

**Voices from the Grassroots Oral History Project**

Detroit Equity Action Lab

Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights

Wayne State University Law School

Detroit, MI

**Malik Yakini**

Interviewed by

PETER BLACKMER

July 12, 2019

Detroit, Michigan

## Narrator

Malik Yakini, born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, is a founder and Executive Director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network and D-Town Farm, a seven-acre organic farm in Detroit's Rouge Park. Yakini is an organizer with a focus on African-centered education and food sovereignty. He is a founder of the Detroit Food Policy Council, and he serves on the facilitation team of Undoing Racism in the Detroit Food System. From 1990 to 2010, Yakini served as Executive Director of the Nsoroma Institute, which was an African-centered school in the Detroit area. He served as a member of the Michigan Food Policy Council from 2008 to 2010. He served as an Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy Food and Community Fellow from 2012-13. He was a James Beard Foundation Leadership Awards winner in 2012.

## Interviewer

Peter Blackmer is a Research Fellow at the Detroit Equity Action Lab, an initiative of the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights at Wayne State University Law School.

## Abstract

Malik Yakini discusses his relationship and the relationship of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) to Wayne Curtis and Freedom Freedom Growers, how DBCFSN got land, their relationship to the city, the struggle against Hantz Farms, and DBCFSN's public policy committee and their involvement with the 2013 urban agriculture ordinance and the Detroit Food Policy Council. Other topics include why there is so much vacant land in Detroit, how capitalism and white supremacy led to large chunks of land being owned by a few white men, how the foreclosure crisis led to fewer Black homeowners, how depopulation led to fewer grocery stores, and the ways in which young white people moving to Detroit are unaware of the city's history and their white privilege. He defines food security versus food sovereignty, talks about the similarities and differences between his work and anticolonial movements, and discusses the development of Detroit People's Food Cooperative and why cooperatives are important for building self-determination and democracy. Another topic is ties between Jackson, Mississippi and Detroit, including the

Republic of New Afrika in the 1960s and 1970s and the relationship between Cooperation Jackson and DBCFSN today. Major themes throughout include the importance of material evidence to convince people of abstract ideas, the food system as an example of a concrete way to see forces of oppression, why movements need a vision of what they're for and not just what they are against, that systemic change requires multiple generations, the importance of history for organizing, and how his activism is rooted in spirituality.

### Keywords

Black Bottom; Capitalism; Chokwe Lumumba; Cooperation Jackson; Detroit Black Community Food Security Network; Detroit Food Policy Council; Detroit People's Food Cooperative; Detroit, Michigan; D-Town Farms; Foreclosure crisis; Freedom Freedom Growers; Gentrification; Great Recession; Hantz Farms; Jackson, Mississippi; Paradise Valley; Republic of New Afrika; Urban farming; Wayne Curtis; White flight; White supremacy

### Restrictions

None

### Original Format

.mp4 file

### Transcript

Transcribed by Brian Schamber.

### Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Malik Yakini, interviewed by Peter Blackmer, July 12, 2019, transcript, *Voices from the Grassroots Oral History Collection*, Detroit Equity Action Lab, Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights, Wayne State University Law School.

Detroit Equity Action Lab  
Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights  
Wayne State University Law School  
Detroit, MI

Transcript of interview conducted July 12, 2019 with:

Malik Yakini [MY]

Detroit, MI

By: Peter Blackmer [PB]

**MY:** Sure. My name is Malik Yakini, and I'm with the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network. I live in Detroit [Michigan]... Don't get it twisted.  
[chuckles]

[0:00:20]

**PB:** [laughs] So, since I asked about Baba Wayne [Curtis] before last time--since last time we spoke, I've gotten to spend a little bit of time with Baba Wayne doing some of his stories, and he'd mentioned the relationship that you all had with the school. So, I was wondering if you could kinda talk about your personal relationship with Baba Wayne, how you first met each other and then maybe a little bit about the relationship that D-Town Farms has with Freedom Freedom?

**MY:** I don't really remember exactly when I met Wayne, I've known him for so long. But, ya know, just from being activists out here in the community, I had come across him for many years. But in the early 2000s, a mutual friend, Ron Scott, suggested to me that maybe Wayne could bring some value to the school that I was running at the time, a sort of an institute, and we talked, and I ended up hiring him as an art teacher. And, the school was really more than just a school, it's a community also, and I think it probably had a positive impact on him. In fact, he's told me it had a positive impact on him in multiple ways, including we were

doing some pretty intensive gardening of the school then, and I would like to think that's part of the influence that has contributed to the work he is doing now around food.

So, Baba Wayne and I are friends. We're brothers. We're comrades. Ya know, we've been through some matters, personal matters, together. We've spent a lot of personal time together. We've had lots and lots of conversations. We're kinda from the same generation. We can relate to a lot of similar experiences. And so, that's my brother, and I love him.

[0:02:04. Jump cut.]

**PB:** Could you also... So, what kinda relationship does DBCFSN [Detroit Black Community Food Security Network] have with Feedom Freedom?

**MY:** We have a sister organization relationship with Feedom Freedom. We're currently working on a project, a film project actually, with Raj Patel, and it's in conjunction with a film he is doing called "Generation Food." It's really about people around the world who are asserting their "food sovereignty." And so because he is so inspired by the work that they done in Detroit, he asked our organization, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, and Detroit Narrative Agency to partner with him to make this film about urban ag[riculture] in Detroit. So, we identified some partners whose values are aligned with ours and asked them to partner on the film, and Feedom Freedom Growers is one of the partners that's working with us to produce this film and will be featured in the film as well.

**PB:** That's...

**MY:** And, we've...we've worked on other stuff before. We were a part of a coalition called CHIRP, Childhood Incubation Research Project [Child Health Incubator Research Project], which looked at various ways of reducing childhood

obesity. We work on many many projects, both just for justice in general and for food justice in particular.

[0:03:21]

**PB:** Ill [Weaver] had told us a little bit about the work that DNA [Detroit Narrative Agency] was doing with DBCFSN. That's exciting.

**MY:** Yeah.

**PB:** Good for you. Could you talk to us... We talked a little bit last time about the genesis and the formation of Detroit Black Community Food Security Network. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about how this got off the ground, like how land was either acquired or used, who was involved in this process?

**MY:** Well, we started in February of 2006, and it started really with an idea. Shortly after that, we knew that one of our goals was to do a two-acre farm. So, we put together a committee that was the Land Acquisition Committee that began to look around the city for possible places that we could begin growing on. One of our members knew the person who ran the 4H club on McDougall near Gratiot here on the East side of Detroit and spoke to him, and he said to us, "Well, I've grown in that lot kinda across the street, kinda catty corner from where the 4H club was located." He said, "Well, I've grown there, and you can grow there too." So, we did for the first year, which was 2006. We had no so-called legal right to be on the land, if there is such a thing, but we grew there during that season, and then a developer bought it.

At the end of 2006, we were forced to move. We moved to a spot on Collingwood and Cascade on--by the Shrine of the Black Madonna. In 2007--we farmed there in 2007. I got a call in the March of 2008 saying that they had other plans for the land, and we had to move. Fortunately, we had been negotiating with the city of Detroit since June of 2006 for two acres of city-owned land. In April or May--I can't

recall--April or May of 2008, people from the city asked us to come out to Rouge Park and to look around at what's called the Meyers Tree Nursery and to see within that 200 acre section of the park if there was two acres that we liked. And so, we did see two acres that we identified, and we began farming in June of 2008. Really at that point, we had no written agreement with the city. What we had was the verbal authorization of the person who was deputy director of the recreation department.

Shortly after we began farming there, that person was out of a job because he was part of the Kwame Kilpatrick administration. He was an appointee, and as Kwame Kilpatrick was out of office, so were some of his appointees. So by July or so, we were farming in Rouge Park with only the verbal authorization of a person who was no longer in the position. But, we had a legal team. The University of Michigan Law Schools Community Economic Development Clinic began negotiating with the city of Detroit on what initially was a lease agreement and then later at...toward the end of negotiation morphed into what they called a license agreement, which actually gives the city more autonomy over the land and gives us a little less.

So, we signed a ten-year agreement in October...I believe it was October 2008 for the use of this two acres inside Rouge Park. In 2010 or [20]11ish--I don't recall the exact date--we annexed an additional five acres and had that added to our license agreement with the city. So, we have had seven acres at Rouge Park since 2011 or so. So, that's the story in a nutshell.

[0:07:21]

**PB:** Do you foresee issues with that arrangement with the city coming up in the future, or do you feel it's relatively safe where you are at with that?

**MY:** I don't foresee any issues, but the reality is the agreement gives the city the ability to within 60 days to come take the land back if they wanted to. We don't think the city would want to create the controversy that would create by doing that because we have a pretty high profile locally, nationally, internationally, and I

am certain that if they were to tell us we could no longer farm there, there would be tremendous backlash. But, there has been no friction with the city, I mean, so there is no reason that they would want to...want to put us off that land. Thus far, the relationship has been smooth, and I'll just hope and pray that it continues to be smooth.

[0:08:18]

**PB:** Speaking of...on that issue, access to land, could you speak a little bit about how race and class in Detroit impact access to land...

**MY:** [clears throat]

**PB:** ...when it comes to agriculture in the city?

**MY:** Well, I'm gonna address the big picture first and say that the whole construct of land ownership is basically a concept that comes to us from feudal European societies, and it's not universally accepted among all of humanity that human beings can own part of the Earth. So, this idea of private land ownership has become one of the cornerstones of capitalism, and because capitalism intersects with the system of white supremacy, what we see in the United States and many other parts of the world is ownership of land, wealth, and power concentrated in the hands of wealthy white men. That is embedded deeply in the logic of capitalism. Those who have the resources can buy land, and the more resources you have, the more you can buy land, and because capitalism and white supremacy intersect, it concentrates those resources in the hands of white men. Then, white men are the ones who own more land than anyone else.

We're seeing that same logic play in the city of Detroit where the city is 139 square miles. About one-third of the city is vacant land. About one-half of that one-third is owned directly by the city or now is in the inventory of the Detroit Land Bank Authority or the Detroit Building Authority. So from--it seems to me, from the city's perspective, they wanted to divest themselves of that land as



quickly as possible so that they don't have to spend time cutting the grass. And also if somebody buys it, it puts it back on the tax roles. But, the problem is that they seem to favor selling large swaths of land. If you have a developer who says, "I want to buy 100 parcels," then that person seems to be favored over a community person who says, "I want one or two parcels." The problem is it...it plays right into that logic of capitalism where the people who are capable of buying these large numbers of parcels are usually wealthy white men--not always, because we also have some Chinese businessmen who are buying land in Detroit online through the...through the county purchasing system.

