

Episode 7: Gentrification in Indianapolis with Kisha Tandy and Paula Brooks

Transcript:

Kisha: Today's episode is rated E for everyone.

Hannah: So hello, everyone, and welcome back to another episode of This Is Problematic, a Conner Prairie podcast. You're here with me, Hannah.

Easton: And me Easton

Hannah: And today we're going to be welcoming some wonderful guests from the Indianapolis area.

Easton: Yes. So today we are joined by assistant curator at the Indiana State Museum and a master of library and information sciences at IUPUI. Professor Kisha Tandy, welcome. Thank you for coming.

Hannah: Thank you for joining us.

Kisha: Hello. Thank you for having me. Glad to be here.

Hannah: And then we're also joined by a community member who has done all kinds of work, including in environmental justice, and that is Miss Paula Brooks who's also joining us. Would either of you guys like to say anything more about your experience, anything that you feel like is important for the listeners to know before we dive in?

Paula: Well I wear two hats all the time. I'm a third-generation resident, and I'm also a community advocate in environmental justice. I work for Hoosier Environmental Counsel, which is an environmental advocacy organization. So I'm always wearing two hats.

Kisha: And this is Kisha. Born and raised here in Indianapolis. And so sharing history of this city in the state, this is something that I enjoy and appreciate having the opportunity to do to discuss.

Easton: Well, we're so happy to have you all with us as we take another dive through some problematic history And we have a very, very complex and multifaceted history. We'll be talking today about gentrification and the history of how that has turned into a beast of many faces, especially in our world today. So...

Hannah: And we're going to be talking about an indirect relationship with the city that we are neighbors with Indianapolis.

Easton: So I guess I can start. Okay. Sure. So as you just said, we're going to be taking some aim at local examples of our very national issues because, you know, gentrification isn't just about, you know, developer slapping around about in the hood next to a crumble cookie. It's much more, you know, it can be a lot more sinister than that. Cities can accomplish the same goals, actually, as people who push overdeveloped neighborhoods with eminent domain and it's oftentimes more harmful when they attack people who don't have the financial means to defend themselves or defend their homes from being taken from them. It's a legitimate economic and cultural force, and it's a threat acting on Indianapolis as urban neighborhoods. In many cases, the neighborhoods impacted are predominantly low income, and many, as it's sometimes called black and brown neighborhoods, predominantly African American or other minority communities. And it's so hard to talk about sometimes because there's a lot of issues under the surface about class, politics, race and human impact. So I guess we can just go to which ever one of you wants to speak first about what you've seen firsthand when dealing with gentrification, not just in Indianapolis, but in you know, there are other places you've seen

Kisha: Easton mentioned many things that gentrification does. And one of the things that I did not hear you list was the idea of history. And so one of the things being a historian and recognizing history and have an appreciation for it, one of the things that happens with gentrification is sometimes you have the erasure of the community. It's not just the displacement, but the history. And the history is so important to what makes a neighborhood, what makes the city. And so just having the acknowledgment, the recognition of the history of the area is so important and in keeping that in the forefront, because there are people who have lived there, they have thrived, they have developed community. And this is important not only for that specific area, but for the city as a whole.

Paula: Just to add on what Mr. Tandy said I find that the erasure part is the most harmful when you talk about gentrification. Not only do people not remember or, you know, just given time, people die, people born. You know that the passage of time. But I have found for the black community it has negatively impacted the youth. People, especially young people, are not connected to community. They live in areas that are environmentally challenged violence, guns areas that have been disinvested in by our state, our city, private investors. And although the description of a community that's been gentrified, it's always oh well Someone came in and bettered the community. But it's not so much the money or the buildings or the structures. It's the people. It's the community that's really harmed. And I think that we we're seeing the impact of that right now here in Indianapolis.

Hannah: I think. I think there are so many examples of that. Like you said in Indianapolis and in cities across the country. And I know Easton and I have been really taken aback. Doing our research for a promised land as proving ground. You know, we've been identifying all of these individuals partially through the Canal Area Research Class Project, which we can talk more about the use of it. And so many of these people who were such pivotal, like you were taught by such pivotal characters in Indianapolis life. Their homes have been demolished for interstates. You know, they're just gone. And so how do you create a space in which to remember people in their lives, in their work, if it's underneath a roadway or no longer present? And so we're excited to talk about ways that

commemoration can be done and ways we can work around, Unfortunately, the realities of the situation.

Kisha: And acknowledgment is so important that individuals lived here, made a difference, had impact, you know, just recognition and acknowledgment as a starting point.

Hannah: Do we want to jump in then to recognizing some of the many neighborhoods that we might touch on? I know we've got a couple written down here, so we've got obviously Indiana Avenue is a very well-known thoroughfare through Indianapolis that was at the very core of Indianapolis black life with businesses and theaters, a flourishing jazz scene going on there in the late 1800s early 1900s up to the mid mid 20th century. When you really start to see the demolition of that community and neighborhood with the growth of IUPUI and also changes going on in the city like we're talking about with roadways. Do you talk about Ransom Place?

