


Article

Cultural Community Wealth: Project Pride (People Re-Collecting Insightful Data Effervescently) a Commemorative MEMorial Black Collective in Trenton, NJ

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Abstract: Presently, an insurgence is taking place in which Blacks are reclaiming Black bodies, Black community history, and Black responsibility. I employed the theoretical concepts of Cultural Community Capital and the conceptualization of two vectors—the vector of similarity and continuity, and the vector of difference and rupture. I positioned genealogy as a collective familial history that is integrated and aligned through ancestral roots and development as—“We as one, a village, are one.” Using narrative inquiry, I collected the stories of four Elders and showed how they positioned their bodies, their communal spaces, and their histories as an ancestral community family in relation to the city of Trenton, New Jersey. I define Elders as those 65 and older who serve as present-day sites of wisdom and historical knowledge and chose them as a sign of respect and honor. This paper provides a unique positioning as it gives voice to Elders (ages 68–99) and provides insight into the intricacies and dehumanizing components of enslavement coupled with a determination to thrive. These are stories that one will never experience through White-washed, indoctrinated, and sanitized history books.

Keywords: collective memory; cultural capital; critical community familial history; narrative; black

1. Introduction

My aim in this project was to obtain the oral histories of four Elders from Trenton in an attempt to analyze the tenets of cultural and community wealth (Yosso 2005) in regard to how the four Elders viewed their city. Writing their stories, framed from how they positioned them, allowed me to both see and hear how they positioned themselves, their history, identities, and that of their community. After analyzing these stories of the four Trenton elders and other stories to be obtained, my hope is to build a commemorative community MEMorial (O'Brien 2019). According to O'Brien (2019), we must move from memory and memorial to MEMorial in order to disrupt the Whiteness of history and the his-story-telling of communities and include those who have suffered real loss. MEMorials begin by recognizing this abject loss that exists within racialized spaces that refused to accept a community's loss and sacrifice due to its own whitestream value structures, beliefs, and ideologies. This MEMorial will serve as the counternarrative to all of the stagnant, White cultured storytelling that occurs in this city. Presently, an African American historical document containing three centuries of historical sites from the 1800s is written about Trenton but could be perceived to have been “invisible in plain sight” (Crenshaw 1990). Although it recognizes a prominent Black history of the city, I heard little to no conversation around this topic in my eight years of organizing in the city. Although I do not know where it is officially housed, I am happy to know that the document is available online. While this city is often painted through a deficit lens, the voices of these Elders would serve as a counter to this

oft-painted narrative. In this introduction, I briefly discuss the history of Trenton, the importance of collective memory, and my positionality in relationship to this project.

2. Background of Trenton, New Jersey

The study was conducted in the capital of the state of New Jersey (NJ), Trenton. Trenton is often referred to as “The Capital City,” and its residents refer to themselves as Trentonians. Trenton is approximately eight square miles, and close to 85,000 people reside within the city limits (Trenton 2017). Trenton was once known as a “booming city” as it was a major manufacturing center in the country. In the 1910s, the slogan “Trenton Makes the World Takes” was created via a Chamber of Commerce contest (Wojdyla 2014) and is still in existence today. During the 1920s, items such as steel, rubber, wire, rope, linoleum, and ceramics were highly produced (Sporcle Blog 2019). Trenton, NJ holds a great deal of history from a White lens, and the knowledge of the rich history of Blacks thriving is often ignored. A time when Blacks were thriving is what Trentonians refer to as the Black Wall Street. Black Trentonians equate their story to that of the infamous Black Wall Street of Tulsa, Oklahoma, where racial violence destroyed an African American community seen as a threat to white-dominated capitalism (Fain 2017).

Although the story of Trenton, NJ is generally framed from its establishment in 1679 and framed from a historical lens of white men and Quaker(s), prior to the 1600s, Indigenous people owned all of New Jersey (Ditmire 2000). The Lenni Lenape tribe was the tribe residing throughout NJ, including Trenton (Ditmire 2000). Many in this city make it a point to discuss and celebrate the history of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin as they passed through Trenton, while others highlight people such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall, and James Brown as ones who frequented the city. Celebrities such as singers Sarah Dash and Nona Hendryx, poet and playwright Ntozake Shange, NFL and NBA players Troy Vincent and Malachi Richardson, and politician David Dinkins were all born in the city of Trenton. It is also imperative to note that Trenton played a vital role in setting the precedence for *Brown v. Board of Education* (Bell 2004) (the landmark case in legalizing desegregation), and a school, Hedgepath-Williams, stands tall as a commemoration of the struggle for equality and equity in education.

3. Positionality

Positionality refers to my stance in relation to the social/political context of how I view the conditions related to a study alongside my agency and action. Positionality recognizes that my race, privilege, and upbringing may not be relevant, but serves as a conduit to be acknowledged in that all factors serve as a means of context and fluidity (Walton et al. 2019). Positionality situates me the researcher as an instrument of my own research, which impacts how I view my findings (Crotty 1998). As a responsible and accountable researcher, I must inform my audience of my researcher identity by providing my epistemological and ontological learnings as all of my identity and its shaping informs my process, my study, my being, and the way I view knowledge creation, being, and truth (Cox 2012).

Personal Positionality

My positionality in relation to this project is one of a Black female Ph.D. student in an Urban education discipline program. I serve as a community organizer and an advocate/activist and have had the privilege of serving in the Capital City of NJ, Trenton. While serving in Trenton, I have seen the abandoned buildings, I have been no stranger to the number of funerals of young students, and I have heard the voices of the struggles of others, yet I saw and see hope, a forced resilience, and a determination to progress—assets versus deficits.

As an unapologetic Black, cis-gendered, female Ambassador (known as Christian to many), I position my being through my lived experiences. These social identities have informed and governed my dominant epistemologies. I learned and witnessed race, racism, and systems early in life from both a Black and a White GRANDmother along with a proud, Black father. With this knowledge, I

know that knowledge is not only power but also knowledge, like race, is constructed and political (Gordon 2010). It is situational and culturally dependent and informs my ideology regarding how I perceive truth.

As a racialized and minoritized female, I have a responsibility to dismantle and disrupt racist ways of knowing and “decolonizing knowledge” (Almeida 2015, p. 99) along with decolonizing methodologies (Smith 2013).