We see this kinda racialized capitalism playing out in how land that is owned by the city is being sold inside the city of Detroit and is creating further disparity, that coupled with the fact that there is still not crystal clarity on land use policies for agriculture in the city of Detroit. There was some clarity provided when the urban agricultural ordinance was passed in 2013, but it is still not crystal clear how that plays out in terms of the sale of city land. There still seems to be some discrepancies depending on who you talk to or who happens to be in the office that day or who you are that is talking to the city. There seems to be different answers that people get. So, there is no real clear path forward for buying land for larger scale agricultural projects in the city of Detroit.

[0:11:54]

**PB:** With that... With that kinda wholesale preference that the city approaches land with, could you talk a little bit about the way that you've seen your neighborhoods or the city be impacted by that kind of land transfer to wealthy white males in the city or others?

**MY:** Well, I'll start with my own personal experience then. I have a white next door neighbor now for the first time in probably 40 years, and although the property wasn't owned by the city, it was owned by a private buyer. We're seeing the same thing play out in the private sector, that people are trying to get top dollar for their properties, and the ones who more likely than not are the ones who have the top dollar to pay are whites, and often young whites who are moving into the city. Although their intention might not be to create further

disparity in the city, the impact of it is that it creates further disparity and creates more haves and have nots.

But, the same thing plays out in the public sector as the city is selling land, and one of the most egregious sales was of course the sale of 1600 parcels or so to John Hantz, which our organization, Freedom Freedom Growers, and many other organizations opposed because we thought it was a dangerous precedent for the city to sell that huge amount of land to an individual basically just because the guy had the money to buy it. And if that's the logic that the city uses, that whoever comes up with the most cash they'll sell the land to, then we could find ourselves in the next 20 years or so where a third of the city is owned by two or three people or two or three families.

So, we think that some greater good has to prevail. How do we put in place a paradigm that works in the best interest of the majority of Detroiters who are African Americans? How do we, kinda, protect the interests of that community within inside of this city, and how do we look at the interests of African Americans within a larger historical context? People who are displaced in some ways from the South, either through violence, through low wages, through terror, and came to places like Detroit to try to live and try to establish themselves and make a better life, and now we see there's still no security in this situation. So... So, there has to be a fundamental change in how we see land and how we see it in relationship to human populations, not just seeing it as a commodity that goes to the highest bidder.

[0:14:40]

**PB:** Could you talk a little bit more about that struggle against the Hantz Farms land grab, what your roles were, and maybe some of the roles of the other folks that were involved in that?

**MY:** Sure. So, there was a small coalition that was put together--and I may be leaving some folks out because this is some years ago--but Detroit Black Community Food Security Network was one of the kinda anchor organizations in

it. Earthworks Farm was one of the anchor organizations. Freedom Freedom Growers was involved in it. The Boggs Center was involved to some extent, and there might have been one or two other groups whose names are escaping me right now, but we had several meetings to kind of hash out what our position was on this impending sale and to hash out strategies for opposing it.

We...we did a lot of door-to-door organizing in the area on the lower East side where John Hantz was ultimately able to buy this property to make residents aware of this impending sale. But also, we had been able to pressure the Detroit City Council into having a public hearing, and so we did a lot of door-to-door organizing to get community residents to come out to this public hearing, and we had about 400 people who showed up at this public hearing. And then the very next day, five of the nine Detroit City Council members voted to proceed with the sale in spite of the overwhelming objections of the 400 or so residents who showed up at this community hearing.

So, an interesting aside, I had been perhaps one of the most vocal opponents of the Hantz sale, and I was regularly getting calls from the media, and instead of asking me about the work that we are engaged in, they wanted to ask me about our opposition to Hantz. I guess because I...I spoke on it a lot, I became one of the spokespersons for this. But interestingly, Mike Score, who was the president of Hantz Farms, is a person that I knew before he started working for John Hantz. In fact, he was at Michigan State University. Mike Score actually has real knowledge about farming and he's--I consider him to be a person of integrity. Prior to Mike Score coming onboard with Hantz Farms, some of their projections were just wild projections which weren't rooting in any kind of reality about how farming takes place, of the scale that farming can happen in a place like the city of Detroit. So, he actually brought some real knowledge to it. But because I have known Mike Score for some years, he was able to broker a sit down with myself, Kathryn Underwood, who's with the city planning commission who happened to be the--not happened to be, but took the lead on the writing of the urban agricultural ordinance, and John Hantz.

So, we had breakfast one day at the Russell Street Deli in Eastern Market, and I got a chance to sit across the table from him and talk to him directly, and I wanted to kinda get a feel for him 'cause sometimes you can't... Just by reading words on

paper, you don't really know where people are coming from, so I like being able to look people in their eyes, kinda feel their energy, and he told me a couple things that I found to be very interesting. The first thing that he said was that his effort was to create scarcity in order to drive the value of property up, that he thought with so much vacant land in the city of Detroit that if some of it were taken off the open market and were purchased that then it would drive the value of the land up, and somehow this would help the city.

He also said that, initially, he approached the city not about him purchasing the land but about putting in place ways that residents could obtain the land, and I told him that sounded like a really good idea and something that perhaps I could have gotten behind. But, he said the city rejected that, and so the second overture to the city was for Hantz Farms, to create what they were saying was at the time would be the world's largest urban farm, and he had a...a tremendous PR campaign that went all around the world about this concept that didn't even exist. But just because he had a concept and a nice drawing and was able to through his connections get this blasted out all round the world, it got tremendous publicity. But, he got significant pushback from residents because he wasn't committed to organic agriculture, and residents were concerned about the spraying of pesticides and the impact on their health. So, the plan then morphed again into what he called...I think he calls it now the Hantz Tree Farm or--I might have the name wrong--where he is planting hardwood Christmas trees.

And, another thing that he told me directly is that, for him, this is a legacy project, and that in 40 years when these trees can be harvested that his daughter will get some benefit from that. So, for me, it's clearly the...a way to intergenerationally pass down wealth, not really to transfer it to the majority of people. Again, anything, for me, anything that continues to amass wealth in the hands of wealthy white people or to amass wealth in the hands of white people period--wealth and land and power--is problematic, and I think this is a primary problem in the world today, that white people have way too much power, wealth, and inordinate amount of say-so over what happens on the planet.

**PB:** So, what did you say to him in that space, and how was...how was that received by him?

**MY:** Well, ya know, interestingly, he did much more talking than he did listening, and that was another thing that I noted. He had absolutely no questions about, for example, D-Town Farm and what we're doing. He was just very focused on what he was doing, so I found that to be interesting too. Rather than being an exchange, it was basically me listening to him. But even in the listening, I found out quite a few things that I found to be very interesting. It didn't quell my opposition to the project one iota. In fact, it made me even stronger in my opposition to it.

[0:21:06]

**PB:** So, I mean, from your perspective, why is the city--in that moment and continuing to do so--why is the city more focused on this wholesale reallocation of land resources rather than the kind that you had suggested would be a good idea that Hantz had floated to the city?

**MY:** I can't speak on behalf of city officials, and also I'll say, in all fairness, the city is not a monolith. There's a lot of moving pieces and a lot of individuals and a lot of opinions, so there may not be one opinion that is an opinion of the city. But, my guess would be that--well, first of all, let me say cities weren't created to be landlords of large tracts of land. This was not envisioned that at some point a third of the city that was formerly houses and commercial buildings would now be vacant land. So, that land has to be cut--the grass has to be cut. There's a certain amount of liability the city assumes if someone is hurt on the land, and the city could be sued. So, they're not really in the business of being landlords of large tracts of land.

It seems to me--and I could be wrong--that the city wants to get it out of their hands as easily as possible, and the easy way to do it is if you have one individual or one company who wants to buy 1000 parcels instead of a person in the neighborhood who wants two or three parcels. So, my guess would be that it's

just easier to move large numbers of parcels in that way than it would be just working on a grassroots level getting rid of them one, two, three at a time.

[0:22:49]

**PB:** So, what did you learn coming out--like, if you're looking back, reflecting on that struggle against Hantz Farms land acquisition, what...what are your take-aways? What lessons did you draw from that?

**MY:** Well, one of the take-aways from that is that we continue to have many elected political leaders who, in my estimation, are not grounded in a strong analysis of justice and equity and because of their lack of clear analysis work in opposition to--sometimes--to the best interests of our community. And in all fairness, ya know, on some issues they're right, from my perspective, and on some they are wrong. So, that's not to say they are terrible wicked people because they made a bad decision, but they clearly--five of them did not seem to be grounded in either a sense of how you use land to create justice and equity or to be grounded in a perspective that causes them to represent the popular will as opposed to representing their own individual opinion. Again, there were 400 people that showed up at this public hearing, overwhelmingly in op...in opposition to the Hantz project, and the very next day five of the nine city council members voted for. So, that would be one of the take-aways.

The other take-away, though, is that we were able to pressure the city into having this hearing even though the hearing didn't result in the kind of vote that we were hoping for, but that community pressure can, to some extent, move politicians, and that when people are mobilized and organized, it can have some impact. We ultimately didn't have the victory, but we were able to at least move the city council to the point of having the hearing. So, perhaps with longer term organizing and more intense organizing, perhaps we could have influenced that vote in a way that would have been a more favorable outcome.

[0:24:53]

**PB:** What do you see as being some either suc--like, already proven successful or potentially successful strategies for protecting land and access to land use or stewardship in the city for the city's majority Black population?

**MY:** Ya know, a lot of people are looking at the possibility of community land trust as a way of protecting land. I don't know that that's really been proven in Detroit, and I think community land trusts are different depending on what locale you're in. So, it's not kind of a one-size-fits-all strategy, but they...that seems to hold some hope for putting land in the hands of communities and protecting land from the long term, from the kind of rampant capitalist development that seems to be swallowing up land throughout major cities throughout the United States. But, ya know, we'll have to see in time if that plays out and how the laws respond to community land trusts in the city of Detroit, but at this point it seems to be the best possible strategy to protect lands and to keep them in the hands of community members.

[0:26:08]

**PB:** This is...this is kinda a 101 question, but I think it's worth asking anyhow just to get more people saying it on the record. But, could you kinda just give us a crash course in the recent history of Detroit and what the major fundamental factors are about why so much land became vacant in the city?