Easton: Absolutely. I actually do have and I appreciate your hold me accountable because as a historian, I do need to hit the history a little bit harder, a little bit deeper here. I do have I can't take credit for this, but a very brief history kind of condensed down here. A Ransom Place, you know, March 1991, it was six members from the six blocks bounded by West 10th, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. West Street, West St Clair and Paca Streets and they all met and Formula formalized the beginning of the neighborhood, which is the association that is now considered ransom place named for Freeman Riley Ransom who lived there 30 years as an attorney. He was a family man, a civic leader, major home renovator and a general manager for Madame C.J. Walker's beauty business and it was not until they became incorporated, which that came in August 14th, 1991.

The neighborhood actually did become incorporated and its mission was the preservation of the neighborhood's ethnicity through written history and related tours and presentations and the encouragement of reasonable architectural compatibility of new housing and to existing structures. And it was just the encouragement of the people who lived there. You know, it was when we think of people historic figures that people may not really know like say, William Wiley and his wife, Eliza G. Wiley, they were having their out lots plotted in April of 1871. And by then thousands of black folk had migrated to the city of Indianapolis and some of them were not long out of slavery. And we think of, you know, this very far off world of slavery. But, you know, those people had to go somewhere.

And that's, you know, a theme that we'll see when we talk more about gentrification. They went primarily, of course, to the west side of Myles Square between Central Canal and the White River, and many of them were in makeshift quarters. They had to make their own living space. They had to carve out what they had. And those who settled there most recently mentioned where the roots of what we now think of as Ransom Place.

And I am curious as to hear your thoughts, because this whole thing of, okay, even when people appreciate the history of a place, some of them don't take into account, you know, how it gets affected by this hole out with the old in with the new thing, you know, these these these neighborhoods are sometimes described as built up when you get rid of old things and build on top of them. And although a lot of people ask like oh that's so like when you find out the history of a place, it's like, how's this happen? But you have to also think about who is truly going to reap the benefits of the amenities that get put there because they're not usually tearing down these places to

build more churches or schools or things. They're building up places for recreation. And sometimes that those places have a different clientele than those who used to live there. I have to quote my father as saying something really great. You know, the people don't just and just let you all know I'm from Cincinnati. And Cincinnati has its own issues with gentrification and how it specifically is in Over-the-Rhine. And I can talk about that later. But what he said was the people don't just disappear once they can't afford to stay somewhere. They have to go somewhere. And so I wanted to hear you also thoughts on that. I know that was a lot I just threw at you

Paula: Well, I would like to correct a couple of things. The first thing is, is that Paca street that I'm not sure how it's now being called Paca Street, but it's a pet peeve of mine.

Easton: Please forgive me. I am not from here

Paula: Long a not short a long a not short a Paca, Paca street and all. And the other thing that I would like to correct is and this is actually a little-known fact and it has to go it goes back to when Mrs. Gene Spears was working in the neighborhood to save the homes. But Ransome Place It's actually seven blocks. The ten hundred block of MLK is part of Ransome Place and it actually the three homes that are in that block were built in the late 1870s. They're some of the oldest structures in the neighborhood, very historic. One of their homes was home to a state wide charity organization. One by women called Sisters of Charity. Another house, a house, the Cosmopolitans School of music. And then the third house was home to many ministers who were at the various area churches, but also that Henry Fleming, who was a political operative, he was a Republican he was the first black caddy here in Indianapolis. He was very interested in golfing, and he was a businessman. And he actually worked with Carrie Jacobs, who owned Jacobs Center home that was in the 1200 block at that time, West Street or now its MLK in that building that's gone. To save that block from the many urban renewal schemes this area has seen since the early 1900s, starting with IU our own medical school clearing settlement. Oh, New York Street in New York in White River down in that area. That was one of the first areas that was cleared. So I need to explain that it's really one huge neighborhood Ransome Place was just seven blocks of what was once a huge neighborhood with different districts you also had have flanner house homes which is part the area and I like to emphasize this because people like to focus on Ransome Place in Indiana Avenue and what happens is it marginalize business our history and you know, it marginalizes even just the viciousness that are left today. So I just wanted to kind of say that and what I found... I'm as I mentioned before, I'm a third generation and I'm old enough to have memory of Indiana Avenue when it was still the commercial center of the neighborhood. I'm not old enough to be able to tell you stories about going to the clubs or any of those things. But I can tell you that in the seventies, every Saturday, my girlfriends and I, we would go to the locker theater and we would see all of those black movies, SuperFly, the Mack, Cleopatra Jones. We saw all of those movies. We were not old enough at all. We were pre-teens, but we went and you know, for me, this area is a neighborhood. And a lot of times when people tell our story, they want to make it into... I like to call it Disneyland, where, you know, it was just clubs and a lot of fun, you know, people coming to and forth. But that's not what it was. It was a true neighborhood and we had everything that we needed here from excellent schools, churches, recreational facilities. There was a diversity in incomes, educational attainment, and that gives lost. The gentrification is was really a result of racist planning. The city in this state wanted basically we say, wanted the black people out. So every ten, 20 years there would be a new urban renewal scheme to bring in the new and get rid of the old. And I think that that is a story that needs to be emphasized.

Hannah: Mhm. Absolutely. Absolutely. Um, I think then it would be um, you spoke a little bit about your, your memories. I'm curious personally, but also having worked with other community members, how does not having spaces in which memories occurred, you know, those school buildings to return to for reunions, the churches to return to. How does that affect a community as they are displaced over time and affect the way that we are able to commemorate and remember history of these communities?