4. Collective Memory

Collective memory is an instrument that fosters the fashioning of self-identity and historical cultural norms and concepts (Boyer and Wertsch 2009). It is an ancient lineage technique that integrates the past and the present (Danziger 2009). Collective memories aid in the building of MEMorials, a concept formulated by Gregory Ulmer’s “problems be us” framing (O’Brien 2019). This framing builds memories through community engagement using the stories of a community whose voices are often never considered and, unlike traditional memory studies, pushes one to look inward at history versus outward, shifting from a memorial to a MEMorial (O’Brien 2019). I am using the Elder’s stories to represent a group and a history that has been marginalized, disenfranchised, and silenced. The collective memories of the Elders of Trenton serve to disrupt hegemonic historical narratives of the past and provide an instrument of knowledge to address the present and the future state of the city. These stories and others will be the blueprint for the present-day sojourners as they move forward in (re)building the city. Collective memories are also instrumental as a means of constructing self-identity; they are aspirational in that they promote hope and dreams, they strengthen the bonds of family and community kinship, and they are linguistic as these memories of culture speak and bridge all forms of literacy. Socially, in many African and/or African American cultures, collective memory generally speaks to the understanding of united forces and resources that aided in their resilience and resistance to settler colonialism. This resistance against settler colonialism is the transgression necessary to destabilize racialized histories in order to build freedom (hooks 2014) (Hartman 2008). These oral histories of the Elders serve as that of individual and collective aspirational capital.

Those that have been oppressed and/or enslaved understand that their unheard stories, their invisible narratives, and their powerful voices both individually and collectively are paramount not only to the struggle but also as forms of liberation and resistance (Delgado 1989, p. 2436). Audre Lorde (1977) refers to this liberation as an “act of self-revelation that transforms silence into language” necessary for life itself. Without this life, we allow the dominant culture and its oppressors to continue the various forms of spirit murder (Erevelles and Minear 2010) relinquished upon our bodies.

I began my information journey by seeking to interview four Elders from Trenton, NJ as a means of leaving a legacy, as many of the respected Elders are passing. Yet upon presenting the one interview question, “What does it mean to be from Trenton,” my interviews evolved more into the non-traditional genre used by those traditionally silenced and marginalized (Pratt-Clarke 2012): storytelling. Moreover, I witnessed storytelling as not only a space of linguistic capital (Yosso 2005) but also as a releasing of white (em)bodied supremacy and healing (Menakem 2017). Each Elder answered the question and immediately began sharing and pouring out their detailed history while crossing in and out time and history and I sat attentively listening to my village, my ancestral history, my being.

In the future, these stories and others will become part of a digitalized museum, a MEMorial (O’Brien 2019), and Black “critical cultural community consciousness” and “critical village consciousness” conversations that edify and acknowledge the perspectives of cultural capital and new forms of resistance. Each story builds the “we” as it strengthens the collective while using forgotten and dismissed voices of the community as a form of not only building the oral histories as sites of counter-memory but also revolutionizing the voices of those who were oppressed.

5. Theoretical Frameworks

I employed the theoretical concepts of Cultural Community Wealth (Yosso 2005) and the conceptualization of two vectors—the vector of similarity and continuity, and the vector of difference and rupture (Hall 1990). Yosso (2005) expanded the notion of capital beyond Pierre Bourdieu’s original framing. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) spoke of three forms of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Bourdieu presented a very elitist (and some may say racist) perspective concerning capital. He penned that in the hierarchical society of which we live, knowledge obtained by the upper and middle class was considered cultural capital. Those from the lower class of society could only obtain social mobility through education. The social reproduction of this deficit theoretical “insight” has been co-opted, institutionalized, and embodied to explain both academic and societal outcomes of Peoples of Color as being significantly lower than those of White people (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Tara Yosso (2005) challenged this deficit framing with an asset framing of cultural community wealth using six tenets: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. The first, aspirational capital, speaks to the maintenance of hope, determination, and the ability to work towards obtaining dreams despite obstacles and circumstances. Second, linguistic capital acknowledges that students/Peoples of Color are representatives of communication on a myriad of levels. Everything from storytelling, art, music, poetry, metalinguistic abilities, etc. is associated with them as this capital recognizes the necessary skills they possess coupled with their levels of maturity. Third, familial capital is the pride shared, communicated, and disseminated through immediate family/kinship to community family relations. This pride lays in one’s culture, the history of their communities, their memories, and their legacy; it is one tenet of a culmination of tenets in what I refer to as “critical cultural community consciousness” or “critical village consciousness.” Fourth, social capital is the availability of community resources and networks such as social, institutional, and people. Next, navigational capital I report as a forced attribute of resilience obtained from a Peoples in order to survive and thrive in the line of constant fire, racist policies/ideologies, racism, and trauma. It is the ability to move through an intersection(s) not designed for Peoples of Color, yet these individuals create strategies for surviving and thriving. Last, resistant capital is the challenging of norms, narratives, status quo, policies, and racism.

Stuart Hall (1990) describes the oppressive nature of colonized systems through the conceptualization of two vectors—the vector of similarity and continuity and the vector of difference and rupture (p. 226). These twin vectors posit an awakening of how diasporic cultural identity flows, and how it lies in the realm of being and becoming. I use both of these vectors as I point out the various critical ebb and flow moments of fluidity that each Elder balances as they share their stories independently and are analyzed collectively.

Hall (1990) identified two perspectives of imagining cultural identity. First, he likens cultural identity to that of positioning and production; always flowing and never static. It is rendered as a representation of within and disrupts the whole nature of its defining. The first perspective is in terms of a oneness that is collective and sharing of culture, like that of the Elders. He calls it “one’s true self, hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed selves.” It is a commonality of shared ancestry in which one identifies through various frames and connections, and this state of being is *truth*. It is the powerful transposing of ourselves and the secret belief and expectation of a future discovery. It is an existence that seeks to rehabilitate, reshape, restructure; re-to do again. This cultural identity now becomes the “cinematic representation” that exhumes the concealed colonization of a Peoples encounters while illuminating the interrelatedness that it submerged. This illumination and cinematic representation populates a new form of (re)thinking, (re)discovering, and (re)imagining that is essential to identity, and these hidden historical moments have been critical to the building of many herculean and revolutionary movements.

In its second perspective, Hall (1990) speaks of cultural identity from the aspect of not just a being, but as a being in the futuristic tense—to become. Being refers to a form of a collective identity mirroring a shared historical encounter and a shared cultural norm and power that relegates us to

a oneness of people with constant, unvarying frames of encounters that lie amongst the dissections and transitions of our actual history (Mishra 2006). In addition, this oneness of Peoples, in its shared historical encounters, becomes a genealogy of ancestral development. Becoming is a cultural identity that is future-oriented, and in order to address a nature consisting of one experience, it cannot do so without highlighting its other side; this is the rupture and difference. These identities are what we call ourselves as we identify the different ways we are positioned and frame ourselves within the narratives of the past. In terms of the two perspectives of cultural identity, the first aids in the construction of a movement. The second definition projects a sense of positionality for the Black body and the Black experiences encountered via the hegemonic structures of the colonizer. Through this commemorative MEMorial project in tandem with the other grassroots and/or community projects, an opportunity to enhance knowledge, write a new chapter that still links with their past, while creating another chapter of genuine present and future hope, along with resistance, is birthed.