**MY:** So, there's multiple reasons why we have so much vacant land in the city of Detroit, and I'll try to condense it and say that beginning in the post World War Two era, you--the Detroit's Black population was increasing. Really even going back to the 1920s, you had a huge influx of African Americans from the South who were moving to Detroit to work in the automobile factories. My family's here--my father's side of the family is here because my grandfather moved from Georgia to work in the Ford Rouge plant, and almost every Black person in Detroit, if you ask them how their ancestors got here, it's going to be related to the auto industry. So as I mentioned earlier, many of our ancestors were fleeing the South because of the terror and violence, because of the low wages, and also because of the...the trickery and debt that often dispossessed them of their land. So, that population,

that migration continued in the [19]30s and the [19]40s, and...and so the population of Detroit was becoming--the African American population was increasing.

In the 1950s, the federal government began financing this federal highway system. And also, through the use of federal dollars, suburban subdivisions were being funded using the GI Bill and other mechanisms where people could get relatively low cost mortgages on houses, and this was enabling many middle class whites to move into these newly created subdivisions, and the freeways were then created to help facilitate movement from the suburban subdivisions into the central city where many of the jobs were. So, we began to see the depopulation of the city of Detroit beginning in the 1950s. In fact, in 1950 the population was at its highest at 1.9 million.

So, that... What we called then white flight continued in the 1960s, and I can tell you in my own lifetime, my family moved from Collingwood and...Collingwood and 12th street, where I was born or where I was lived after I left the hospital, where I lived for the first four years of my life, we moved to where I currently live near us in the University of Detroit area, near Six Mile. So when we first moved there, there were maybe two or three Black families on the block. There were white children on the block--this is 1960--that I played with for the first year or so, although we didn't go inside their houses, but we played together on the street. Within a year or two, all of those white families were gone. So, this isn't something I read, this is something I experienced personally. So, this white flight continued and increased as Black people continued to move into neighborhoods that were formerly all white, and most of the folks moved into the suburbs surrounding Detroit, many of the suburbs west of--north of Detroit in particular.

Then came 1967, where the rebellion occurred, and many whites were just scared out of their minds. And so, in the six months from July 1967 when the rebellion occurred until December 1967, about 80,000 people left the city of Detroit. 1968, another 70 or so thousand people left. 1969, another 60,000 or so people left. So, we had this tremendous--tens of thousands of people leave within a two-and-a-half year period, and many of those people were homeowners, property owners, business owners. And so, this contributed to the kind of vacancy that we saw in the city of Detroit. It contributed to then having absentee



landlords, contributed to having blighted properties, and it contributed to the city eventually becoming majority African American.

So in a nutshell, that's kind of how we wound up in this--and that, you know, that's not the only factor. Race is not the only factor. There were economic factors as well. At one point, the Detroit automakers were the only game in town, or they were the dominant force in manufacturing of automobiles on the world stage. But then in the 1960s and [19]70s, you had foreign companies that began to take a larger share of the market. Volkswagen and Toyota and Honda and other companies started making cars that were cheaper, sometimes better, and there was some decline in the U.S. auto industry as well. So because Detroit was almost totally dependent upon the auto industry as its primary means of generating a healthy economy, as the auto industry declined, so did the general economic health of the city of Detroit. So, that also contributed to some of the social problems and the blight that we are seeing in Detroit. But, we also saw not only the abandonment of Detroit by individual whites, but we saw companies that were either located in Detroit or Highland Park [Michigan]. For example, the world headquarters for Chrysler was right in Highland Park, and it left Highland Park and moved into the suburbs north of Detroit. And many other businesses, maybe not as large as Chrysler, but many other businesses that were formerly in the city of Detroit left.

So when you have individuals and businesses leave and they are no longer paying taxes, then the city has to figure out how to keep the same number of streets plowed in the winter, how to keep the same number of parks' grass cut, how to keep the same number of street lights cut with a...only a small percentage of the tax base that it had previously because of the abandonment of the city by tens of thousands of people. So now, the population of Detroit most people think is maybe 680,000 or so down from 1.9 million in 1950, but the geographic--the footprint of the city is the same size! So, the city still has to be maintained with less than a third of the population here to pay taxes that was here in 1950.

[0:33:08]

**PB:** Could you... If we fast forward, how does the Great Recession, the mortgage crisis, and then emergency management, bankruptcy impact that escalation of vacancy and foreclosures?

**MY:** Yeah, thank you for raising that. And, I'm not an expert in that area, but I can just tell you from also having lived through that that many people lost their properties, and there's been a lot written and published in interviews about the kind of mortgages that companies were issuing to--even falsifying applications and issuing mortgages to people they knew were going to default. And if the person defaults on the loan, the bank gets the--or the lender, whatever it is--the bank or the lending company gets the property, and the individual is just out. So, many, many people in the city of Detroit lost their homes. In fact, Detroit used to be the Mecca of Black home ownership in the United States, and now the majority of Detroiters are renters. So, the mortgage crisis contributed to the kind of depopulation of Detroit and also to some of the blight that we are seeing now.

But emergency management, ya know, I'm not really an expert in that. I'm told by friends who have studied it in detail that it was contrived and basically contrived as a way of banks being able to get the maximum dollar out of the city, and that perhaps the city wasn't really bankrupt. In fact, councilwoman JoAnn Watson often talks about the state revenue sharing that the state withheld from the city, and had the state not withheld that money, the city would have been solvent. So many people believe that the mortgage--the bankruptcy was contrived.

[0:35:06]

**PB:** How was your neighborhood or your communities in general impacted by that period, whether it's the mortgage crisis or the...

**MY:** Yeah. Well, as a result of the mortgage crisis, there were probably in the late 19--no, that occurred in 2007, 2008. During that time period, there were probably 10 or 12 houses on my block that were vacant houses. What we're seeing now is those houses being bought, and there's maybe three houses now that I see

people repairing, working on everyday. But, there were at least 10 or 12 houses on my block that were vacant houses as a result of people losing their property.

[0:35:50]

**PB:** Do you see that mortgage crisis and the foreclosure crisis that is ongoing now as akin to the same--I mean, in terms of impacts and displacement--as akin to urban renewal of the 1950s and 1960s?

**MK:** [deep breath] Well, again, I'm not an expert on any of these things, but I think generally the way white supremacy works is it puts in place policies and procedures that favor people who identify as white and disfavor, exploit, extract wealth from and displace people who are Black and people of color. So no matter what it is called, ya know, if you look at it on a historical continuum, it's been a historical onslaught of attacks on Black people and brown people throughout this country, and we are seen as being the source of wealth and labor to enrich others. So, whether it's called urban renewal--or some people used to call it "Negro removal" or, ya know, whatever--whatever term you use, the reality is that white supremacy is alive and well, alive and well in American society. And so, policies typically play in a way that give advantage to people who are identified as white, and they leave Black people kinda holding the bag.

**PB:** It's not my intentions to ask you questions outside of your expertise, but I know that your historical analysis and your political analysis is really...

**MY:** That's...

**PB:** ...valuable.

**MY:** That's kind of you.

[0:37:16]

**PB:** To move back into your expertise, I guess maybe at the time that the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network is being established, could you speak about some of the problems with racism and white supremacy in terms of their impact on food security in Detroit?

**MY:** Sure. So again, there's a logic to capitalism, and capitalism and white supremacy kinda work hand in...work hand in hand, and they intersect. So, most grocery stores try to locate where there's large...there's population density, and so as the depopulation of Detroit occurred that I talked about earlier, then what we saw was groceries stores moving and moving to the area where there was this greater population density. So, you had tens of thousands of people leaving Detroit, and grocery stores look at that and say, "Well, ya know, maybe there's not as much money to be made here as perhaps there is in Southfield [Michigan] or Oak Park [Michigan] or Birmingham [Michigan] or wherever." So, many of the stores that were in the city of Detroit closed Detroit stores and actually moved into the suburbs surrounding Detroit, but also because the African American population as a whole is less affluent...affluent than the white population as a whole. In fact, I think the current statistics say that the average white family has fourteen times the wealth of the average Black family in this country.

So businesses, when they are looking at where to locate stores, they are looking at these kinds of factors, population density, income. And so, those two things, population density and income, are higher in...in wealthier suburbs than they are in places in Detroit where tens of thousands of people left. So, this is my thinking, ya know. I haven't done any kind of real analysis or talked to people who own stores, but this is the conclusion that I have come through...through my own observation and lived experience.

[0:39:22]

**PB:** And why... From your analysis, why is there a lack of Black-owned grocery stores in the city of Detroit?

**MY:** That's a long... Ya know, to understand any of the factors impacting Black people in Detroit, you have to take the long view 'cause none of this stuff happened overnight. So, I'll go all the way back to the destruction of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley again as the freeways came through. I-75 came through and destroyed this vibrant Black business district on the lower East side of Detroit, and it scattered many of the people who were living in that area to different parts of the city, which created less of a sense of community where you had sometimes families living all in the same area. Then as they are scattered, those families become more dispersed. They're not all in the same block or whatever.

In fact, in my own family, my mother's mother and father--this is after leaving the lower East side--in the 1960s, they lived on West Warren and Maybury Grand. In the late 1960s or so--or maybe the mid 1960s. I can't remember the exact date--the Jeffries freeway was built. So, it came through, and through eminent domain, they forced my grandparents to move. But, my grandparents lived on West Warren. They had a duplex. They lived on one side and rented the other side out. Beneath the house, they had a business, a printing shop, where my grandfather worked, and that's how they earned their living. And then right around the corner, the very next house was a duplex where my grandmother's sister lived, and my mother's--in the other side of the duplex, my mother's brother and his wife and children lived. So, we had almost like a family compound right on this corner, and so we were kinda all, ya know, very close to each other in the same proximity.

And so similarly in Black Bottom, the same thing happened as the freeways came through. People were dispersed. Families that were once close together are no longer as close together. So, that kind of destruction of the Black business districts is one factor that has contributed to us not only not having Black supermarkets but not having a lot of Black business in general. But, there were some Black supermarkets in the city of Detroit. In the late 1960s, there was one on Joy Road near Dexter called Our Supermarket, and in fact a friend of mine worked in the produce department there.

There were a few other Black grocery stores in the city of Detroit, but there's a number of factors that impact Black businesses. Sometimes, insurance rates are higher in communities of color, not just auto insurance but also liability insurance. Sometimes because of the extreme poverty, theft is higher in our communities. Often, those smaller independent stores weren't able to buy quantities that allowed them to compete with the national chain stores, and so there's a difference in price point which contributed to the decline of the stores. And so, all of those are factors--so, the last remaining store was Metro Detroit Foodland, which was on Grand River right near Southfield, and they struggled for several years to stay afloat. But ultimately, the lack of community--consistent community support, economic support, ya know, people buying at the store consistently, I think spelled the demise. And then, there was another--an Arab owner who was interested in buying the property, and I guess he offered a high price. And so, the previous owner, I think, decided to cut his losses and to sell the store.

