Dorothy Cox is currently the Project Manager for the Rhodes Hollywood-Springdale Partnership. She is an avid community leader and works diligently to preserve a sense of community and genuine humanity. She discusses racism in terms of economic inequality and the ambiguity of discrimination as it exists today.

Lauren Turner: On behalf of Crossroads, we'd like to thank you for participating in this project with us.

Dorothy Cox It's my pleasure

Lauren Turner Could you start by stating your name?

Dorothy Cox: Dorothy Cox.

Lauren Turner: Where were you born and raised?

Dorothy Cox: I was born in Byhalia, Mississippi. And I lived there for the first nine years of my life. And then we moved to the big scary city of Memphis, Tennessee. At nine, that was a big deal.

Lauren Turner: And what's your current occupation?

Dorothy Cox: Currently, I am project manager for Rhodes College, the Rhodes Hollywood-Springdale Partnership.

Lauren Turner: Can you tell us a little bit about your parents? Where were they from and what they were like?

Dorothy Cox: My parents, my mom, both my parents from Mississippi. They had two different upbringing. My mom's dad was I guess you'd say was affluent. He had property and he owned a store.

[01:03] He was very, very savvy and he was able to, I'm going to say convince people that he was very scholarly and learned. So, they actually gave him a high school diploma and he never went to a day of school. It was after he was a lot older.

My dad on the other hand was an orphan. His mom died when he was, I think about 13. So, he was placed with relatives. And my mom died, my mom's mother died when she was seven. But she had a more of stable, I guess, you'd call "traditional" family. Her dad remarried and she grew up with a two parent household. But my dad didn't. He only had a second grade education. But he was definitely a very wise man and he wanted all of us to be very educated, I guess you would say.

[02:03] And he taught me how to read. He really was the person who really instilled reading to me. And my mom wasn't that, really big on education. I don't know why. It was really my dad who I would say was instrumental in me just reading anything I could put my hands on.

Lauren Turner: Can you tell us a little bit about your home life and what was that like?

Dorothy Cox: Oh, gosh. Do we have enough time? Well my parents, I think there was ten, in my mom's family. And my dad's family was five. And my family was 18. I have 17 siblings. I have a twin sister, two sets of twins, ten boys, eight girls.

[03:00] Yeah, you can't imagine unless you lived through it. You shared everything, I mean, everything. There was no privacy. I mean even your thoughts were not private. Thought you had some private thoughts, but you didn't. And I'm number seven from the top, so I did a lot of parenting for my younger brothers and sisters from homework help to drying the baby to learn how to cook at age 11.

And even at age, eight I was working outside of the home. I didn't feel I had to, but I wanted to. I guess, more than anything else to have some peace and quiet, you know. And I don't think the money was that important to me. It was just being a responsible person. So, I feel a bit responsible my whole life.

[04:01] I wouldn't say my childhood was chaotic. Amazingly, it was orderly. I mean with that many people because my mom would tell people she really should just raise children because we call her the "warden." She's very good at getting order without doing anything, just speaking. I was probably the defiant one. I just rebelled.

I didn't do things that kids do now to rebel. I just rebelled. If it didn't make sense to me, I just do away with that. I'm not gonna do that. I'm not gonna think that. So, I was an independent thinker at a very young age. I just didn't think like other people thought, you know. I didn't run with the crowd, although I wanted to be liked but, I was different.

Lauren Turner: You were talking about the responsibility that you had being independent. What kind of affects do you think that had on you or has on you now, the way you were?

[05:03]

Dorothy Cox: People see me as the "fix-it" girl. Go to Dorothy. She knows everything. She can take care of it. Give it to her. It will be done. We don't know how she does it all, but she'll get it all done. I think that early upbringing beside the fact I'm a Capricorn where everybody's coming at you, too. But those things were activated in me very early, to be responsible and not let people down. When I gave you my word, you got it.

So, it made me I guess you could say, you can ask my daughters, made me the perfect parent because of being so responsible at a very early age. When you know you should be thinking about just outside playing at age 11. I'm thinking about what I'm gonna cook for dinner.