Applying this concept to a marginalized community, the vector of similarity and continuity synchronizes with a Peoples past colonial history while the vector of difference and rupture addresses the celebratory moments of arriving at a planned destination while still acknowledging the former side (Mishra 2006).

6. Methods

This project utilized both qualitative and decolonizing methods. Decolonizing methods are methods that refuse to use Western ideology as a means of pursuing knowledge (Smith 2013). Decolonizing methods discard the methods of those entrenched in enslavement, capitalistic and cultural imperialism, and any other forms of dehumanization (Smith 2013). Using decolonizing methods and storytelling in this study, both strengthens the African ideology of the village as a oneness ancestral familial lineage as it deconstructs, dismantles, and dismisses the Westernized white, patriarchal discourse of family ancestry. Both personal and collective stories from those who have been marginalized and enslaved create a space that centers Black Body wholeness as humans, free from white, colonized framings, and white hegemony (Pratt-Clarke 2012).

I used narrative inquiry from the aspect of freedom and power (Rubin and Rubin 2011) and as a means of analysis. Narrative inquiry has nothing to do with telling a story; it is more than a story. Narrative inquiry is a methodology that investigates one's story as it digs deeper and analyzes one's story as a means of explaining the beliefs that are inherent to a story's shapening (Bell 2002). Narrative inquiry allows those who have undergone oppression to use the power of their voice and stories as being paramount to their Liberation (Delgado 1989), thereby authorizing and positioning the informants to make meaning of their stories and interpret and share them the way in which they desire (or not). It is another tool that assesses how people make meaning out of their life (Flick 2007). Their voices are the counter-narratives to the survival of their Peoples. Narrative inquiry, in tandem with the harnessing of memory, Hall's (1990) vectors concept, and decolonizing methods, embraces, aligns, and interconnects with the tenets of capital community wealth.

My first two interviews took place on Monday, April 15th in a church setting. The women had both just finished a workshop located on the business side of the church. The first woman I interviewed was African American, sixty-eight, and shall be called Ms. Pride. Ms. Pride was very lively and grew up and resided in Trenton all of her life. She was ready! She came prepared with notes to which she made a copy for me and which I will use as a form of an artifact as I move forward in this project. The next woman interviewed was of African descent, eighty years young, and shall be called Mrs. Queen. Mrs. Queen was from S. Guyana and lived in Trenton for over 40 years. She was very laid back and possessed a lowkey spirit. Both possessed a strength that emanated from their being.

I was supposed to meet a ninety-nine-year-young gentleman on this same day but was informed that he was under the weather. I came back to this church a few days later and met both informant number three and his wife, ninety-two, who became informant number four. I refer to them as Mr. and

Mrs. Life. They were a combination of Ms. Pride and Mrs. Queen as Mr. Life brought *life* through his interview and Mrs. Life was sweet and even-keeled.

My position was one of an outsider within (Collins 2002) as well as that of a “cultural broker” (Elder and Odoyo 2018). I used the word informant in exchange with the word Elder as I sought to submit and recognize the voices of Black bodies or Peoples of Color—a space of hierarchical power (Seidman 2006) in their own city. I stated Peoples of Color for two reasons: first, as a term that internationalizes the infringement of Whiteness on Black bodies and that recognizes their encounters and issues and the struggles of some of those most affected by colonizers (Smith 2013); second, to memorialize the language of Peoples of Color, as we often state “My Peoples.” This term in and of itself denotes family and dismantles the westernized conception of family descent and familial history. Dr. Joy DeGruy (2005) teaches Black bodies that we are born with the intergenerational trauma sustained upon the bodies of our ancestors, and this trauma extends from the collective ancestry and the collective descent of our Black ancestors. I intentionally sought not to be the researcher implementing empowerment (Smith 2013) and “Othering” (Morris 2010) in this study, but one of individuals fostering a “thempowerment” mindset that is synonymous and honors their history, hope, and humanity.

I intentionally include each Elder’s story individually as a form of respecting and proclaiming their identity while centering a cohesive shared understanding that formed meaning (Delgado 1989). This formed meaning edified each of them as an individual first who aided in building the collective, the collective thought, and the collective memory. I share their thoughts individually as human beings showcasing their own voices as enslavement and racism did not and still does not afford Black bodies the freedom to be a person first, a human. Often, enslaved and enslaved Peoples served as spaces of humor to oppressors, as they were unrecognized figures of humus (where the word humorous derives from), an earthly source of wetness brought low yet became the water giver of production; this production came through the greatness of positioning by those who were not considered humans (Delgado 1989). This duality of production and positioning of each Elder’s narrative (individually and conjointly) is an expression of the vectors which generate cultural identity (Hall 1990). In preparing this manuscript, I chose to include this duality in order to honor the fact that Black Peoples have been pulling the correct pieces of history together in an attempt to reclaim voices, history, community, visibility, and identity. These individual yet collective narratives/counter-stories disrupt the history and history books as they provide a community building that forms a common cultured consensus of shared narratives and understanding (Delgado 1989). I present four Elders’ histories and write them one by one and share a collective analysis in order to ensure that they are not (re)marginalized, (re)victimized, and (re)institutionalized by Whiteness. By choosing to hear and write their stories individually, I have collected the data that produces the ancestral familial history collective—the village Peoples. Each voice builds, shapes, impacts, and develops an allied familial oneness, and by allowing each voice to solely be expressed, I honor my responsibility in dismantling and disrupting racist ways of knowing and “decolonizing knowledge” (Almeida 2015, p. 99) along with decolonizing methodologies (Smith 2013).

Research Question and Participants

I recorded the voices of the Peoples of Color (those that identify as Black) and posed the question “What does it mean to be from Trenton?” The goal was to unpack this question in terms of gleaning information concerning their life in the city, what brought them to Trenton, and to understand what has occurred from then to now from any standpoint and/or perspective they desired. I asked other questions, such as “what do you mean by,” or “can you tell me more about that” and others throughout these interviews in an attempt to glean meaningful information and perspective. I embarked upon this project by interviewing four Elders from the Trenton community born either during the 1930s, 1940s, or prior. I obtained these Elders with the help of two of Trenton’s respected community members. All of the interviews were at or around an hour long. All of the interviews took place within one week in the month of April; two on one day and two on another day.