So at this point, we have a city of 690,000 people, 80 percent of whom are African American, and not one African American grocery store. But for that matter, there's very few African American grocery stores in the entire country. There's probably less than ten in the entire country, and it just has to do with the overwhelming opposition of the mainstream economy to Black people and to the ways in which capitalism and white supremacy intersect.

[0:44:03]

**PB:** So, could you give us a working definition of what food security is?

**MY:** Sure. So, food security, or community food security, is often defined as a condition that exists when all members of a community have adequate amounts of culturally appropriate food. So, that's just a baseline, and our organization says that it's a human right to be food secure just--that regardless of what your economic standing is, just because you are a human being on the earth, you have the right to have adequate amounts of food. But although our organization is called the Detroit Black Food Security Network, really our thinking has evolved since we started in 2006, and we now realize that what we are striving toward is

really something higher than that. And so, really what we're working for is what is called food sovereignty, and I'll explain the difference in those two concepts.

So, my friend Raj Patel sometimes says that you can have food security in prison. You can have enough food to eat, but you can still be in prison. So clearly, what we're striving for is something more than just people having enough food in their bellies. We want to make sure that we have control of the system that provides that food, that we make the decisions about what is grown, how it's grown, how it's sold, what the...what happens to the profits from the food that's sold because, right now, Black people are just a market where other folks come into our communities and set up what I call "wealth extraction stations," right. They might be the name on the...on the sign might say "supermarket" or "gas station" or "dollar store," but what they are is wealth extraction stations that set up shop, suck the wealth out of our communities, and take them outside of our communities. It's the same thing that happens in colonialism, where a country like England or Spain or France goes into Africa or Asia and sees it as a place to extract raw materials, then to sell cheap goods to the residents. So essentially, it's the same thing that is happening here.

So, we want to make sure as part of our striving for food sovereignty that the profits that are derived from the purchase of food in the city of Detroit benefit who's spending that food--I mean, spending that money, not just that the...the...the profits are sucked out and then we're supposed to feel privileged because we can go to a store and spend our money with somebody who has no love for us.

[0:46:28]

**PB:** So in response to this, could you tell us a little bit about the work that's been going on and the work that you've been putting into developing the co-op?

**MY:** So since 2010, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network has been working developing what came to be called the Detroit People's Food Co-op. When we first started, we didn't have a name for it. We just knew we wanted a

cooperative and were committed to cooperatives because we think capitalism is a terrible system, first of all, and that there will never be justice and freedom and equity within a capitalist system. It can't happen. It's based on theft of the land, exploitation of labor, concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. And so, we're not interested in just recreating that in blackface. We're not just interested in having a supermarket that's owned by a Black individual, but we're interested in strategies that allow us to create collective wealth in our community and to create empowerment. And so, cooperatives are a way of doing that.

The other reason we think cooperatives are important is because cooperatives are democratic institutions, and what happens to people who live in an oppressive system for so long and become used to other people deciding for them, particularly in the city of Detroit where we've had the extreme cases like emergency managers where the elected officials were totally dis-empowered and somebody from the outside is making all the decisions on our behalf and the people we voted for can't make decisions. So, and when people live in that condition it kind of almost rocks them to sleep to some extent, and so cooperatives provide the opportunity for us to learn again how to exercise democracy.

And when I say democracy, I'm not talking about whether you vote for the Republican Party or the Democratic party, but on a grassroots community level, how do we work with our neighbors and the residents and the business owners in our community to collectively make decisions about our own collective well being? So, cooperatives give us the opportunity to exercise those kind of democratic muscles.

[0:48:37]

**PB:** Could you talk about... I'm particularly... In that, in terms of that "exercise of democratic muscles" as you put it or kind of modeling self determination and social transformation within organizational praxis, could you talk about some of the other ways that your work does that with Detroit Black Community Food Security Network beyond the co-op?



**MY:** Yeah. So, our work is rooted in what we call community self determination--sometimes we use the key Swahili word "Kujichagulia," self determination--that we think the fundamental problem right now with Black communities is that we don't have the power to define our own reality, and other people are defining our own reality for us. So as we move to higher and higher levels of building that power and building that capacity to define our own reality, we have to create small microcosms of what we might like this larger self-determined society to look like. So, our organizations and our institutions become a microcosm of this larger vision that we have.

Most people, I think, see things with their physical eyes. Some people are visionaries and see things with their third eye. They see things don't yet exist. But for most people, they have to see it in the [claps hands] physical form to really understand it. And so, what we are creating is these models where people can see on a small level how these concepts of self determination play out through our governance of ourselves, and in the case of like D-Town Farm, people that are actually producing food that can sustain our lives. Then once people see it, it begins to become much more real for them. And so, our hope is that the models we are creating begin to spill over into other areas of life, that if people see, "Oh, we can grow tomatoes," then they eventually start to think and say, "Well, maybe we can make shirts, too," or "Maybe we can make pants and shoes and tools," ya know, that we don't have to be totally dependent upon the corporate sector to provide for us.

We become... We've ceded responsibility for the major areas of our life to forces outside of ourselves, even to the extent, there was a commercial on TV maybe 10 years ago about McDonalds, and it said, "Leave breakfast to the experts," as if we're not even capable of making breakfast for ourselves, that we have to have some corporate giant come in and make brea--it's ridiculous! But if you grew up in an environment where you are bombarded with these messages constantly, and then that combined--the messages combined with the fact that self determination takes work, right? And so, it's much easier to be a sheep and to kinda go along with the prevailing trends than it is to buck those and to try to build an alternative system.

So, that's essentially what we are trying to do. We're trying to create these small models that give people glimpses into perhaps what the future could be but more importantly gives us glimpses inward into our own potential as human beings, and we're recapturing our own humanity instead of ceding responsibility for our lives to someone else.

[0:52:01]

**PB:** It's making me think about--this is what I was hoping we would touch on. Do you see this emphasis on community self determination and these models you are describing as falling within that trad--the anti-colonial tradition of creating liberated zones and liberated territories, like in the model of [Amílcar] Cabral and others?

**MY:** Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So, I mean, clearly Cabral and [Kwame] Nkrumah and [Julius] Nyere and Jomo Kenyatta and Steve Biko and many of the other anti-colonial fighters informed much of the work that we're doing. And so while the situation--an...and in Guinea-Bissau where Cabral was head of the PAIGC [African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde], they were in their traditional homeland.

So, this is.... Black people in America are in a very different position than probably any other colonized and exploited people in history because typically those people were still in their indigenous homelands, still had their own languages. In the case of Black people in America, not only have we been divested of our language, but most of the time we are carrying the names of the Europeans who enslaved our ancestors. So, the very fabric that gives people connection to their culture and historical continuum has been destroyed--or not destroyed, but has been severely diminished in the case of Black people in America. So while we can learn lessons from Cabral and the African liberation struggles, there is a uniqueness about our situation that is not addressed by some of the things that Cabral and others went through.

But still, there are many lessons that we can learn, and yet we are, I think, influenced by that creating these kinda "liberated zones" and then finding ways to connect these nodes of liberation until we can raise the consciousness of our people enough that we have a fundamental shift in power. Back in the day, we used to call that revolution. Now, people don't like to use that term so much, but that's what it is.

[0:54:02]

**PB:** In... On that tip of consciousness raising, I know you--with your experience being an educator, this is a skill of yours. How do you--when you're engaging with particularly young people that are coming to D-Town Farms or other content points within the network, how are you having...what does that conversation look like in terms of connecting food sovereignty to this broader concept of having liberated zones?

**MY:** So, often we talk about what people can see directly with their own eyes and experience everyday, and that's the fact that although Detroit is an overwhelmingly Black community, most of the stores in our communities are owned by Chaldeans. So, the most unconscious person can see that because they experience it everyday, and many young people walk in stores and are spoken to in disrespectful manners by the store owners--and I wanna clarify... I always have to clarify that this is not some anti-Chaldean thing. That's not the point of this. The point is anti-exploitation, and it just so happens that, in this instance, most of the people who own the stores are Chaldeans. If you go to the West Coast, it might be Vietnamese or some other ethnic group, but that's what capitalism does, it pits ethnic groups against the other. And because Black people are particularly vulnerable because of our history and the diminishing of our language and culture and the things that give us our kinda sense of pride in ourselves and our fiber as human beings, we become more vulnerable. And because of the ongoing attacks on Black business districts that I talked about earlier, the dispersion of Black families, now we find ourselves very vulnerable. Other groups swoop in, see the opportunity to make money, and do so.

So, we often point that out to young people, and they can relate readily to that because it's part of their experience. They might not call it racialized capitalism, but they know everyday in their own neighborhood when they walk to the store on the corner of their house that there is somebody in that store who owns the store who is not gonna hire them, who came from somewhere else in the world, who's extracting money from their community. And so, everyone can see that. They don't have to read, ya know, Malcolm X, or they don't have to read Cabral to be able to see it. They see it, and they live it everyday. So, we hold that up, and we talk about that.

Then, we talk about how what we're doing at D-Town Farm is an alternative to that, and, again, it's not just rhetoric because they can see the food growing, and they can see people coming and buying the food and eating it, and they can see directly how we're actually exhibiting self determination, which is in direct opposition to the kinda extractive economy that they see everyday. So, that's one of the ways that we frame this conversation that can be related to readily.

[0:56:52]

**PB:** Where do those conversations take place? Like, out in the farm or in classroom spaces or...

**MY:** Wherever we can. So this morning, for example, we had 35 students from Wayne State University and the University of Detroit who came out to the farm. And so whenever we have a group out there, we're gonna tell them about how we grow collards and how we grow kale, but we're also gonna talk to them about white supremacy and capitalism and patriarchy. So for us, that's equally as important. We can't--because if we don't have a clear analysis of the systems that oppress us, we don't know how to go about dismantling them and putting an alternative in place. In fact, if we don't understand the systems, what we will just try to do is just replicate it in blackface. We'll try to have... We'll think that the answer is, "Oh, we just need more Black business people," and that that is going to solve the problem rather than transforming the system itself.

So, yes. Every group that comes out to the farm, we make sure that we spend time talking to them about the systems of oppression, but we also just spend an equal amount of time talking about what we're for and what our vision is for the future. You can't just define the future based on what you are against. In fact, many times in the [19]70s as a young activist, we were very adamant about "Down with Capitalism!" and "Down with Imperialism!" And then when people say, "Well, what do you want?" and we'd be like, "Uhhh...I hadn't thought about that," right? So, it's important that we have a clear vision about what we want, not just about what we're against.