Paula: Oh, it makes it very difficult and you know, personally, it makes me sad because the people who really have a connection to this area are all middle aged to very elderly, younger people. I think just given the way that they were raised more in suburban areas, and not really having a grown up in a like a thriving black community, they tend to think of this area as a blank slate. You know, our also a place that is in need of some kind of restorative justice measures, but they don't they still don't see us. The residents. They're, we're still invisible. And the older people, they just moved on. A lot of people who were displaced maybe as a child. Right. That interruption meant that they lost the connection to the community. Um, a lot of older people who were adults at that time, they're just bitter. But people for the most part have moved on. And it's really hard because as a community we want to revive Indiana Avenue. But when you just have a couple of buildings and the people have gone for the most part, it that's it's really difficult. So it to answer your question, just makes me sad.

Easton: Well, yeah, I just can't even can't even think of a good segway there. I mean, it is unfortunate, though, thinking of the importance of sentiment,

Paula: I think is this is hard right to really picture it because, you know, the damage has been done and when you're in other places, like, for instance, in Atlanta or D.C., which has a longer history and also just demographically the density the black people is higher, right? It's harder to forget those spaces. So for instance, in D.C., you have parks and buildings and streets named after historical black people. That means that that memory is still there. But here in Indianapolis, for instance, MLK, a portion of our neighborhood is MLK, the other portions, West Street, we have 11 street. A block is named after Oscar Robertson. And the rest of it's the 11th Street. It's very confusing. And even just our conversation about Paca Street newer people. I mean, I hear Indy go on the record in this Paca street, you know, it just makes me see red. But it's a disconnect. And I don't really know what that solution is.

Hannah: I'd love to ask you, Mrs. Tandy, because I feel like for us, not neither of us being Indianapolis natives beginning this work with Dr. Fletcher, who obviously is. She has taken us obviously down into Norwood and into some of these spaces to try and get a real feel at least as much as we can today of the homes that the people that we are studying held and the spaces that they operated in and made their lives. And but your project with the map helped both of us so much to feel like we could almost reenter this lost world. And so I'm curious, obviously, um, in an ideal world, we would be able to physically rebuild some of these spaces and we should continue those restorative actions wherever possible. How can digital solutions also help us to begin to rebuild and educate on these spaces?

Kisha: And thank you so much, Mrs. Paula, for sharing all of that information. It's definitely helpful and why it's so important to speak to community members who can share their memories, because we have record live experiences, but you provide a lived experience. And I appreciate and thank you

for that so much. As far as one of the things that when I am trying to do work and research maps are extremely important. And so I would recommend to anyone find as many maps as you can and continue and continue to look at them because they can be very, very helpful. And so the project that you're referencing was for a class that was taught, my staff, Dr. Andrea Copeland and Dr. Paul Mullins and this was a course in the course was titled Digital History and Community Change and these it started we had been working on research. Dr. Mullins, of course, who has done so much research on black history and culture here in Indianapolis, who has shared so much through his blog, through his presentations, just amazing research. And I have worked on the research of Indiana Avenue and that neighborhood for as long as I can remember as part of my adult years as an undergraduate, as a graduate student. So I had the information and awareness, and then this collection became known to us. One of the librarians at the Heron Library contacted Dr. Mullins and let him know about a collection. And in that collection was the Indiana Central Canal Collection, the Indiana Canal Collection. And these were photographs that were taken by the Indiana landmarks. So Indiana historical landmarks. They had taken these photographs. The photographs range in different age, but I think the latest one was around 1975. And so you had this collection of images. And so using that to build a framework for teaching the course that would look at displacement, that will look at all of these different issues that were taking place in the neighborhood and the community that preceded IUPUI. And I have a quote that I cannot actually give credit to whoever said it, but it's something that stuck in my mind, especially as you were talking Easton, it was a city within a city. And so all of the things that you have there, the descriptions that MS. Paula has provided for us. And so you had the city within a city. And I remember one of the students in one of the articles talked about not knowing that this history was under her feet. And so how that came up. And so as a part of this course, we use these images and then we use maps. So they were images of houses and buildings and you have the addresses for them. And so we try to find them with maps. And then we had the students do as much research as they could using different primary sources to help tell the story of the individuals that had lived there and what their lives were like and what happened to the building and where we could trace how far we could trace the individuals. And so the students responded really positively to this experience, Paula. Brooks came and spoke. David Williams came and spoke. We tried to also provide an opportunity for community members to come in and speak and provide different voices as to what was taking place during this time period, in particular between late 1962 and the 70s and just really look at what was happening and what was taking place. And so that was kind of the basis for the course. And so the description of this course we looked at, you know, this idea of the heritage of gentrification in Indianapolis, examining local archives and digital historical resources. We talked about racial displacement and urban transformation and really just looking at this near west side of Indianapolis and really focusing on using primary research and being able to tell the story and the goals.

One of the goals and one of the things and I will attribute this quote to Dr. Andrea Copeland and one of the things that she said, she said in this and by 2016 the course was 2019. I would like to see Indiana Avenue and the African American Heritage story become part of the university story, such that every person that works here goes to school here, knows that history and realize this the importance of it to the place. And so really having that and ensuring that and, and that was really a goal and we tried hard to make sure that every part of that was, that was something that the students could feel and could share. And the resource of their project are available online. And you can all see it, you can see the different images and you can see the various maps and try to put to place and then you get a sense of, you know, that footprint, you know, and I think that's one of the beauties of having maps and then adding the images is getting the footprint of the locations that you

were discussing and that you're talking about. I appreciated that Mrs. Paula brought up fly on her house, you know, and so that again, just connects to the finer house homes. You have Crispus Attucks, you have backfield gardens. You have you truly had a thriving community in downtown Indianapolis. And then adding in the churches, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Bethel AME, that has had been there for so long. And it did move and is now in a different location.