7. Participants Oral Histories

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. After the interviews were transcribed, they were cleaned and assigned pseudonyms. I then began to approach coding the responses using the constructivist inductive method of grounded theory (Charmaz 2005). Grounded theory is a qualitative form of research that systematically analyzes memos, diagrams, poetry, art, and music, as open coding and theories for the purpose of making meaning (Charmaz 2005). It allows for an organic shaping of themes in an attempt to bridge time, location, culture, and context; aiding in construing an organic shaping of the interviews. I utilized the ethnographic tool of “thick description” (Geertz 1973) as a means of analyzing and coding inductively and deductively. Thick descriptions are “useful in challenging any theoretical assumptions about social processes” (Combs 2017). I then began to analyze and code thematically (Saldana 2009). Based upon these themes, I then made connections between the interviews, theoretical literature, and the socio-political and historical nature of the city.

8. Setting

The church seemed to be at least two acres. It was neatly manicured, located on a corner lot of a four-way intersection that was instrumental to ascertaining access to major highways and possessed two entrances. As I turned into the entrance opposite the church entrance, I saw a sign that stated, “church feeding,” where a feeding for the community was taking place. It was also here that I had an opportunity to ask an older white man, who I believed was a volunteer sitting outside, for directions of which entrance I should use, and he pointed me in the right direction. As I proceeded forward, a middle-aged Black gentleman who appeared to be taking care of the grounds greeted me as the voices of small children grew louder. While parking, I realized that this church was also a school. Immediately, I saw a line of children on my left as it appeared recess had ended and it may have been time for lunch; it was 11:45 am. I sat in the car for a few minutes to gather myself, and as I sat listening to the conversations of these small ones, I could not help but laugh. They added to the joy and excitement I already had about conducting these interviews.

As I walked up to the door and rang the bell to the locked entrance, I was greeted by two of the workers for the Echo ministry, to which I later found out the women I would be interviewing belonged. One of the greeters was not only the manager, Mrs. Jo Carolyn Dent-Clark, an integral piece of the tapestry woven into this city, but also she was the glue that cemented my obtaining these informants. The ministry which she spearheads is housed in this church and provides support and activities for the Golden Community i.e., our Elders. Mrs. Dent-Clark gave me a brief tour, shared some of the history of the church, and then introduced me to the ladies as they finished their workshop.

9. Participants

9.1. Ms. Pride

Speaking with both of these ladies was such a joy. It was like I was sitting down at the table with my aunts hearing the stories of the past. My first interview began with Ms. Pride.

Ms. Pride was an energetic and lively Black woman. We exchanged introductions, small talk, and began rolling. I started by posing the question, “What does it mean to be from Trenton?” Without skipping a beat, Ms. Pride confidently boasted, “Pride, girl, what you see here in *my* city is pride.” This Trenton pride consumed her all throughout her interview. I went on to ask her to elaborate on Trenton pride and whether she was born in Trenton. Immediately, Ms. Pride pulled out the papers she had brought with her as she informed me that she was told I would be asking questions in regard to Trenton. She then went in!

“My family is originally from Florida and we moved here because times were hard. That was during slavery and my people worked hard and made very little. It was often not enough to live on. My family believed opportunity was here so they left. Once they arrived, they believed they were correct in the decision they made coming to Trenton and then began bringing other family members

here." "What about Trenton gave them that impression?" I asked. "Well, Black people lived next to White people and even some Jewish families lived by us. Yet, the Italians did not want the Blacks in the Chambersburg section and the Polish had their own section. In my part of town and in most others, we all got along. This was not the same where we used to live, you know, down south. Girl, listen, this town was booming you hear me? Look, I wrote down some of what was here. Listen honey, during this time, you could get fired from a job and be hired at another spot by the end of the day. See here, we had Bell Telephone and Westinghouse. We had all kinds of pottery spaces-Trenton pottery, even Lenox was here. There was a marine terminal, tile companies, rubber companies, battery companies, a refrigerator and store fixtures spots. We had a crane rental space where operators worked. Every section of town had their own department stores-see right here." She had everything separated for me and on one of the pages; stores such as Dunham's, Yards, Lit Brothers, Arnold Constables, Kitty Kelly, and Lerner's, to name a few, were in their perspective column labeled "department stores." Ms. Pride spoke of banks such as Trenton Trust, Trenton Society, and New Jersey National and it was labeled "banks." As I was looking at her list, she jumped right back in. "We had theatres all around this city—The Mayfair, Capitol, Trent, Garden, Lincoln, the Palace. We had a school called the 'Normal School' which actually trained many educators." From there, she named a host of schools to include their locations in the city.

"And although White people had their stuff," she continued, "the Black folks in Trenton had their own as well. In every section of this city (there are four sections) we had our own Black doctors, Black lawyers, Black funeral homes-corner stores on almost every other corner. Shoot, we had our own slaughterhouse, and there were places that the more elite Blacks frequented and places where those who may not have had as much did. And then there were times, we as Blacks came together." "Like when?" I questioned. "Like when Martin Luther King would come here or when our dance spots and clubs would have James Brown who would stop in Trenton on his way to New York." As soon as Ms. Pride started speaking about these clubs, 'it got good to her'. She started dancing in her seat and reminiscing about the good ole days to a point where we both just burst into laughter and I teased her a little. Yet, I understood her joy and her pride and was ready to dance with her after not only hearing about opportunities, but also now hearing Ms. Pride name the many spaces where Blacks rightfully had occupations that allowed them to thrive and share with the community.

I then asked her if she still sees that same pride in her city, and if things changed, in her opinion, why? She began by stating, "Trentonians will always have pride. I believe where things began to change and quickly was right after the riots. That's when everything burned down—since then things have not been the same." Ms. Pride's voice mellowed some and I asked her, "Why do you think the riots occurred?" "I think it was because of economics. I really don't think everybody wanted us to have like they did and things began to get out of hand." "Do you think things will ever get back to the days you remember?" "I sure hope so. I sure hope these next generations can do it. They were some great times."

As I heard Ms. Pride state, "Trentonians will always have pride. I believe where things began to change and quickly was right after the riots" was where the joyful dancing began to turn more into a slow dance. Yet aspirational capital still rang from her voice as the days of her former reality swayed into optimism and hope for the present and next generations. It left me with the thought of a loving mother wanting the best for her child as I thought of her mother and family bringing her loved ones to a land of "milk and honey." She wanted the next generation to be able to rekindle the navigational capital of the racism and trauma they still experience.

9.2. Mrs. Queen

Mrs. Queen was an older, well-esteemed-appearing woman with a very genteel spirit. I introduced myself and thanked her for her time and gave her a small overview of what would be taking place. "I am not sure if I will be of much help to you. I am not originally from Trenton", she quickly began. "You will be a big help, I am certain of that. Why don't you start by telling me a little about yourself-you

know, where are you originally from, how did you get to Trenton, and how long have you been here? How does starting there sound to you?" I asked. She smiled and we began.