So, we also spend time talking about that, about what we're developing, about co-operative economics, about our relationship with the earth. Because even if we shift economic systems--if we were to destroy capitalism and replace it with a more egalitarian system such as socialism, for example--if we still see the earth as a commodity that we're exploiting, we're going to wind up still in a terrible situation. So, we're not just changing the economics, but we have to change how human beings see ourselves in relationship to each other and how human beings see ourselves in relationship to the earth. So, these kinda conversations for us are equally as important as the discussions about food security and food sovereignty. So, we take every opportunity when people come to the farm to hold those discussions, but also we go to other places. We go into churches. We go to schools. We go to block clubs. We do all kinda community organizing to make people aware of our work and the ideas that are driving our work.

[0:59:19]

**PB:** Dan Aldridge and I have this conversation from time to time about the liberated zones and about what the next steps are and what the visions are. So, I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about what your thoughts, your analysis is about that next step in the process from developing individual liberated zones, and then what that looks like scaled-up in terms of connecting between liberated zones?

**MY:** So, I want to be honest and say I don't have the answer, and I've been thinking about that question a lot in the last week, and the reality is that no one

has the answer because if they had it, they would have done it. Some people might make you think they have it, but, ya know, we're all trying to figure this out. What we're trying to figure out is, really, how do you make revolution inside of the most powerful country that the world has ever known? And, none of us have the answer to that. We're trying to...trying to figure it out as we go.

But in terms of my thoughts about what that might look like--so, the first thing is that you need...you need strong organizations and institutions on the local level in each kind of neighborhood. You can't--I don't believe in top-down organizing. So, it has to start from the bottom on the community level, and you have to have institutions that are actually serving people's needs, where people can see some improvement in their life as a result of the institution that exists that is kind of a people's institution. It can't just be rhetorical. And too often, activists are just into kinda the rhetoric of revolution and not really able to provide a higher quality of life for people.

So, one of the things that's valuable about D-Town Farm and other agricultural projects is it's not just rhetorical, that people can actually see the food being grown and can eat it, and their health can improve, and they can actually see in a concrete way the manifestation of these ideas that we're talking about. Then when people see where an institutional organization functions in their best interests, then they're willing to defend it because they see it as being theirs. If they don't see it as working in their best interests, they're not going to defend it and will just be subject to the...the attacks that are...are constant. So, that's one step.

But then on the local level, we need to figure out how we create coalitions and alliances so that we create a synergy that is larger than any of the individual liberated zones, and that might look like the sharing of resources, ya know, because organizations have to--ya know, you have to do accounting, you have to have people that keep notes, you have to have computers and telephones, and some of those things can be shared. Every organization doesn't necessarily have to have all of those things in place. Some of those things can be shared, and we can, ya know, make more...more use of our resources through sharing and collectivizing them.

But also the governance part, ya know, when you start trying to connect these liberated zones, then you have to figure out how do we govern these things? How do we make decisions collectively in a way that is fair and democratic? And, you know, that can be very...that can be a process that can create conflict because we have different views of the world and different analysis and different experiences. And so--but we have to struggle through that and find out how we build principled relationships with each other so that we can have principled differences and we can argue those differences in principled ways and try to build consensus when possible, if not consensus, try to build something that the majority can live with. So, we have to engage in this exercise of...of self governance.

And then, we need--because the problem is not just a local problem, but we need to then have alliances on the national level where we have folks across the country who have these coalitions of liberated zones that are then beginning to connect. And then also, the problem is global, so we can't--ya know, Malcolm X, for example, ad...advised Black people to internationalize our struggle, that you can't just look at it within the context of the United States because people all--Black and brown people throughout the world are faced with a very similar problem, and so we have to see how we build meaningful relationships with people in other parts of the world as well.

But, none of this is a short-term proposition. This is a long-term work. In fact, it's a multi-generational work, but we have to--ya know, Frantz Fanon talks...said something like, "Each generation out of relative obscurity must discover its own historical mission, fulfill it or betray it." So, the ball is in our court right now. The baton has passed to us. We have to do the very best that we can do, and then we pass the baton to the next generation.

But, what has happened--because capitalism is still fairly resilient, ya know. It's on decline, but it's not going to just collapse in the next two or three years. Because it's fairly resilient, they have been able to kinda offer rewards to people. And so when people are comfortable, generally they're not going to be as resistant to systems of oppression. People go back and keep calm and look at their big screen TV and, ya know, pop open a Budweiser and, ya know, jump on their cell phone, ya know? Then, the chances are they're not gonna be quite so resistant as if they

were actually, ya know, trying to figure out how do I get enough food in my belly for the next day?

So, capitalism realizes this and creates kinda these pressure release valves, and one of the ways that they do it is by allowing a certain number of people to attain a position within society that has a certain income and say, "Well, Michael Jordan did it. You can do it too!" Right? And, the reality is these are exceptions. The vast majority of Black people in the United States are living at or near the--or under the poverty line. And so, to point to these one or two exceptional individuals and say, "Well, they pulled themselves up and you can do it too!" is just a fallacy. And so--but it's a fallacy that keeps people striving for this kind of illusion.

And so, I think it's important that we...you know, again, that we...that we build and connect these liberated zones, build these alliances, connect internationally, carry the ball down the field as far as we can in this generation--in a rigorous way though, ya know, not just in a--like, Chairman Mao said in the--he had a book we used to read a lot in the [19]60s and [19]70s called "the Red Book," or "Quotations from Chairman Mao," I think it was called, but people called it "the Red Book," and one of the things that he said is that "Revolution is not a tea party." And so, we...we have to have a...a greater degree of seriousness, a greater degree of assertiveness, and a greater willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to bring about our freedom because if we're not willing to sacrifice, then the dominant system will always buy people off, right, and they'll always find ways to, ya know--and sometimes they might buy you off with money, or they might deter you by things like jail and killing people and things like that.

And so if you don't have a sense of being dedicated to your goal beyond any consequence, then you'll be stopped. So, Malcolm X said, "The price of freedom is death," and I'm not into some, ya know, revolutionary suicide thing that we should run out and engage in shoot outs with the police, but the reality is that we know that as we're building sovereignty and an alternative system that creates further justice and equity and distributes the wealth in a more equitable way, that we're going to come under attack. That's what has happened historically, and it's happening now. And so if people are not able to withstand those attacks, they'll just stop. And so, we have to have a certain resilience and a certain resolve within



ourselves that goes beyond whatever consequences that the people who are opposing us could impose on us.

[1:07:24]

**PB:** On that note, what kind of repression have you faced in your work in Detroit in general and particularly with the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network?

**MY:** [Swallows water] You know, I'm not sure that we faced any outright repression... I...I'd have to think about it. I don't want to say that absolutely hasn't happened. But, I'll say this, that we carry ourselves in such a way that people don't usually attack us outright, even verbally, right? They might go off in the corner and whisper somewhere, but they kinda feel like we're the kind of Black people that, ya know, that if you attack us there's gonna be some consequences, and that's how we like it, ya know? That's... In...in a war situation--and we are at war, frankly--in a war situation, you only have value at the negotiating table if you have troops in the field, and so we want those who would oppose what we are doing to feel that we have troops in the field and we are capable of exacting some consequences if people attack us. And, I'm not talking about, ya know, violence necessarily. Ya know, there's all kind of ways you can exact consequences, and--but, ya know, this is, ya know, this is what we think that the people who might oppose us need to feel.

So because they feel that kind of vibe from us, 'cause we're not kinda "turn the other cheek" kind of Black people, usually we don't feel outright opposition, ya know. Like, say people might be in the corner somewhere whispering or typing something on a computer, but, you know, it's subtle. It's always subtle. I mean, it's kinda baked into the fabric of society, and so it's not so much that, you know, I think people are meeting in back rooms saying, "How can we stop the Black Community Food Security Network?" It's more that built into the fabric of society these kind of structures that continue to concentrate power in those who already have it and...and dis-empower those who are striving for power, ya know. It's just kinda...it's on automatic pilot right now.

[1:09:36]

**PB:** So, when we're talking about building--...

**MY:** I'm good.

**PB:** ...like...

**MY:** Thank you though.

**PB:** ...like, through organizing--building these kind of liberated zones and raising consciousness when there are so many crises taking place in the city at this moment and over the past couple decades, whether it's water crises or foreclosure crises or school closings, what we're talking about, uniting people around and building this community of self determination and liberated zones, how do you--for folks that might not already have that connection--how do you make that connection between food sovereignty and all these other crises that are taking place and saying that this...this is something that we need to be organizing around?

**MY:** So, one of the things that I think is important that we always, in our conversation, connect the work of food sovereignty to the larger struggle, as I have in our conversation today, because the same forces that create injustice in the so called "criminal justice system," the same forces that oppress women, the same forces that want to build walls to keep migrants out of the United States, the same forces that create inferior schools, they are all the same factors. And so if we want to get to the root of the problem, then we have to really transform the system.

And so, the work of food--the particular work of food--becomes a vehicle for people being able to see the larger forces at play. They play out in the food

system, but those same forces play out in the way--the other ways that oppression manifests. And so in our conversation, we always have to make that connection so that people are seeing the bigger picture. Again, my friend Raj Patel says that, he says, "Local food tastes great, won't end white supremacy," right? So just because we have lots of local gardens, that's not going to destroy capitalism, it's not going to destroy white supremacy, but it becomes a window for people to begin to see how these forces play out within the particular system that we're working in. But, it's also a window into our own potential to transform ourselves and to transform the system. So, it's kinda... Ya know, there's a duality there.

[1:11:50]

**PB:** Just... Beyond that note of, ya know, urban gardens won't end white supremacy, what does white supremacy look like in the urban farming and urban agriculture scene in Detroit?

**MY:** You trying to get me to call names?

**PB:** If you want to you can, but I'm not going to push you on it. [laughs]

**MY:** Well, so there's many young whites moving into Detroit, and I'm not, ya know, I'm not condemning all young whites who move into the city of Detroit, but the problem is that most white people, so-called white people, have almost no analysis about the system of white supremacy and how it functions because they're not talked at, right, and they just, ya know, white people have the luxury of just moving through life and just "I'm just normal. I'm just moving." Black people don't have that luxury. Every time we step outside, we are confronted [claps hands for emphasis] with, ya know, the fact that we're different from the majority of the society. When you walking down the street and the police roll up, even if they don't stop you, you are acutely aware--if you're a Black man--you are acutely aware of the presence of the police near you 'cause you don't have the luxury of not being aware of that.