But just that history and how important that is and using the class and the work of Dr. Mullins who again has just done so much research and being able to provide that and then other individuals and I'll mention David Williams, he just published a book, African-Americans in Indianapolis, and he does share some of this history as well. So being able to find it in books as well as online to be able to have that.

Hannah: I will take this moment to say that we will have all of these sources listed on our podcast website. So if you want to pause at this point and go check out that book or the research project, it will all be listed there for you to be able to access and engage with. Um, I actually really want to take this moment to say thank you to both of you for the work on that project because like and I'm going to speak for both of us here, but tell me if that's not okay. And I can say it's just myself, but from conversations we had walking around downtown, I am an IUPUI student. I'm in the MLAS degree in the public history degree, and I just saw a campus. And after seeing your project and working on creating case studies and bios beyond as well of people that we were studying and connecting them into, we would then be downtown seeing a community. I mean, we would walk by all these places and be like, this is where so-and-so lived, that we have kind of almost feel like we have grown close to you in our research. And it it's amazing to feel like it brings that back to life for those of us who don't have that connection.

Kisha: Definitely. And I would also like to add that Danita Dee Dee Davis, she was one of the specialist over at Heron School of Art and then the library, and then Sonia Leeman was the other individual. And the reason why I wanted to bring that up is because of the information that was added to the digital resource, you know, Dee Dee did the work, you know, that kind of groundwork so that people can have access to it and know what they're finding. So you can search by subject day location and all those different things which are important to the research process. So making sure that I want to make sure that I did, you know, acknowledge the work that they did and helping to provide and you know, and then just, you know, with the landmarks in IUPUI caring for the project and making it available.

Hannah: I would love to hear from Mrs. Brooks you talking about that collaboration on that project and I know you guys have collaborated a lot over the years. So I'm curious what it means to community members like yourself, Paula, to be brought into that that environment and to be asked to tell those stories and interact with the students in that way. What you thought of that that process?

Paula: Oh, no, that was great. You know, Dr. Mullins and I actually met him when he first started his career here. And I, I have so much respect and love for what he did. He put a face on our history. He came in at a time when buildings were being demolished. The streets were being widened, and he put a face to our history. However, you really... to have a full, comprehensive look. You have to bring in first person stories, community members, because we're the ones that know the back story. You know, a lot of events that happen are not written, especially in newspapers, you know journal

articles, may give you more context, but, you know, you lose a lot if you do not include the people who witnessed the history.

Easton: That's the truth.

Kisha: Definitely agree. I know. I remember receiving a tour from Mr. Ridley and just the knowledge that he shares and going on tours with you where we're both presenting a tour and then just hearing you tell the stories of growing up in the neighborhood, it provides such a different perspective because again that whole idea of the recorded experience versus live the experience and I agree with you, you know, just having those oral histories is extremely important, extremely important.

Paula: You know, I went away to school and I was gone for a long time, but I would come home and I came home finally because my mom needed me. I came on to be a care giver and you talk about the erasure. I was just so appalled I kept hearing near West, Near West, and we were always in the Near West Side. And it finally dawned on me that the near West had moved west of the river. You know, it was, again, a planning strategy. So we really lost our identity. And that goes back to where I'm talking about the segmentation of the neighborhoods, because we were the Near West Side, you could say Indiana Avenue, you could say MLK, a West Street, because West Street was just as important to the neighborhood as the Avenue was. West street had restaurants, it had civic organizations, it had churches, it had a slew of funeral homes, residents, businesses. It was a public street just like the avenue was. But because when you look at it physically, it's really hard to see all the attention just goes to the avenue. So that goes to the erasure. I can just mention the Jehovah Witness. They were located approximately, they were on West Street, but kinda approximately where the Gateway Garage is maybe just a little to the north of there. There, the Jehovah Witness, the largest church of Jehovah Witness in Indianapolis, they were right there. There's no memory of that.

Hannah: I, I keep hearing in our conversation kind of coming up this, this topic of planning and of purposeful change. So I'm curious, I, I've studied in different classes kind of mapping prejudice in Minneapolis and the engagement that that project has started to get from kind of local politicians and community groups. I'm curious if either of you have seen a change in the way that Indianapolis politicians and the planning department are engaging with community members and approaching these topics or if there is still kind of a lack of engagement and interest from those officials making the decisions?

Paula: Oh, it's like a 360 degree difference.

Hannah: Yeah.