"Originally, I am from Guyana, South America. I was very adventurous and had dreams and aspirations of becoming a nurse. My family was brought from Africa to Guyana as better than slaves." I interjected as I was not totally sure what she meant by her statement. "May I ask what do you mean by better than slaves?" I kind of thought I knew yet never heard anything framed in that manner, especially by a Black person. "We were not slaves, but a step above, ahhhhh . . ." I saw her struggling to recall what the term was so I said, "Do you mean indentured servants?" "Yes. We were not slaves like in America. Our families stayed together, we were allowed to marry, we kept our own names, and when we finished our set time of working, we were given land. We were not treated as evil as the slaves in America."

Mrs. Queen's statement, "My family was brought from Africa to Guyana as better than slaves...we were not slaves, but a step above...we were not slaves like in America" was so powerful. I thought this is why the narratives of these Elders and many other stories have to be a part of a MEMorial and are imperative to critical village and critical community spaces. Her words served as resistant capital. They were the challenging of existing norms, racism, and the status quo as many history books today teach that all Blacks were slaves and few address the difference between the indentured servitude of Black bodies in other countries compared to the terroristic act of slavery in America.

After thanking her, I asked, "So why the United States and did you come straight to Trenton?"

"I was an adventurous woman and thought I would come here. I thought my dreams and aspirations were here. I first chose to reside in Jersey City, NJ because I heard there were some great nursing schools around in that area. I also heard of a good nursing school in Trenton. I visited all of the schools and decided on the Trenton school. After finishing school, I obtained a job at the hospital here in Trenton and was later made a supervisor. I then decided to move to Trenton and it was here that I met my husband. He loved his city and knew everybody. He was a well-known and a respected photographer in the city and constantly was called upon for jobs. I was much more of a loner, spent a lot of time at my church, and often did not go with him even though that is what he wanted. I do remember one time when I went with him to a social hosted by Black elites. Many of the Blacks did not want to speak with me and treated me as an outsider even though I was his wife. That left a bitter taste in my mouth and I really never went with him after that."

"I am sorry for your experience. Why do you think you were treated like that?" "Well, I am not from here and I am most certain that it was also because I was African." I knew what she was saying to be real and moved forward. "Well now that you have lived here for forty-plus years, paid taxes, and invested in this city, what would you say it means to be from Trenton?" "Well, I would say that I remember living next to a different race of people and getting along. I remember my husband especially being so proud of his city and us going to Black-owned stores and restaurants, seeing Black doctors, lawyers, and debutants. Trenton was a well-respected city with a great deal of jobs and opportunities. It was a place where Black people too thrived and they too had success." "Do you see that now and if not, what do you think happened?" "There was a time of uproar and great fighting in the streets." "Are you speaking of the riots as people call them? And let me ask you, with you being from another country, Africa, in particular, do you see them as riots?" "Yes, I am speaking of that time, but I see those days as resistance. People were in the streets for their rights. I think people here did not like the fact that Black people were just as happy and owned much of the city too. You saw many people look out for each other and you saw Black Peoples look out for one another as a family. It was an amazing time."

Mrs. Queen's first response to what it mean to be from Trenton was, "Well I would say that I remember living next to a different race of people and getting along...opportunities... it was a place where Black people too thrived and they too had success," which not only confirmed Ms. Pride's story but also again spoke to a familial time where social capital too existed for all.

9.3. Mr. and Mrs. Life

My last informant was a gentleman who was 99 and whose wife, 92, accompanied him as a means of support. She stated that he sometimes needs assistance moving through his stories; I was amazed at both of them. Although my interview was scheduled with him, his wife was an added gift, and as she interjected freely, I dared not stop her. I thirsted for their knowledge and their presence. I will distinguish their conversational responses and we will call these two Mr. and Mrs. Life.

We entertained some small talk as I was informed that Mr. Life was a little nervous about coming. He thought he may not have much to say. Yet once I posed the research question and presented a little context to the question, Mr. Life was nonstop and enjoyed our time. He began immediately informing me about his looking to come up north from down south to be with his sisters. He is a war veteran and Mrs. Life was his second wife whom he met in Trenton as his first wife passed. When I inquired where down south did he reside, he informed me that he lived in Georgia. He found himself back in Georgia after the war and often Mr. Life spoke of the many societal ills of his boyhood while there.

It was a hard time. I spent many hours in the field and my hands were sore. We barely were paid enough money to even survive and racismmm . . . it was real. I got into several arguments 'cause I just wasn't gonna let 'em talk to me or treat me any kinda way. My daddy had a white friend and he was nice to me even when his son and I didn't get along. One time, this group of boys were throwing rocks and stuff at me and my daddy while we were on a wagon, and I jumped off that wagon. My daddy called for me. I exchanged some words, but when I got homeee, whewww my daddy beat my hind. I didn't understand at first ya know, but it was fear. He was afraid for me. I understood when one day I had to hide underground and wait for hours as boys with guns were waiting for me.

Mrs. Life, who was from New York, then began to speak of her male cousin that was from down south.

I have a cousin that lived down south. Once he was accused of looking at a white girl. He was so scared that he hopped on a freight train and came to New York. Our family owned property down there and even after they died, he never went back down south to reclaim it. It was that bad ya know, like today for Black men.

"I came here because my sisters were here already and I had to get out of the south, that place was wicked. I had heard from my sisters how all kinds of people lived next to each other here in Trenton. I couldn't read ya know, but I suh' could cook. So I got a job here as a cook and I was a good cook and did well for myself." Afterward, I thought how many others were like him in this city and successful, especially since Mr. and Mrs. Life spoke of their families coming out of enslavement to the city of Trenton. This alone was a testament to his ability as aspirational, navigational, and highly resistant and resilient.

"My first wife and I bought a house and our kids too did well for themselves. This place here had opportunity ya know. A man could get a decent job and live next to White people and feel safe-wooo you couldn't do that down south. After my first wife passed, I got lucky and was able to marry another good woman. We too lived in a house." Mrs. Life chimed in and began speaking. "Yeah, one time we had to move out of our house and move to a different section of the city." This caught my attention and I inquired further. She then asserted, "It was because of the Coal Port project. We were forced to live in a segregated neighborhood and went from a home to a rented apartment. It was because of some Trenton government policy that went wrong. Yet, we were determined to achieve our hopes and dreams." "Yeah that's right," Mr. Life added. "We had been through too much to let anything stop us and like I said, there was opportunity here. You didn't see Black doctors and lawyers, Black people having a decent home and a decent job ya know." "That's true, everywhere you looked in this city you could see Black success and Black people sticking together. We were a family and we all had and we

all celebrated. It was a good time," Mrs. Life informed me. "Ummm hmmm," chimed Mr. Life. I then asked, "How do you feel now? Do you still see that family, all for one and one for all mindset? If not, what happened?" Both piggybacked off of each other, "It was the riots. Yeah, once that happened the city was never the same. It's a shame too because in this city there was a lot of potential." As I did with the other Elders, I again presented the question asking them why they think the riots happened. Although Mr. Life really never gave an answer, Mrs. Life believed, "I really don't believe everyone liked Blacks having so much."