So, but white people, ya know, it's like the water they swim in, ya know. They just, ya know, just living life. They don't have to stop and do some in-depth analysis of the system of white supremacy and how they have internalized these concepts, and so most white people are very naive. In fact, I would go so far as to say that although I think most Black people are asleep to some extent, then I think white people are like in a coma, as a whole. Not every individual, ya know, either Black or white. Not every individual, but as a whole. I think most Black people even--you can go out here on the corner of Canfield and find an alcoholic, ya know, and he knows it's a...it's some shit in the game. He might not feel that he can do something to change the condition, but he knows it's not right. He knows that the deck is stacked against him and against his people. Most white people don't even see! They think it's just, "Everything is cool!" right? And so, they're in an even deeper coma than most Black people.

And so, the problem is then you have white people who have never been forced to confront what it means to be a white person in the society, what it means to internalize the concepts related to white supremacy, what it means to live out white privilege. Then, here they come wanting to do good and move into the city of Detroit, drop into the city of Detroit. And while on a certain level they might have good intentions, because their consciousness is so limited, they end up functioning in a way that is against the majority, against the aspirations of the majority of people.

Another thing is that because the school system is steeped in white supremacy and the history that we learn is overwhelmingly the history of white people, either white people from Europe or white people from America, that white people don't have to learn the history of Black people. And so, white people moving into the city of Detroit, most of them, if I...I could name names of organizations that were influential in Detroit in the last 50 years, they have...they would have no concept of what I was talking about, have done no study of the community that they are moving into, no study of the historical aspirations of the people. And so consequently, come in, drop in, parachute in, don't know in a sense where they're at.

In fact, sometimes, [laughs] we.... we have some white people coming to the farm, and we had one who was acting kinda stupid. We was like, "Do you know where

you at? You better look around and...and see what's going on." But, some just have no awareness. And so, coming with that kind of blindness, ya know--and part of that is arrogance also, right, feeling that I don't have to study the history of the area I'm moving into, I'm...I'm me, and I can just come in and do me, right? And so, that kind of arrogance and blindness causes many young white people to come to Detroit and act in a way that is in opposition to the best interests of the majority population. I forgot what the question you asked me was, but....

**PB:** Didn't matter. That response was perfect. [laughs]

**MY:** Okay. [laughs]

[1:16:03]

**PB:** [laughs] No, the question was about what rac--what white supremacy looks like in the food sovereignty scene.

**MY:** Oh yeah, that's what it was. That's what the question... I didn't get into food, I was just talking in general, right, about young white people. So, some of the young white people moving into Detroit are doing food work, and, ya know, I don't...I don't think that white people are a one-size-fits-all thing because some are doing a really good job at examining what this concept of whiteness means, and they have internalized it, and they are trying to act better, but they are the exceptions to the rule. A friend of mine, as a point of fact, said, ya know, "If there was a pit of snakes, and, ya know, two of the snakes were nice snakes that wouldn't bite you, would you stick your hand in there?" It's like, ya know, no. So, ya know, but that's not--I'm not saying that every white person is a...ya know, functioning in a way that is terrible. Some are better than others, but what I don't see as much as I'd like to see is those white people who do have some awareness of how the systemic oppression plays out talking to other white people and helping to transform them.

What I see often in white activists, they want to come into Black communities and transform us. Get the fuck outta here! We don't need you to transform us, go to your--in fact, there's some activists in North Carolina, they tell white people, "Get your cousins!" Ya know? Don't come in my neighborhood trying to transform me and my neighbors. Go to your...your family, your mother, your father, your uncles, your sisters, your people you went to school with and transform them 'cause that's where the problem is. So, I don't see enough of that happening. I'd like to see more of that, ya know, the white people who are trying to transform themselves really make it a mission to help transform the other people that they are in relationship with.

**PB:** I mean, that's something that Malcolm raised at the end of his autobiography, that's something that people have been raising for generations.

**MY:** Yeah, it's not a new concept. It's not a new concept.

[1:18:02]

**PB:** This is in a different direction. Could you talk a little bit about the work that the public policy committee of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network has done?

**MY:** Sure. So, that actually was an ad hoc committee that doesn't even exist anymore. But when we first started Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, although we are totally committed to the community doing for ourselves, we also think government should behave in a responsible manner. So, we wanted to create the policy environment that would allow our group and other groups to do the kind of things with agriculture and food that we thought should be done. And so, we first began to research food policies in many cities throughout North America, and we started writing a food policy, a food security policy, for the city of Detroit. That took us about 18 months to do. We were able to get that passed unanimously by the Detroit City Council in 2008.

Then, we began to look at structuring the Detroit Food Policy Council. The policy that was passed in 2008 called for the creation of the Detroit Food Policy Council. So, we began to look at--we looked at 18 food policy councils throughout North America--predominantly in the United States, but a few in Canada in Vancouver and Toronto--and we looked at how they were structured and their relationship to the municipal government, and we gleaned all of that information and proposed the structure for the Detroit Food Policy Council. We also then had a huge public listening session in Eastern Market where we had--I don't remember how many--ya know, a couple hundred people showed up and voiced their views. And to the extent possible, we incorporated those. Ya know, you can't always incorporate all the views of people in a 200 people audience--200 person audience 'cause some of those views are oppositional to each other. But as much as possible, we incorporated that into the document we were developing on the structure and purpose and function of the Detroit Food Policy Council. And so, we were able to--we submitted this document after gleaning all these ideas from the public and from the 18 cities throughout North America. We submitted these recommendations to the Detroit City Council. It was again unanimously approved, and the Detroit Food Policy Council was seated in November of 2009.

I was elected the first chair. To tell you the truth, after we kinda got it started, I wanted to step away because policy is really not my area. I'm much more what can we do on the people level, ya know. Some people like dealing with policy. That's not really what I like. I really ended up doing that work because some other people in that organization had kinda fallen off, and I had to pick the ball up and carry it to the end zone. But--so, I really wanted--I chaired the convening committee that put together the bylaws and selected the candidates for the Detroit Food Policy Council, and I really wanted to step off at that point, but several of the people on the convening committee convinced me that I was uniquely positioned to be able to lead it because seemingly many people from many different viewpoints respected me and respected the work of our organization.

So, I kinda reluctantly said, "Okay, I'll stay." I chaired the Food Policy Council for the first two years, and then I was term limited out of office. We built term limits in it so that we don't have the same kind of stale leadership but so that we are intentionally fostering new leadership. Then, I stayed on it for another two years,

and I stepped down I think in 2013 or so to really focus on this project of the Detroit People's Food Co-op.

So, that's been, basically, the extent of our involvement in Detroit public policy. We also had representatives on the Michigan Food Policy Council when it existed, so I was on that prior to the Detroit Food Policy Council, and we had another member when I stepped down from that who we got appointed to the Michigan Food Policy Council, but the last governor of Michigan, [Rick] Snyder, abolished the Michigan Food Policy Council a couple of years ago.

[1:22:09]

**PB:** What kind of impacts did you see the Detroit Food Policy Council or the Michigan Food Policy Council have in your community or in the city or at large?

**MY:** Not--certainly not the kinda impact that we had envisioned it would have. The Michigan Food Policy Council, I was disappointed at, and it was in many ways an arm of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and didn't seem to have the kinda independence that we thought was necessary in order to, you know, speak out when necessary against the government itself.

And so--and one of the things that--I mentioned that we looked at 18 food policy councils around North America as we were structuring the Detroit Food Policy Council, and one of the things we were concerned about was the relationship of the Food Policy Council to the city government because we knew that we might have to come out and be in opposition to the city, so we didn't want to be under the city's thumb. So, we kinda created a unique strategy. Because on one level, we wanted the approval of the city council to give it legitimacy, and so we wrote the bylaws in such a way that the city council approved the first 21 candidates--or the first 18 candidates. Three were appointed. One was appointed by the Mayor's office, one by the city council, and one by the Health Department. The other 18 candidates represented different sectors within the food system. So, we got the city council to approve these 18 candidates to give them legitimacy, but then in the bylaws after that first appointment, the food policy council elected its own



members, and so we didn't have to go back to the city council. So, we were looking on one hand for the legitimacy of the staff of the city council and on the other hand not to be under the thumb of the city council or another aspect of city government in case we had to be critical.

So, I am a bit disappointed, I have to tell you, with how the Detroit Food Policy Council has evolved, and I love the people who are leading it, and I think they have wonderful hearts. I just would like to see a bit more militancy in the way the work is framed because my experience has been that with city government they move--and this goes back to the earlier conversation about you only have strength at the negotiation table if you have troops in the field. And so if there's no implied threat, if there is no feeling that, ya know, something that we don't want to happen might happen if we're not supportive of these particular things, then there is no counterbalance. And so, I'm not seeing the troops in the field. I'm not seeing the more militant framing that I would like to see, but, then again, this is not to condemn my brothers and sisters who I love who are running the Detroit Food Policy Council. So--and...and specifically as a result of that and as a result of many other factors, I'm not sure that these policy bottle--bodies have concretely impacted people's day-to-day life in the city of Detroit. I don't know that the average person sees anything different happening in their life now since we have a food policy council than they did before that. Perhaps that will change. I am hopeful.

[1:25:41]

**PB:** Do you attribute that to the limitations of that kind of body and that kind of policy in and of itself or the way that that kind of body has been carried out?

**MY:** I think it's both. I think it's both. I mean, ya know, there's certainly some limitations to the structure of it itself, but also, ya know, the framing and the language that's used, again, I would just like to see it be a bit more militant in its opposition to injustice and a bit less nice and fluffy, that kinda thing. That's my personal opinion, so.

[1:26:34]

**PB:** Sure. You mentioned that you had studied 18 cities, ...

**MY:** Yes.

**PB:** ...and I think in our last conversation you mentioned some relationships that you had with Cooperation Jackson.

**MY:** Yes.

**PB:** Could you talk a little bit about what those connections are between Jackson [Mississippi] and Detroit? What kind of sharing has gone on and lessons learned or--and how that's been put into praxis in both cities?

**MY:** I can speak a little on it and just say that there's been a long relationship between Black folks in Detroit and Black folks in Jackson, Mississippi. Part of my earliest activism was 1969 or 1970. Three students who attended Jackson State University were killed by police officers, and I organized a protest at the junior high school I was going to at the time. So, that's just one connection.