Paula: I really commend this this latest administration hawks. It's a administrator and Jeff Bennett in particular, he said and it was published widely he apologized for past city actions. That was the first time I have ever heard a city official admit to what had happened. I can't say so much for IUPUI in that because the university is still expanding it really does not engage with the community. They they'll engage with the walker, but the walker is not the community. The people who work in the walker. They don't live in the community. They never have. And you know, to all due respect, there's been so many executive directors, you know, they come and go and they have responsibility is to

that building. It's not to the neighborhood. It's not a community building. So the university has not changed at all. You will hear people talk, but actions speak louder than words. They're still buying property was seeing the city buys property they gate it up you know is just what it is but the city my hat is off to them. They are in a place where the there's intention to try to reinvest it in the avenue. And the question is going to be what is that investment going to look like or, you know, are we trying to recreate the pasts? Are we trying to include the community that's here? Because we are a very diverse community here. Now, we have elderly. We have a lot of college students. We have our fastest demographic growing demographic are Asian people who are actually buying homes and living in the neighborhood. Last year we had the first black family that had bought in Ransome Place in 20 years, and we were all excited about that. This year we had a young man who bought a house in a Ransom Place. So, you know, we're a changing community and we get along well. You know, we're not stuck in the past. And that questions going to be what vision wins out.

Easton: Kind of also building off of that, but also what Hannah talked about with the Canal Area Research class. I want to also bring up an interstate and university building just as it as a whole, because it happens all over the country and it continues to happen. As we were the my main focus in some of the research for PLPG, of course, we played between the two, both of us. But I wanted to get the names of a lot of the churches. You know, local faith based institutions in our Promised Land as proving ground research process. And of course, as we were walking through IUPUI for weeks at a time, we were kind of saddened to see that a lot of the historic black churches in that area, many of them, of course, had been in disarray or abandoned time going all the way back to even like the early 1900s, like 19 tens, but they were demolished to make way for parking and walking paths and in some instances green space. So not really anywhere where anything is today, but just space for people at IUPUI to use. And when it comes to, you know, it just seems like it's a very common theme that whenever something massive and or unsightly needs to be built, it usually gets built through these established low income communities. And so I mean it's just that the effects are very, very visible and it just go it's just you just have to sit and wonder like how in the future of Indianapolis, you know, how do you not make the same mistakes? How do you not eliminate what gives a place culture?

Hannah: And how do we get all these academic institutions as students and them or, you know, members of the community? How do we ask them to do better?

Easton: Right. Like I don't have I didn't have any beef with IUPUI before, but now I'm like, I like don't really I'm not really I can't really say that I'm enthused to give them my money anyway just a thought.

Kisha: It's actually the state. It's not even... What I found with IUPUI and this may change a bit with the recent announcement of the formal split, but all decisions come from Bloomington, and those decisions are really based on like a typical college campus. And I find that the university the, the there's a shield, a bureaucratic shield. So no one really has to take responsibility for anything but what I find is, is that and all universities are like this in terms of being greedy land grab around their university. All universities suffer from this. So what IUPUI does and those decisions are coming really from the real estate department is, is that their decisions are based on the university. So they're not really interested in building a campus that truly integrates with the neighborhood and the city. You look at the way the buildings are sited, all the new buildings, basically turn their back to the main streets. You know, you look at the campus and it's not friendly. Students you really don't

see students hanging out there on campus because it's almost like there's this negative energy that permeates the campus. And I think it's because there has not been a reconciliation. The university has not really done the work that's needed to repair the harm that they've caused and continue to cause.

Easton: I have to agree with you there. It's it's 100% a thing you feel when you go into a space like that.

Hannah: Yeah. It's just not it's lacking that community engagement and it's lacking a heart I feel like a lot of the time, like you said, there's not those congregated spots. And I mean, I've been on a campus university, so I'm originally from the UK and so I went out undergraduate at Strathclyde in Glasgow, which was a city center campus which had its issues too. But that's, that's a different story. But here I spent a year at Iowa and there were certain actions they had put in place and I cannot speak fully to exactly what happened it, but it took place. But there were rules about real estate. You know what businesses could move in and, and how these things could happen in order to protect local businesses. And to kind of keep the heart of the community the same through all of the regenerations of the university. And I can't think about what a different place helped help, but think about what a different place IUPUI would be had they focused on that from day one of maintaining a community that already existed and uplifting and supporting instead of tearing apart.

Do we think that there is much that can be done moving forward? It's like I know a lot of that harm has already been done. You talk about reconciliation. Do you guys have ideas about what that would look like or could look like?

Kisha: I know that there are people who are currently working on ways to do that, and I'll look at it from the kind of the records part and the digital resources that are available, you know, working in a museum, working in libraries. We want to have artifacts and records that speak to the stories and that provide this information. I know we Mrs. Paula was talking about the Sisters of Charity. I immediately thought about the Sisters of Charity Collection at the Indiana Historical Society. And then we have a couple of artifacts that talk about the history of the organized fashion and the long history. And then it makes me think about the hospital and the black nurses and just various pieces, because it all connects back together and where all this started and was established and making sure that there's access to records and that we are working to preserve stories that we're working to preserve images and collections and that we're recording people like Miss Paola, who is here and who's sharing her story and who's telling it and that we're writing these now and are I'm just making all of this information available and that it is present and publicly presented you know, that is a part of the downtown Indianapolis story that we are sharing that not only were there, you know, you know, individuals who are musicians on Indian Avenue, but you had doctors, you have the Dentist, you had the lawyers, you know, you have all these individuals who were making a difference in this area, who were building families, who were providing education. One of the things you know, growing up here, one thing I remember is the conversations from Attucks graduates and just their experience in going to school and their teachers and how they had a difference. You know, hearing people talk about Mrs. Frances Connecticut Stout, you know, and just all of those different things and how important that is and making sure that all of that is there and that for the things that remain, that they are preserved that the buildings and structures that, you know, that are still there, that they are preserved. And then also, you know, finding ways to different places, placemaking in places of recognition, you know, whether that's through a historical marker whether that's through

a tour, if it's the walking tour, audio tour, you know, all of those different things. But then going back, I'll go back to what Mrs. Paula said about getting the first person, you know, getting there and making sure that we have that documentation somewhere as well, because it is extremely important to history and to moving things forward because we really need to know what existed beforehand. And having that there is just is extremely important.