Mrs. Life ended her conversation by stating how much she wanted the city to "get it together" so the youth can enjoy great memories. She was elated to learn of the progressive movements aiming to restore the nostalgia she and her husband shared.

Mr. Life surprised me with his final thought and comment. "You know, I only went back to Georgia one time and I had no desire to go back. I remember them white boys asking me, Mr. Life, how them white girls up there? You know what I said? I said, I don't know how they are. The only thing a white girl can do for me is to point me in the direction of a Black one. They weren't going to get me—oh no." He chuckled and so did I as that was the last thing I expected him to say. Yet I saw how his past still affected his thought process. He was such a joy.

10. Collective Analysis

After analyzing each of the Elders' stories, several themes quickly emerged. Each of the Elders spoke of leaving a space of enslavement and coming to Trenton, living next to people that didn't look like them, recollections of a thriving Black Peoples in their city that birthed much pride, and a time of resistance/riots. I shall address each of these themes as the Exodus, change, arrival, and we have nothing to lose but our chains headings as I unpack and analyze their stories.

10.1. *The Exodus*

As the conversation about how each Elder came to Trenton, I learned that three of the four Elders came from the south as they recalled the ugliness of enslavement driving either their family's move up north or their own in order to obtain betterment. The fourth Elder experienced indentured servanthood and arrived in the United States seeking to fulfill a life dream as well.

My family is originally from Florida and we moved here because times were hard. That was during slavery and my people worked hard and made very little.

(Ms. Pride)

Ms. Pride's family saw hope and opportunity in the city of Trenton—aspirational capital. Whoever moved to Trenton first scouted out the area as a form of ensuring it would not be worse than the south. They saw opportunity and began bringing more of their family here.

Mr. Life shared that he lived in Georgia and found himself back in Georgia after the war. Mr. Life spoke of the many societal ills of his boyhood while in Georgia, "It was a hard time. I spent many hours in the field and my hands were sore. We barely were paid enough money to even survive and racism . . . it was real. I came here because my sisters were here already and I had to get out of the south, that place was wicked." The more Mr. Life told me stories of the racism he endured, I gleaned that he came to Trenton to not only get away, but also find safety, sanity, and a job.

I have a cousin that lived down south. Once he was accused of looking at a white girl. He was so scared that he hopped on a freight train and came to New York. Our family-owned property down there and even after they died, he never went back down south to reclaim it. It was that bad ya know, like today for Black men.

(Mrs. Life)

Mrs. Life's comparison of the treatment of Black men today with the fear of the terrorism of *yesterday* was fascinating to me. It showcased Hall's vector (1990) of similarity and continuity as Black cultural identity became associated with a former white, supremacist, patriarchal system.

I am from Guyana, South America. My family was brought from Africa to Guyana as better than slaves. We were not slaves, but a step above, ahhhhh . . . indentured servants. We were not treated as evil as the slaves in America . . . I came here [United States] because I was an adventurous woman and wanted to become a nurse."

(Mrs. Queen)

Listening to Mrs. Queen speak of indentured servanthood existing in Africa and the difference of treatment in comparison to enslavement in the United States was another confirmation of the MEMorial project. Far too many students are not afforded an opportunity to the richness of this kind of history.

All of these Elders were exercising aspirational capital as they left their perspective habitations filled with a hope and determination to ascertain a better life and become. Navigational capital was evidence as a *forced resilience* became their passage in order to build strategies that allowed them to survive in the midst of all that racism generates in order to thrive as Peoples of Color. I state *forced resilience* intentionally as resilience as a trait is often posited as something positive without addressing the colonized policies that thrust Black Peoples into becoming resilient. These Elders challenged the status quo expected for their lives by demonstrating resistant capital and leaving the perils of both enslavement and colonization.

These narratives from the Elders highlight Hall's (1990) two perspectives of imagining cultural identity. First, their bodies became the ebb and flow that rendered their experience as one that was positioned and produced simultaneously. Their bodies were never static as they transposed themselves while maintaining an expectation of a future discovery that comes with hope. This "cinematic representation" shaped their cultural identity as they became a movement of hope, contradicting all their bodies currently stood for. The Elders formed an interconnected cultural identity of both being and becoming (Hall 1990). Together they existed as a collective identity which shared an ancestral oneness of being, leaving the perils of a space and place while holding on to a futuristic anticipation of a better space and place in which they would now become; this interrelatedness of identity for the Elders sustains the vector of rupture and difference (Hall 1990).

10.2. Change

One aspect of freedom and deliverance sought by the Elders became clear as three of the four spoke of how they lived next to people that did not look like them.

Well, Black people lived next to White people and even some Jewish families lived by us. In my part of town and in most others, we all got along. This was not the same where we used to live, you know, down south.

(Ms. Pride)

Here we witness Ms. Pride's statement as she speaks of a celebratory time while acknowledging her past (Hall 1990).

Well I would say that I remember living next to a different race of people and getting along...opportunities... it was a place where Black people too thrived and they too had success.

(Mrs. Queen)

This was Mrs. Queen's response to the question, "What does it mean to be from Trenton?" Her answer displays a response of humanity.

Well I would say that I remember living next to a different race of people and getting along ... I had heard from my sisters how all kinds of people lived next to each other here in Trenton. A man could get a decent job and live next to White people and feel safe-wooo you couldn't do that down south.

(Mr. Life)

Trenton served as a place of safety for Mr. Life. The trauma of his past often frequented both his answers to questions or his story overall. Although all of the Elders were a gift and a gem to me, there was something even more special about being in the presence of 99-year-young Mr. Life. He was a man that was the epitome of the walking history of slavery's resilience and resistance that schoolbooks deny students the privilege of consuming.

Again, the Elders exuded aspirational capital, having ascertained hope despite obstacles and circumstances. A familial pride is evidenced in that Elders who arrived in Trenton shared the opportunity with family/kinship. Arriving in Trenton and being able to live in a home next to all types of people is also a step in the cultural identity of becoming (Hall 1990).

10.3. Arrival

Overall, all four elders spoke not only of pride, but also from a space of pride; pride in their city, a shared pride that extends from a Black collective family existing as a oneness of village pride, and a pride in being Black—unapologetically Black.

