hand out food.

MILLER: Yeah. They hand out food. Any produce that is ready to be done. I didn't know if you knew about that or ever volunteered in the past.

CAROL: No. I didn't know about or volunteered. Growing up, we went didn't go to the big grocery stores. We went to the neighborhood market Mom and Pop grocery stores back in the 50's and 60's. And um as a kid, you never knew where your parents get the food and sometimes, they even had food delivered. Even when we lived on Cleveland Street, yeah...(Warren and Carol talking to each other, disregard).

MILLER: I guess another question I had, and it should have been earlier, and I thought of it while I was writing. A lot of my other interview subjects talked a lot about the 27 Street line—crossing the 27th Street line, do you know what I am talking about when I say they?

CAROL: I am not sure about. We born in the middle of that happening.

MILLER: You might be a little bit younger. My older interviewees say that crossing the 27th Street line in Kansas City was a big no-no.

CAROL: Yeah. I am sure it was. I remember living in the surrounding areas, but you don't think about that when you're a child, you know. You don't think about that stuff until you get older.

MILLER: Yeah.

CAROL: Even then, I didn't think that much about it, you know. As a teenager, you could go a few more places—a little bit but you still stayed in the same area actually. You had friends and relatives—my grandmother lived on 34th and Park, all the relatives would stay inner city. So, by the time I got married, it was a little better but still a little segregated.

MILLER: So—was Blue Hills the best option for guys (to afford) or something that had area more African Americans to feel more comfortable to stay?

CAROL: You mean area to actually to live in the city?

MILLER: Yeah.

CAROL: Well, uh....

WARREN: We've been blessed, and I always made a lot money in my years of working you know. Even in retirement, it's okay. It's not that we can't move any other place—we chose not to. I figured the Lord blessed us and we didn't do how should and he's still blessing us. So, if we wanted to move somewhere else, we probably could—at this point, we're happy where we are at and don't want to move unless we have to.

MILLER: Yeah.

WARREN: To answer your question, yeah...we could move a lot of places, but we are used to the people over here.

MILLER: Well...that's a great answer.

WARREN: huh....

MILLER: Well, my last question and—I always give the interviewee I give it to, is there anything I have, any question given to you that you want to add that might signify what the Hodison's are about. Your family history, anything I have missed, or should have added or asked- the last word. Is there anything either of you would like to add to the interview?

CAROL: Do you mean like where we live?

MILLER: Anything or something I may have missed. Add to something I have already asked or glanced over. I always give that last question and the last word to my interviewees. Like you—have the last word.

CAROL: Do you mean like the city is?

MILLER: Anything you want to add about you, about the city or the world is?

CAROL: I don't like the gentrification that is going on in the city. Um....I don't like the food deserts that in certain spots for over fifty plus years and have to beg and beg for change. And

you may get one and suburbs tend to get four or five of the same grocery stores right in a row. In the city, they tend to close them and um...a lot to be blessed for and grateful for to—that is true. Um...I nothing really to complain to about, I have my husband. The city, the city isn't running very well and could be better, accessible and to people who can't afford it. The market is taking a lot of steps, you. know—there is a lot of obstacles in the way, you know.

MILLER: Well, that's a good answer. Does Warren want to say anything.

WARREN: You did good Kat.

MILLER: I really appreciate you guys taking the time to speak to me today.

CAROL: Oh sure. Glad to do it.

MILLER: I will also include you guys—I always send who's been included, a copy of my thesis and everything. So, you'll get an opportunity to read it and everything, okay?

CAROL: Oh, okay!

MILLER: Okay...I will talk to you guys really soon okay.

CAROL: If you need anything else, let us know.

MILLER: Okay.

CAROL: Tell Taryn hi and I'll talk to her love her.

MILLER: Okay. Talk to you soon.

CAROL: Okay. Bye. Bye.

MILLER: Bye.

VITA

Kathrine Trevette Miller was born November 10, 1977 in Kansas City, Kansas. She was educated in Kansas City's public-school district and graduated from Central High School in 1996. She attended Metropolitan Community College in Kansas City for two years and received her Associates in Arts in 2013. She transferred to the University of Missouri-Kansas City that same year. The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures awarded Mrs. Miller an Outstanding Achievement Award in 2014. She went on to graduate with her Bachelor of Arts in History by 2016.

Mrs. Miller began the master's program in history at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the Fall of 2018. She also interned at the Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop-Farm in Olathe, Kansas and for American Public Square in Kansas City, Missouri to fulfill requirements for the public history program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Upon completion of her degree requirements, Mrs. Miller plans to continue her career in the historical and archival fields.

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