Hannah: I completely agree. And I'd would really like to speak to anyone listening and doing this work and being in this field. I see the financial cost that this brings. And I think a lot of the times it's easy to forget that this work is expensive and it's time consuming and it's done by people with a great degree of expertise. And so if you are in any way able to pay for walking tours and take them around cities, if you're able to give money to libraries and institutions and ensure that it's being given to this work, if you have that within your wheelhouse in your ability, please do think about doing it, because it is one of the most important parts of this work is making sure it's funded the way it should be and that these individuals like Mrs. Tandy doing the amazing work have the resources they need.

Paula: You know, when I took a look at the canal connection, I couldn't stop every photo brought back of memory for me, especially the photos on Missouri street from about 12th Street to 16th Street, where Flanner house used to be I went to grade school at school 23, which was at 13th and Missouri. I didn't know at that time that about the history of the school or are the, the teachers. But I remember my experience there and we were well loved. We were everyone learned how to read, write and count. You couldn't get out of the school without knowing that. But just to see those buildings, it was a mix of in industry, it was mainly industry back and through there. Going east from Missouri. I remember a Knee-High beverage company we would go and get syrup to make punch. There was machinery shops around but the school was still there and there were still some homes surrounding the school and on the canal. And I just I just want to mention that because it is valuable to support this work that portion of the neighborhood is long gone. Most people don't remember it, but it was vital. And what I take away from it is, is that that change that had happened preceding my time there the school was a reminder of the history I just kind of wanted to throw that out. I think it's really important to support this type of work okay.

Music

Easton: So this might be a little bit of a shift, but we're going to go with it. So as much as it's downplayed, gentrification is a nationally issue seen in particular concentration in the Midwest. I feel. In college, back when I was attending the University of Cincinnati, I went on a gentrification walking tour. I will never forget that tour because we discuss things about my city that I didn't even know existed. We discussed the neighborhood. It's called Kenyan Bar, and I hate that because that's not what it was originally called. But it's called that because of the two streets that used to run through. And actually, it's interesting, if you ever look at old maps of Cincinnati, you know, a lot of cities did this after the Great Migration when there were large like concentrations of black folk. A lot of people would label the area Linconia, like as a reference to Abraham Lincoln, because if there was just a lot of black folk in one area that's just know a lot of us settling down to one specific concentration, they just called it Linconia. And it was it was demolished to make at highway in the interstate. And then you think about Queensgate, which was teased to be this huge thing and ended up being it again is only called Queensgate because that was its industrial complex name. And now it's just a remote district where no one ever is, but people used to live there. And the epicenter, of

course, as I mentioned earlier, is over the Rhine, which is the historic Germantown in the middle of it's actually to the northern middle of Cincinnati, but it's the brewery center that could be its own episode. But that place is very much fetishized. And I'm not saying that, especially post-COVID, that the revival of Cincinnati's brewery culture is any you know, is bad for you know, I'm not saying that it's a bad thing. I know that's how a lot of people ended up getting back into work after, you know, what we've seen with COVID and what all that's change. But it raises the question, how do we encourage individuals to see the value and beauty in inner city spaces without fetishizing them?

Kisha: Oof...

Easton: I know. Right

Paula: because, you know, that's what we're dealing with here in this area. I really hate to call it Indiana Avenue area, just because it negates MLK and Flanner house homes Fayette street and some of the sectors and nodes that are still left. But that's what we're dealing with right now. How to not let that happen. And to be honest with you, I really don't know what the answer is because until you have an influx of young black people of all walks of life wanting to come back and live in the city, there's not much you can do and so, you know, when I talk to younger people, I can even just give you my cousin as an example. And she seems not necessarily, you know, a young, young person. She's Gen Z, but I had started about five years ago. She grew up in Anderson, so I try to encourage her to buy a house in the city. Martindale Brightwood, Riverside you know, Mapleton, Fall Creek, Crown Hill. And she told me so matter of factly that she did not want to live in the hood. She this year, She bought a house the Noblesville that used to be a farm, you know, one of those new developments. And I'm happy for her. But, you know, I'm just thinking, why would you want to live all the way out there? There's no community there. You have no political power socially. You have to drive everywhere that you need to go to know why. And, you know, her answer is, is she liked the house? So what do you do with that? That's my question.