Ms. Pride confidently boasted, "Pride, girl, what you see here in my city is pride. Girlll, listen, this town was booming you hear me? ...you could get fired from a job and be hired at another spot by the end of the day...we had Bell Telephone and Westinghouse. We had all kinds of pottery spaces-Trenton pottery, even Lenox... a marine terminal, tile companies, rubber companies, battery companies, a refrigerator and store fixtures spots... Every section of town had their own department stores... stores such as Dunham's, Yards, Lit Brothers, Arnold Constables, Kitty Kelly, and Lerner's to name a few...banks such as Trenton Trust, Trenton Society, and New Jersey National. We had theatres all around this city—The Mayfair, Capitol, Trent, Garden, Lincoln, the Palace. We had a school called the 'Normal School' which actually trained many educators. And although White people had their stuff, she continued, the Black folks in Trenton had their own as well. In every section of this city (there are four sections) we had our own Black doctors, Black lawyers, Black funeral homes-corner stores on almost every other corner. Shoot, we had our own slaughterhouse... there were places that the more elite Blacks frequented and places where those who may not have had as much did too. And then there were times, we as Blacks came together...like when Martin Luther King would come here or when our dance spots and our clubs would have James Brown who would stop in Trenton on his way to New York."

Ms. Pride's statement of "her city is pride and Trentonian's will always have pride" did not leave me feeling left out as I already knew who I was, but I strongly sensed her meaning of her familial cultural bonding with her geographical place, space, and community. This bonding denoted that despite the racism and the deficit perspectives of both the present and the past, coupled with a maintenance of hope was that of aspirational capital, navigational capital, and resistance. Ms. Pride's artifacts that she shared again demonstrated resources and network familial capital and the shared pride of a village as well as a community.

I remember my husband especially being so proud of his city and us going to Black-owned stores and restaurants, seeing Black doctors, lawyers, and debutants. Trenton was a well-respected city with a great deal of jobs and opportunities. It was a place where Black people too thrived and had success.

(Mrs. Queen)

Although Mrs. Queen did not feel welcomed in this city, she appreciated the success of Blacks that reigned supreme in Trenton. I later left wondering if she was used to seeing this in Africa prior to being brought to Guyana.

Mr. and Mrs. Life confirmed the aforementioned stories after recalling a racist housing incident they experienced with Trenton government ([Kovisars 1974](#)).

We had been through too much to let anything stop us and like I said, there was opportunity here. You didn't see Black doctors and lawyers, Black people having a decent home and a decent job ya know.

(Mr. Life)

This statement by both Mr. and Mrs. Life again is the forced resilience I spoke of earlier. Despite racism, they were determined to succeed.

That's true, everywhere you looked in this city you could see Black success and Black people sticking together. We were a family and we all had and we all celebrated. It was a good time.

(Mrs. Life)

Mrs. Life's usage of the word "we" supports the idea of the village familial ancestry not often recognized by westernized mindsets.

The Elders' stories functioned as familial capital as they spoke of Black Peoples as both family and a community family to which after hearing their stories I too felt as though I belonged. Both confidence and pride emerged as all the Elders spoke of Black success and opportunity. I viewed that as the ancestral familial pride that built a oneness amongst them and sustained the Black Wall Street-type movement ([Hall 1990](#)).

Not only did their recollections divulge a sense of joy and love into the atmosphere, but it also forced me to live in their sense of time and happenings. Their soulful, free-spirited storytelling with all the hand gestures, the stretching of syllables of some of the words they spoke, and the rich laughter and pride that comes with the village's culture screamed linguistic capital.

This sense of time served as a blend of both vectors. The vector of similarity and continuity was illustrated by the history of Trenton's colonization, and the vector of difference and rupture ([Hall 1990](#)) disconnected Black communities while yet positioning them in a spatial place of Black wealth and the village simultaneously if only for a stretch of time.

10.4. *We Have Nothing to Lose but Our Chains—The Eruption*

All of the elders called the fighting in the streets riots and associated it with Whites in the town not being happy with the way Blacks were thriving except Mrs. Queen.

There was a time of uproar and great fighting in the streets...but I see those days as resistance. People were in the streets for their rights. I think people here did not like the fact that Black people were just as happy and owned much of the city too. You saw many people look out for each other and you saw Black Peoples look out for one another as a family. It was an amazing time.

(Mrs. Queen)

She believed it was a form of resistance versus riots. The Whites in this town were not the only ones annoyed with Blacks, the United States was too as a whole as this riot/resistance came at the news that Dr. Martin Luther King had been assassinated. It was refreshing in a way to hear her counter the narrative and call this a time of Blacks resisting, rather than the negative and deficit connotation in which the word infuses for some when speaking of Black Peoples in relation to riots. Mrs. Queen's answer was resistant capital personified as even now she will not accept a deficit framing on behalf

of the Black Peoples who “looked out for one another as family.” I strongly believe Mrs. Queen’s perspective solidified her non-westernized vision.

Although Dr. Martin Luther King (1968) states that “riots are the language of the unheard,” many people perceive Black Peoples who riot as a behavior belonging to savages. They will never understand that this is not Black bodies acting out just to act out, it is a form of resistance from years of oppression and/or abuse. It is buried pain erupting and made manifest. It is a form of dis-embodiment of the pain of one’s lived experience of white supremacy.

I believe where things began to change and quickly was right after the riots. That’s when everything burned down- since then things have not been the same...I think it was because of economics. I really don’t think everybody wanted us to have like they did and things began to get out of hand.

(Ms. Pride)

I really don’t believe everyone liked Blacks having so much.

(Mrs. Life)

Both the statements of Ms. Pride and Mrs. Life differed from that of Mrs. Queen. They both used the statement, “I really don’t think . . . ” Yet, Mrs. Queen spoke from a space of certainty as she boldly proclaimed “I think . . . ”

Yeah, once that happened [riots], the city was never the same. It’s a shame too because in this city there was a lot of potential.

(Mr. Life)

I was a bit taken aback as I originally expected to hear more from Mr. Life about what happened yet remembered that this statement was at the end of our interview and he may have been tired. Not to mention, Mr. Life did not prefer to spend the majority of his time focusing on the traumatic events; he would go in and out of time.

The actions of many Blacks served as a form of resistance capital. Like that of Mr. Life, they too jumped off their wagons after succumbing to the many rocks of life thrown at them. This was Blacks’ resistance to centuries of being equated to property, resistance to violence rendered upon them from the police, resistance to intentional and predatory policies and government, and a resistance that screams you will no longer fail to hear our humanity.

Yet whether one saw the incident as riots, resistance, or both, Trenton’s primarily Black residents moved as an oneness to the streets to fight for humanity and dignity. They were not willing to be rendered subalterns (Morris 2010) nor stand idly by and be dehumanized and lynched once again by the oppressive spirit of colonization and greedy colonizers. This vector of similarity and continuity (Hall 1990) of a past colonial history, they determined would not subjugate them once more. This pain of the remembrance of terrorism, Whiteness, and lynching was uprooted by the vector of difference and rupture (Hall 1990) as they—Black Peoples, Black bodies, and Black culture—*had arrived (in Trenton)*, planted roots, and celebrated. Black bodies would no longer *be nor become* Whiteness’ status quo. They were determined their cultural identity would reign.