There's an organization that began here in Detroit in 1968 called the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika, and this was started by several Black nationalists, including two who were here from Detroit, Milton Henry, who was known as Gaidi [Obadele], and his brother Richard Henry, who was known as Imari Obadele, and they were two of the key people in convening at The 20 Grand Motel, which was also--it had a club attached to the nightclub, and Parliament-Funkadelic played there all the time and a lot of the Motown acts, so it was kind of a cultural center in Detroit's Black community.

But, they convened many Black nationalist activists from throughout the country, and their position was that there will never be justice for Black people inside of American society and that the best route that we can take for freedom was to have an independent state where we had a landmass that would secede from the United States government, would have its own president, its own governing body, its own flag, its own laws. And so, they created what they called The Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika. They identified five states in the South as being the national territory: Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and I think parts of--and Louisiana.

And so, this idea really, perhaps in some ways, evolved from an older idea that the Communist Labor Party and other groups had about what they call "the Black Belt South" or "the Negro Black Belt." And so, there were many groups who kinda had this idea, and that's because of the concentration of Black people in those areas, and there are still many counties, at least at that time and still to...up till the present day, many counties that are still majority Black populations. And so, they felt that by focusing our efforts in these majority Black areas that we could win public support, hold what they call a plebiscite, a vote where they would decide either yes, I want to continue to be a part of the United States, or I want to secede and be a part of this new government, the Republic of New Afrika, and that then there would have to be an armed struggle where the Black Legion, the military wing of the Republic of New Africa, would engage in armed struggle with the United States Army and military apparatus and would then liberate this land, and there would be this independent Black nation.

So, that was their view, and they convened in Detroit. And again, two of the key members were from Detroit as well as a number of the other people whose names are not as well known, and they began making trips to Jackson, Mississippi, which they identified as kinda the headquarters of this Black nation that they wanted to bring into being. And so around 1970, maybe [19]71--and forgive me for not remembering the exact year--several members of the Republic of New Afrika were in their headquarters, a house they had obtained in Jackson, Mississippi, and the police attacked them, and there was a shootout. And, ya know, again, these were Black folks who--they were not followers of Martin Luther King, and so if they were shot at, they were shooting back. And so, 11 people were arrested and incarcerated and were called the RNA 11. One of them was Imari Obadele, who was the president of the Republic of New Afrika. Also, another one

is a friend of mine named Addis Ababa who lives in Inkster [Michigan] and continues to do organizing in the Detroit area and several others.

And so, they were...they were put in prison, and there was a whole campaign around getting them out of prison. And so, that was another relationship between Detroit and Jackson. Chokwe Lumumba joined. He wasn't an original member of the Republic of New Afrika, but he joined the Republic of New Afrika. In fact, we had an interesting story at our farm one day last year. A sister named Imara Hyman, who was one of our organization's members and volunteers at our farm, was at the farm one day, and we had another brother Alfonso Pugh, who was a plumber who was doing some work on one of our hydrants at the farm, and I introduced them, and I said, "Well, you all are about the same age. You probably been in some of the same circles."

Find out they were both in the Republic of New Afrika at the same time, and two interesting things came out. Imara said she was in the Republic of New Afrika's office--it was either on Dexter or Linwood. I can't remember--when Chokwe Lumumba walked in for the first time and signed up, and she signed him up as a member. But, the other thing they talked about, they were both in New Bethel Church, the church pastored by Reverend C. L. [Clarence LaVaughn] Franklin, Aretha Franklin's father, when it was attacked by the Detroit police department. There was a famous shootout there called the New Bethel Incident, and again the police attacked it, attacked it. The Black Legionnaires shot back. I think one of the police officers was shot, or maybe more than one. I can't recall. The police raided the place, took a lot of people out, and put them in...put them in jail. In fact, I think they were held in a garage or something, and then Judge George Crockett convened court right there in the garage of the police station and ended up releasing a lot of those people. But, that was a very famous incident, kinda, in Detroit history.

[1:33:15]

But anyway, back to Chokwe Lumumba. So, Chokwe eventually became vice president of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika. And at some point, I think he had some differences, some strategic differences with the

leadership of the Republic of New Afrika in terms of how the New Afrikan independence movement should proceed. And so, he became a co-founder of what was called the New Afrikan People's Organization, and they were much more into organizing people in urban areas throughout the city to support the strategy of liberating the Black nation in the south, and then out of the New Afrikan People's Organization, an even more mass-base organization called the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and both of these organizations had a significant presence in Detroit. My good friend and brother who just made his transition to being an ancestor, Kwame Kenyatta, ran the Detroit Malcolm X Community Center on Dexter right near Davison, which is run by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and he was also a prominent member of the New Afrikan People's Organization.

So within the New Afrikan People's Organization, there was decisions made by leadership that several of the members would move from the cities they were living in to the South. And so, I don't remember the exact year but maybe [19]85, [19]86, [19]87, in that time period, Chokwe Lumumba packed up his family, moved to Jackson, Mississippi so he could be in what they called the "national territory." And so--and several other people did the same thing. And then some years later, a plan was developed called the Jackson-Kush Plan, and it kinda outlined this effort that they wanted to...wanted to institute and sign what they call the Kush district where they would have co-operative economies, they would utilize the electoral political process to gain seats in the government. And as a result of that, Chokwe was eventually elected to the city council in Jackson, Mississippi. He served on the city council then was eventually elected to be the mayor of Jackson. He died while in office. And then in the election following, someone else was elected. The next election, his son Chokwe Antar Lumumba, who was also born in Detroit but was maybe only three years old when his family left Detroit, was elected mayor, and he's the mayor currently.

Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the current mayor's sister Rukia Lumumba, who's an attorney, was also born in Detroit and actually was in a class I taught at Aisha Shule, the first African-centered school here in Detroit. She was in the same class with my daughter. So, she is also from Detroit. She was the campaign manager for her brother in Jackson. Again, just trying to make these connections between Detroit and Jackson. And so, Cooperation Jackson is an organization that, from my understanding, is developed kinda out of this Jackson-Kush plan, and they are particularly dedicated to cooperatives and also to creating processes for self

governance. And so, they institute a lot of what they call people's assemblies, which have been done in other parts of the country as well, but--and participatory budgeting to try to mobilize the population of the city of Jackson to support these efforts to create greater self determination.

Now unfortunately, a couple of years ago a split occurred between the Lumumba administration and Cooperation Jackson. In fact, the headquarters of Cooperation Jackson was called the Lumumba Center. After the Lumumba family asked that the name be taken off of the building--and Rukia Lumumba was in fact the board president of Cooperation Jackson--she and the other board members resigned, and I don't think this rift has been healed, and I'm not placing blame on either side, but just to say that there are different opinions about how we should move forward, and I think there was some real differences about how Chokwe Antar Lumumba was moving, and maybe folks feeling that maybe he was not moving in tune with this larger plan. But again, I haven't talked to all the parties involved, so I am kinda just giving my opinion from looking at it from afar. But, there has been this long history of connection between Detroit and Jackson.

So, several people from Detroit have been to Cooperation Jackson, and in fact I was there in 2017 with the national organization--I'm part of the National Black Food and Justice Alliance which Cooperation Jackson is also a part of. Detroit--when I say I'm a member, I mean Detroit Black Community Food Security Network. And so, they run a small farm there, and, ya know, we got the chance to look at their farm and give them some advice. The chief farmer from Cooperation Jackson has been to D-Town Farm a few times and has seen some of the techniques, and we've had multiple conversations. And so, there's all kind of exchanges about agriculture. There's been significant cooperation between Blair Evans and his group Incite Focus and his development Fab Labs using 3D printers and laser cutters and things like that, and Cooperation Jackson--in fact, he's been working with him to set up some of that in a facility owned by Cooperation Jackson. So, there's been significant kinda cross-pollinization between what's happening in Detroit and what's happening in Jackson.

[1:39:10]

**PB:** What becomes really clear to being in conversation with you is how grounded in history and historical analysis your thought is.

**MY:** I'm old.

**PB:** [Laughs]

**MY:** That's what that is. [Laughs]

**PB:** But, not all elders have that same kind of analysis, so. So, I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about what the importance of that kind of historical analysis is for your political thought and your organizing work, and maybe you could project a little little bit about more generally why that kind of historical knowledge is essential for organizing?

**MY:** Ya know, many of us who are striving to improve the condition for Black people might define ourselves as being African-centered, that part of what we are trying to do is decolonize our minds and try to look at some of the traditional values that provided the under-girding for African cultures. And so, I often draw on African cultures to illustrate points I'm trying to make, which is what I'm about to do now.

And so, in ancient Egypt, or what more correctly is called ancient Kemet, they had a school that sometimes is called the mystery school where people would go and study there for 40 years, and they had a Grand Lodge. Or at the major schools at the big university, we had up to 40,000 people studying at one time. The Grand Lodge is in a place--was in a place--that is now called Luxor [Egypt] if you were to look on a map. Back in the day when ancient Khemet was at its height, it would have been called Wa Set, and it had subordinate universities at various places throughout the world, and this is really how philosophy and many other sciences were spread throughout the world. But when you first entered the school, for the first few years, you would be a scribe, and what you would do is you would just copy

the writings of the people who had come before you. That's all you would do. For years, just master that.

So similarly, to answer your question--or let me give even another example. If you want to be a jazz saxophonist, you have to go back. You have to listen to Charlie Parker. You have to listen to John Coltrane. You have to listen to Ornette Coleman. You have to listen to Sonny Stitt. You have to listen to that tradition and absorb it. Then once you have absorbed it, you can extend it. And so similarly with political work, if you're not grounded in what happened in the past, then you can't extend it in a way which pays tribute to what--and builds on--what has happened in the past.

So, it's critical that we study the immediate history of political activism in Detroit and other parts of the United States, but also globally. I think Malcolm X advised us to do this. In fact, he said that, "If you have a problem, you look around the world at people who have a similar problem, and you see what they did to solve their problem. You'll know what you have to do to solve yours." You have to study what other people have done. Although this is a unique situation we find ourselves in, many aspects of it are similar to what people throughout the world are faced with and have been faced with and have addressed. And so, the study of history, particularly the history of activism--but not just activism in isolation because activism is influenced by the context in which it operates, so you have to have some understanding of the factors that impact and cause that activism. And so, it is extremely important that we are grounded in a historical understanding.

But at the same time, it's important that we not be anchored to history. So, it's a delicate balance. And often, grapple with this idea in human culture, the tension that exists between tradition and progress. Because on one level, you do need tradition. Every generation can't start anew. You have to start on what's been done in the past, but you can't be so anchored into the past that you can't move forward. And so, you need both tradition and progress simultaneously. And, ya know, I guess in every human culture, there's been some tension, ya know, people who want to hold on to the old ways and other people come and see a new way of doing it want to move on. So, the question is how do you do both simultaneously? How do you find yourself grounded in history but still being future-focused?