Kisha: Its so powerful. It really can be. I think about, you know, going back just to examples of the individuals that I have had the opportunity to sit and listen to them talk. Their stories are amazing. I mean, there are just so many things that happen within the span of those streets that, you know, it's just amazing. And like those are things that we're not necessarily having. They have not been written down, but they're someone's memory, you know, and that is special. And just being able to share that and to capture that, that is extremely powerful. I do not I always joke and say, you know, that history is so much better than fiction. We have we know that this took place and we can share that information. And that is valuable. It's meaningful, and it really helps to place you in this environment. I know growing up here, one of the things that was always so special to me was that I could visibly see remnants or structures or something that acknowledge black life in the city. And I'm not saying that it was necessarily this enormous amount of information, but, you know, we had I still have the Walker Theater I know whether that was West Montgomery Park or, you know, just Crispus Attucks that or just going over to other neighborhoods, other neighborhoods outside of downtown, the Douglas Park, you know, these different places where you can find history and story. And I appreciate storytelling and stories and history and being able to have that. You know, I was thinking about when I remember talking to David Williams that one time and he talked about, you know, going to Attucks and just his different teachers and, you know, what his teachers expected from him and things like that? Olivia McGee Lockhart, who is the historian for Bethel AME, and just the many different people that she had the experience of learning from. And she was she was a

teacher, so she taught a lot of students. And so hearing it from both sides and just and that's another collection that's a wonderful collection to gain information from the Bethel AME collection. That's also at the Indiana Historical Society. Mr. George Van Sickle, who is deceased. But for many different stories that he would talk about, I remember him talking about Indiana Black expo, and just the history of there. And then, you know, listening to individuals like Eunice Trotter and the research that she has done about her family and so that's kind of going a little bit outside of your question, but it is still very important to focus because it's about the value of one's history. The value of what is there. There's nothing that's needed to be added because it's already there and it's important and significant. And all we need to do is just share the, that foundation. And that really is it boils down to me, it's that foundation is what needs to be shared, shared and we go from there and then it is something that is worth fighting to make sure that those accurate stories are told.

Hannah: 100%. I think, I think one piece we went to the Crispus Attucks Museum this last year, and I do want to point out there's an amazing museum there. If you have not checked it out before in the city, make sure you, you, you do pay them a visit. But I know we were talking with their museum director who's been doing so much work for such a long time, but he was saying COVID has had a huge impact on them, that even though they are part of IPS schools, they've seen a serious decline in the number of students being able to come through their doors. And that makes me think of what you're saying, like there is a sadness there and if that connection is not being made, those students are not being able to engage because of COVID or funding or whatever those reasons are, they're missing out on that experience. And so again, this is another piece of this, as is whatever we can do to make sure students are getting those experiences and those cultural institutions are getting that attention. And we'll leave a link to Crispus Attucks Museum on that page to make sure you can check that out.

Do you want to talk about environmental justice? A little bit wary of the time? We've got about 10 minutes left and I don't want to ignore, Mrs. Brooks, your work in environmental justice so would you like to talk at all about how you got involved in the who's your environmental counsel and the importance of that work and how that fits into the discussion we're having today?

Paula: Well, I actually got involved with Environmental Justice when I came back home not only was I appalled about losing our identity, I was the residents, the older residents that were living in the neighborhood. I could not get across the street safely across 10th Street. And when I talked to policy people and DPW people, they just basically told me oh, that's just the way it is. Commuters would get upset if they have to stop. And, you know, I know that especially the seniors who were living in the two senior buildings that we have in a neighborhood. I know that they were living there because there were people who fought to have those buildings built to stop the expansion of IUPUI and so I ended up just becoming involved in my neighborhood association, advocating for my neighborhood then there was a developer that proposed and this kind of happened at the same time when we lost the Fall Creek Y, which is another iconic building, and that's actually a building that a lot of younger people can identify with because they went to daycare. They're people in their thirties. They they they can really fill that loss of that building. We have some generic private dorm there now privately owned dorm there now. And that was a city initiative as well at the bequest at IUPUI to build this off campus dormitories have private developers. So, you know, I'm seeing this and this developer makes a proposal to build an apartment building on MLK for students. And I knew the people were turning over in their graves at the thought of dormitories on MLK. IUPUI expansion was supposed to stop on that east or west side of the avenue. And here we are. We had

people who were in charge of the neighborhood who did not know the history, who were just looking at all what this is new development. And this is going to increase my property values. They weren't really concerned about the impact on the current residents. And at that time, the president of the neighborhood association was a white man, and the people who were gonna be most impacted were the black people who were living closest to this development. And it just made me angry. But it also motivated me to use my skills that I had in policy and also community work that I had honed my years away from Indianapolis. So I was active in that respect. And once my mom passed Jesse Kharbanda, who was the ED of Hoosier Environmental Council, came and said to me that they were thinking about trying to launch an EJ initiative here in Marin County. Would I be interested in joining the agency I said yes. And I decided to focus on mainly land use. So environmental justice, the framework includes everything. It the I'd like to say what environmental justice is, is a human right to live in a clean, safe and healthy environment. So that covers housing, that covers clean water, clean air, it covers all like the health disparities and land use. So I been working on counsel for almost six years now. And I've been able to work directly with residents on building their capacity to advocate for themselves. And I'm really proud of the work that I've done. A lot of the residents that I work with, I tell them that they're my people. And I mean that in the fact that we have the same lived experiences, these neighborhoods now are being threatened by real estate speculators, even the gentrification. And I'm able to help them. You can't stop change, but you can make sure that when that change happens, that the people who are living there, and especially these people who held up the neighborhoods through thick and thin, who educated their children, who paid their taxes, who you know, they're model citizens in a lot of ways to make sure that they're able to enjoy the benefits of this new investment in their neighborhoods. And so we try to make sure that residents have a voice and it's meaningful. My goal is always to make sure that residents are included in the planning in the beginning because you always have stakeholders who come in with the best intentions, but they don't know the people and they come in with these generic programs and then wonder why they fail. And the reason that they failed is because they never got the buy in from the beginning. From the community. So I my hat is really off to the board, ATC's board. My manager, Frank and Jesse, he's no longer our ED. But the commitment that they have shown to this type of work is definitely made a difference in ordinary residents lives. And a lot of people that I've worked with, they do feel today that that they can have an impact, that they're important and they're seen which is the most important thing is being seen and this is just not limited to members of the black community. I have one thing about growing up in Indianapolis, especially in the seventies, we all kind of had the same experiences with various sports leagues. The high schools you know, the events and you can always find something to bond over. So I'm doing a lot of work now in West Indianapolis, and that's a community traditionally that was not very friendly to black people at all. But I still can bond with them and I still understand their experience.