11. Discussion

As I reflected on the date the interviews began, it was April 15, a day many in the United States associate with as income tax day. Yet it was also the week of Passover and Resurrection—a representation to many Christians and to the Jewish community as that of Liberation, i.e., Freedom and Arising. That is what I obtained from my experience of being with these Elders’- liberation and freedom stories. I encountered a natural dissemination of their historical truth that resided in slavery along with their historical community truth about their city. The stories shared about their life in

Trenton are rarely heard, not in the books of history, and the city is often painted as a deficit without the knowledge that was shared with me.

The stories of these Elders are ones in which they *passed over*, birthing an illumination that forced me to see the light and the sight of their liberation and freedom as a Peoples; I saw a healthier picture of their identity and strength. I heard a Resurrection as resistance and resilience in spite of a tried annihilation. This is what I believe some groups of sojourners are seeking to do in their grassroots efforts. They are picking up the mantle and running to (re)claim, (re)commission, and (re)member through (re)telling and (re)calling the history of and passed down by their ancestors.

I reiterate the sentiment of [Delgado \(1989\)](#) in that those who were or are marginalized position their power and the strength of their voice and stories as being paramount to their freedom. Their voices, I witnessed, are truly the counter-narratives to the survival and thriving nature of their Peoples. I understood this in terms of the maintenance of self-esteem and identity rendered from these interviews.

After interviewing these four informants, although an outsider within ([Collins 2002](#)), my positionality in understanding the constructs of knowledge and who it is built to serve (Whiteness), I now have a more crisp understanding of what those that are from Trenton mean when they state “they are from *Tren-on*” (one must say it like this or it is easy to note you are not from Trenton). They are speaking of the pride of a time that the sojourners remember—their Black Wall Street. A time interrupted by violence, racism, classism, laws, structures, policies, fire, and the greed that comes with capitalism; a time their families fled in order to reach *freedom* and a form of equity. A time when Blackness stood for pride. Diaspora literacy from a framing of the village was the linguistic capital of these Elders as they told their own stories. These stories spoke of a myriad of community resources that were the product of social capital. Even though all four Elders found themselves at different intervals of life that forced them to deal with racism, vectors, and trauma, they had navigational capital as they were resilient and thrived. This resiliency speaks to an aspirational capital of hope and dreams being fulfilled. They were/are the resistant capital that said, I will challenge normalized ideologies of Black bodies; I will not be the status quo. I heard a familial capital, one that had a shared pride that came with the history of their community. All of the tenets of Cultural Community Capital were evidence and functioned as the Elder’s roadmap to survival and success—their community and their village.

As I think about the vectors of similarity and continuity and the vectors of difference and rupture ([Hall 1990](#)), not only do I see and hear the voices of the Elders, I see, hear, and feel the hearts of the present-day sojourners. The Elders spoke about their past colonial history of bondage while experiencing freedom and yet thriving in the midst of some forms of racism while living in the city. This is the vectors of similarity and continuity. However, they operated from a space of double consciousness ([Du Bois 2008](#)); recognizing that they were existing in two worlds. The vectors of difference and rupture allowed them to disassociate themselves and immerse themselves into the spatial orbit of the Black Wall Street time. This is where they chose to concentrate and speak about although those evil times were still a part of their consciousness. I view the present-day sojourners as ones who see the daily colonization of their city via gentrification, policing, business, and government as striving to not only disassociate and disrupt but also dismantle themselves and their communities of this bondage. Their goal, coupled with the hope of the Elders, is to return to that space of Black thriving; a back and Black to their future existence.

12. Conclusions

In conclusion, to just leave my experience as an understanding through the voices and time spent with these four Elders would be an insult as I embodied more than just an understanding. I was positioned to receive both a causal relational opportunity as well as a correlation between individuals, community, and communal familial villages. I witnessed not only the vectors but also the “cinematic representations” ([Hall 1990](#)) of a time that shined through the voices of the four Peoples. The scheduling of listening moments caused me to hear stories, and the hearing of these stories produced an understanding of the importance of not colonizing this work, but building upon it. When we seek to

only produce an article via voices and/or capture numbers and data sets and come into spaces with our own agendas, that is all we do, (re)colonize. We miss the honor of an auditory encounter that affords sight. This sight is a People(s)—a Being, a human, an identity. Through the privilege of this space, place, and time with these Black Elders, I will no longer see abandoned buildings the same way. I will no longer listen to the stories of violence nor view lead poisoning and the possibility of unsterilized water, as just a human right, in the same way. I now perceive the word trauma or community trauma in a new manner. They are not just mere words I will use as a form of description as I hear others (and at times myself) sometimes say so casually as they describe the viewing of symptoms. It is more than a symptom. The root is pain—and again, buried pain will eventually become pain made manifest and erupt. Many on the outside (and some on the inside) judge a people or a community without a deducing of the predatory and intentional policies inflicted upon them via the spirit of Whiteness and greenne\$. This spirit equates these same Peoples to nothing but mere commodification that reifies the terroristic act of enslavement upon their backs daily.

As I speak throughout this paper of the present-day sojourners, I am witnessing an insurgence in which Blacks are reclaiming Black bodies, Black history, and Black responsibility as a means of dismantling ignorance and the reproduction of Black injustice upon their community. Movements that dismantle enslavement such as the reclaiming of Black boys and fatherhood, Black midwifery, community trauma, and Diaspora knowledge are igniting. An exhibit entitled 'Undesign the Redline/Designing the We,' serves as an educational platform explaining how the city became "ghettoized." The exhibit rests on the walls of the second floor and in the only Black-owned building in the city which houses cultural and arts learning—The Conservatory Mansion. What a perfect name as this space *conserves* knowledge to be shared while providing opportunities to glean expertise artistically and culturally from their Elders while also providing a space to simply *be*. This space is now seeking to work within the educational system as a means of not only dismantling systems that are still in place but also decolonizing them while re-educating.

Last, through what originally started as both an inner longing to hear from the Elders in the city in order to obtain history and to fulfill an assignment obligation, I became privileged to have inhaled the social tenets of how Black Peoples were resources, networks, our ancestors, and legacy despite every travesty. They were/are every form of capital manifested, and their stories are the "critical community consciousness" and "critical village consciousness" that must be captured and shared. The stories collected in this study are the first of the future MEMorial as I plan to obtain more stories from all age groups in the very near future.

Salute to the Elders. Salute to the next group of Sojourners. Yet. Still. I/We/They/Us. Rise.

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