[1:43:44]

**PB:** And, I think to wrap up, what's... What is that vision? What does that future focus look like in your thoughts, and how does that guide the work that you are doing presently?

**MY:** So, I would say for myself as an individual, my activism is rooted in a deep sense of spirituality, that the physical world is only one part of this whole reality, and that the deeper and more enduring part is really what we might call the spiritual aspect. And so, if we only approach the work from a materialistic view, I think we are missing part of the boat. And, for me, this is one of the shortcomings of Marxism, that it is...it's rooted in this idea of dialectical historical materialism that, you know, only looking at how systems evolve in the material world. And while that's important, it's not that whole scenario. And, most Indigenous people have this understanding of unseen forces. They have an understanding of ancestors and ancestors still being present and accessible and...and being able to access the wisdom of those ancestors. And so, for me, that's also important as we are changing the paradigm, that we not just look at it on a material level but we also be rooted in a sense of spirituality.

I think the spirituality is also important because we don't want to replicate systems of oppression just changing the people who are in charge. And so if we don't have a deep sense of spirituality that sees our connection to the whole, then we stand the possibility of doing that. So, that would be the first aspect of kind of how I see the future, that if we are to survive as a species that we have to increase our sense of spirituality and our understanding of our interconnectedness not only to other human beings but our interconnectedness up to all of creation.

The other thing that I would like to see in the future is systems that respect the Earth as a living entity that we are in a symbiotic relationship with. Earth is not just a commodity for us to pull minerals out of the ground or have trees to cut to make wood, ya know. It's not just something to extract from, but we have to be in relationship with it in a way that meets our needs but also doesn't damage the

earth and, when possible, heals the earth. That's part of what we're doing at D-Town Farm, in fact, with our farming. It's not only organic, but it's regenerative. It's actually building topsoil. So, we're helping to heal the damage that's been done to the earth. But so, we have to have that in our consciousness. It's not just about creating equity for human beings, but it's about creating a healthy planet on which we live. The context in which we live has to be health if we are going to be here for the long term and future generations of humans and plants and animals benefit from the planet on which we live.

Thirdly, ya know, human beings create systems on the earth that govern and that decide how resources are distributed. And so, for me, it would derive logically that if we see each other as being an extension of ourselves and we see ourselves as being interconnected, then this idea of amassing wealth in the hands of a few individuals is not something that is fair and just. Then, we need to find how we create systems that ensure that everyone's needs are met and everyone has the possibility of reaching their full human potential. Now, I'm going to tell you the truth. I have almost no hope that in this country enough white people will come to this realization that Black people should have any sense that our future should be dependent upon whether white people come to a sense of their humanity or not. I certainly hope that many more do, but I--frankly, from history, I have no faith that that's going to happen in significant numbers. I hope I'm proven wrong, let me say that, but I just don't have much confidence that is going to happen.

And so, I think in the face of that, in the face of this overwhelming kind of sense of lack of awareness of privilege and power on the part of white people, that what Black people have to do is we have to build institutions that build our power in order to protect ourselves and advance our interests. And so, I would like to see more of that, more power building on the part of Black and brown people throughout the world so that we can build societies that are just and protect our own interests as we are moving forward.

And, there's many different aspects of that. I don't think we have time to go into that with education, ya know, how that's framed, ya know, coming out of this Euro-centric paradigm where 90 percent of what we learn in schools comes from people from Western Europe, ya know. It would deal with policing and the so-called criminal justice system. It would deal with relationships between

genders and, ya know, stopping this crazy oppression of women and, ya know, negating the value of effeminate energy, ya know. In fact, if we are to survive as a species, patriarchy has to be destroyed, frankly, because much of...much of what can save us is embodied within effeminate energy and within the wisdom that the feminine holds. And so because of suppression of that, not only are women are suppressed, but also inside of men this feminine energy inside of us that can help us to be whole and embrace our intuition, embrace our wisdom is also suppressed. And so, men can't be whole within a patriarchal system in the same sense that white people can't be whole with--inside of a white supremacist system.

If white people are oppressing Black people, then they are oppressing part of themselves as well on multiple levels, including on the genetic level, because all white people come from Black people, right? So, ya know, people used to think that Elijah Muhammad was crazy when he said that, but we got all kinda genetic evidence now that every human being on the face of the earth if you go far enough back in their mitochondrial DNA, you're going to get to a Black woman. And so, there's this crazy psychic thing going on when white people oppress Black people because there's also part of themselves that they are suppressing as well, so they can't be whole.

And so, ya know, my hope is that humanity will elevate its consciousness soon enough that we don't destroy ourselves and destroy the planet in the--and maybe I shouldn't say destroy the planet, but I will say damage the planet significantly enough that it would take hundreds of thousands of years to regenerate and to be inhabitable by human beings, plants, and animals. So, ya know, that's my hope for the future. Of course, ya know, all that stuff is probably not going to happen in my lifetime, so we move the ball down the field as far as we can, and we try to be the best example of being a human being as we can and generate that energy and try to spread that energy to others. And then, the next generation carries the ball further.

**PB:** Is there anything that we didn't cover that you want to get on the record?

**MY:** Nope. [chuckles]

[1:51:22]

**PB:** [laughs] Thank you.

**Herbert Taylor [HT]:** I've got a question for you.

**MY:** Yep.

**HT:** Where specifically is D-Town Farms?

**MY:** It's on West Outer Drive between Plymouth and West Chicago. It's on the western edge of Rouge Park.

**HT:** Thank you.

**MY:** Thank you. So, they subjected you to all this?

**Sydney Sinclair [SS]:** Me? I'm taking notes.

**MY:** I mean, but they subjected you to all this like radical rhetoric, white supremacist--anti-white supremacist...

**SS:** I don't know; I think I hear it a lot when I'm working, so.

**MY:** Okay. Well, good.

**SS:** It's not--I'm really enjoying it.

**MY:** Okay, good.

**SS:** It was great. Thank you.

**MY:** Good. You know, usually people don't feel lukewarm about it. Either they like me, or they don't. [all laugh] So. [slaps legs]

**PB:** You gave us a lot to think about.

**MY:** I'm thinking a lot about...about a lot of stuff myself, so I'm just, you know--and I think I told you before, doing this kind of thing gets me to reflect and think about my own thoughts. So, it's...it's helpful 'cause a lot of stuff is in my head and I'm trying to, you know. I mean, none of us has the answer, frankly. We're trying to figure it out.

**PB:** Right.

**MY:** So.

**PB:** My hope is that by sharing between each other where we're at with our thought processes that we can help each other to get there.

**MY:** Yeah. Yep. Yep. Yep.

[1:52:40]

**HT:** Do you write? Like, whether it's autobiography-type stuff or... [Malik laughs] fiction or food related?

**MY:** Yes. Yes, yes, yes, and yes, but the problem is I'm so freaking busy. I've been trying to work on a book for some years, but I'm just so busy just having the time just to sit down and finish it has been problematic. So, I have several chapters done, but, you know, I'm in...I'm in the thick of it. What I think I need is I need a grad student who's gonna sit down with me, and I can just talk like this, and they'll like, "Oh, yeah. Da da da da da," [mimes writing] and craft it into chapters 'cause right now I'm not sitting down still enough long enough to really get through it, you know. Maybe once we get this co-op built, maybe I'll be a little bit like--in fact, what I would like to do is get some kind of grant, a fellowship or something like that, maybe for a year where I can figure out how, you know, to pay me so I can eat and keep a roof over my head.

But, I have like all these archives from 1969 to the present day--flyers and posters and stuff I've written and records and tapes, and I used to work at WEMU radio station, and I got fired from there in 1978 'cause we were challenging the station 'cause we said that airwaves belong to the people and so we were bringing people in from the community into the radio station training them to use the radio station and, you know, all this kind of thing. And so as a result of that challenge, I got put off the air. So, the night they fired me--I still had a key--we went in and took out all our tapes, and I still have these, like, 12-inch tapes, boxes and boxes and boxes [slaps legs] of all these radio shows I did. I've got all this video tape I've shot over the years, stuff I shot in Africa.

So anyway, I got a lot of valuable information. I want to get a fellowship so I can sit down, first catalog what I have and then try to make some meaning of what does all this stuff mean? You know, how do I put it in some kind of fashion? And so, a book is one part of it, but I want to do a lot of different things or at least have this stuff organized. If I don't live long enough, somebody else can take it in. Somebody can, you know, derive meaning from it and hopefully move the struggle forward in some kind of way. [clears throat]

**PB:** I've got somebody I would love to introduce you to who--her name is Marcia Black. You might already know her. She works with BYP [Black Youth Project] 100, but she's getting her degree in archiving and so she's very invested in kind of reimagining the way that we do archiving and...

**MY:** I would love to meet her.

**PB:** ...liberate, liberatory framework.

**MY:** I would love to meet her.

**PB:** So would you mind if I...

**MY:** I would love--

**PB:** ...put you in touch?

**MY:** Please put me in touch. Thank you.

**PB:** Okay.

**MY:** Thank you.

[1:55:37]

**HT:** So, I have one more for you.

**MY:** Yes.

**HT:** So, if we were speaking straight to a young person between the ages of, let's say, 12 through 20. What is the number one reason why we should take care of the Earth?

**MY:** Speaking to a young person between 12 and 20... You know, first of all, when people ask me things like "What's the...what's the number one?" or "What's the top?," I just don't think like that 'cause I don't ever see stuff as being singular. It's always this web of interrelated stuff. So whenever people ask me questions like that, I have a hard time. But, I mean, I probably would give some examples that they have seen in their lifetime like the poisoning of the water in Flint [Michigan] and the impact that lead is having on children and will probably continue to have for the rest of their lives. I would probably give examples about incinerators, like in the city of Detroit, and you could show statistics where asthma rates have increased astronomically where you have...where you have incinerators in neighborhoods. I would probably give examples of illnesses that could be controlled by food, but because of the poor quality of food in our neighborhoods--which is also related to the environment.

Those kind of--you know, I try to give people examples they can actually see and they've experienced so they can kind of make a connection to these broader concepts. So, I probably would share some things like that and then maybe get into some...you know, some of the more esoteric things about our relationship to the Earth and this and that and this and that. But usually, unfortunately, people are motivated by how things impact them directly, not by deep philosophical concepts. Some people are into deep philosophical concepts, but most want to know how does this affect my daily life, you know.

**HT:** Thank you.

**MY:** Thank you.