Hannah: Would you mind if, if on our links page, if we add a link to the organization and the work that you all are doing just to give you that shout out as well, would that be okay?

Paula: Oh, no, that would be great. That'd be great.

Easton: So I know you just touched on this Mrs. Brooks and I'm happy you talked about buying an investment because I'm sure there are plenty of people listening today that probably or whenever they're listening to this, they're going to wonder what they can do and I just wanted to ask you all, in closing, what do you think the best course of action is it, you know, making different choices when you go shopping or is it, you know, investing in different, you know, differently owned companies

and businesses, or is it through political, you know, reform or, you know, anything like that? And then just on top of that, in addition to what you all think, the best way for average Joes is to, you know, so to speak, assist. And also just if you guys think we've missed anything in our discussion, so two parter.

Paula: you know, I think all of the above that you mentioned is important but I also think a lot of people that live here in Marin County come from these small towns around the state. And I always encourage people that I work with that come from these small towns that they need to talk to their friends and families about electing more progressive leadership. The state legislature controls everything that happens in Marin County, but in Marin County, it is the economic engine for the state. This is a poor state. We're not a wealthy state. And we're losing talent. And so it's important to modernize that. When I first came back home, I used to say I felt like I was living the 1980s. Now I feel like I'm living in 1990s, but I don't feel like that we're at the cusp of anything this progressive or that will attract talent that is needed to sustain this city. So it's all of the above. And one, one last thing that I kind of wanted to mention, you know, Madam Walker is really identified heavily with Indiana Avenue. And I get the question a lot of times how I feel about that. And, you know, it's kind of interesting because I grew up in that shadow, so I always know who Madam Walker was. I always knew who Crispus Attucks was. You know, she was a businessperson. And the first black female entrepreneur. I've learned since, you know, the contributions that she made while she was living in this city. But the fact is that she only lived in this city for a short period of time. The building was not complete. It was almost a decade after her death when the Walker building was completed. And I think that we need to concentrate more on the people, the local people who made that building and made the avenue what it is, whether then to try to paint all of our successes on one person's achievement and that goes for, you know, this entire city. We have some great people who have given to this city, who are giving to this city. And we need to uplift that and I actually think that that will help not only solidify a love for the history and the area, but it will also help improve, you know, just the well-being of all.

Kisha: And I would just add to that, support the people, the individuals and the organizations that are doing and sharing the work, you know, people who are doing the research and who are sharing the information in the various stories supporting them. And I know, for example, that there are various Zoom recordings of Mrs. Paula talking about various neighborhoods throughout Indianapolis. And that's a way, you know, definitely to support. So taking those walking tours, I recently went on a walking tour and I came back and I researched for like the next three days because I wanted to learn, learn more about what was going on. And even now, MS. Paula brought up the why. I was like, oh my goodness, yes. Because that is such that is one of those places that we do have memories of that we remember we I remember driving past it, you know, all the time and just, you know, you know, supporting, supporting those things and those tours. Take the tour if you can, you know, and purchase the book. Look for the book. You know, all of those kind of simple things that you can do at the at the kind of neighborly level, the community level, and really looking for ways to be able to do that. And then, of course, I kind of have to throw this in there. If you have materials in your home, preserve and protect them as best that you can, please feel free to donate it to an institution, a historical repository, because that is that is something that is really important, you know, taking care of those artifacts, those images, those things that can help to document and share the stories. It is extremely important. And fortunately, there are many people who have done an excellent job of keeping those things in their homes, but making sure that when you're no longer to take care of them, that there is someone else who can do that.

Hannah: I think, is what people often think. If they're not in the best shape, they may not be worth it, but in the condition they're in today, get them taken care of as quickly as possible. Because there's no time like the present, right? Like we will do our due diligence. Oh, sorry. Yeah, go ahead.

Paula: And I just want to point out right at Michigan and West Street, there's a second Baptist church that's another historic church. They're still in the neighborhood that nobody knows about. Its been converted it into some kind of residential commercial space. But I just wanted to get that on the tape. That Second Baptist Church is still in the neighborhood the congregation is not there anymore, but the structure is still there.

Kisha: I try to include that one when I'm doing tours, especially if I'm like on a bus, then we can kind of drive past it. And you also, when you were talking, it made me think of St Bridget's and yes, again, another longer discussion. But, you know, it made me think of, of, of that congregation because, you know, all there were a number of churches there.

Music

Easton: absolutely. So thank you all for coming and thank you all for tuning in today. For another episode of This is Problematic. You can find us on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and anywhere else you get your podcast needs satisfied and for everyone here, we say thank you and take care.