[05:58] And I wasn't this person that wanted to cook now, believe me. I just thought that was totally unjust, period. You're only 11 years old. And but I didn't whine and complain about it. I just took it out on my siblings because I would make the food real hot, spicy, so they wouldn't eat it all up, so I wouldn't have to cook the next day. I learned to be real smart. And you know I don't have to repeat the same task tomorrow.

Video Cut 6:30

Lauren Turner: Where did you go to school?

Dorothy Cox: Well, when I was in Mississippi I went to a little school called Tyson. And that was up till about the third grade. And then we moved to Memphis and I attended Klondike Elementary. It was on Vollentine Street. And they built a new school in Chicago where we grew up, Chicago Park. I went there for one year. And then we had to go back to Klondike to finish what you all now call "middle school."

[07:02] We called it junior high. And I refused. I rebelled. Me, and my sister, we rebelled. We wanted to go to Manassas. So, my cousin went to the school board and got us enrolled in Manassas. So, Manassas High School is where I went to school, high school for me.

Lauren Turner: Why Manassas?

Dorothy Cox: My sister was there. My older sister was there. And I don't know. There was just something about the school. And when they split

Manassas and removed elementary, some of the kids from Manassas came to Chicago, I mean Chicago Park. And I liked it. I liked the kids there because it was different. It was people from another community. And so it was different types of relationships that was available. And I wanted to continue those relationships. And I wanted to go to a bigger school.

[07:59] I didn't want to go back to, I didn't want to go to Klondike. I liked the name anyway. Manassas sounds just intriguing and different. So, that's why-

Lauren Turner: What kind of activities were you involved in?

Dorothy Cox: Oh, in school --

Lauren Turner: Or in school, in church --

Dorothy Cox: Well, you know church I was the model little Christian. I taught Sunday school. I thought I could sing, but I never made the choir. But you know back then you could sing anyway. You didn't have to audition. Church was good for me. It was socializing as well, as a sense of family. And I always thought it was amazing what my dad did. We would pass other churches going to another church. I thought that was, that didn't make sense because I figured churches were churches.

[09:01] But I think it was the people there were always treated, when you come from a big family you know you're poor and everything about, you're poor. You didn't know you were poor, but you knew that you didn't dress like everybody else. And at this church, we were made to feel that we were wealthy, like everybody else, from the pastor's wife to just ordinary people.

And my dad, he was a deacon. And if any of us caused any problem during the week, he'd pray for you out loud. Everybody knew your business. I mean he would just, bless this child. I mean he would call names. Fortunately, I wasn't one of those because I learned early how grown people do. They will embarrass you in public. So, I would make sure that I was a good child.

And, but that impressed me how much his love for his kids and how much he wanted us to be, grow up to be productive citizens.

[10:06] And how much it laid on his heart and would pray for us in church. And he would be, he would bow down and pray. But when he finished people would be standing and walking.

And if you got there late, you had to stand outside until my daddy finished praying. Nobody would let you in the church. It was really awesome now that I think about it. Of course, they get embarrassed. You know you're a kid. You're thinking, why don't he shut up? But, now I'm looking back on it I truly understand because I'm a parent myself, why you would do that. That was some of my fondest memory of church, my growing up. It was a good place for me to be.

At school, I got along basically with everybody. But since I was from Mississippi, you know people wanted to see who you are. And I remember there was two times I had to fight.

[11:03] And I guess this city girl thought the country girl couldn't fight. Of course, you know I won. And we got to be good friends after that. And that was in elementary school. And I always wanted to be with the smart kids, all the kids who had less kids in their family than I had. I wanted to be with them.

When I got into sixth grade, went into sixth grade at this new school, I had a wonderful teacher. And that was Lucy Phillips. She was recently I guess graduated from college. And she took a real interest in me. And she, we had this play and she wanted me to narrate it. I don't think I did such a good job at all, because I don't think I ever said a word. But the play went forward and I guess I did a good job. But she was the one who really instilled in me that I could be a leader and I could step out front.

Video Cut 12:04

[12:04] And when I went to Manassas, I was elected to something usually, secretary. And I loved to debate. I could debate any issues and I did take a course in that. So, I got to do a lot of debating. And I had some very good teachers at Manassas, Bonnie Philips, and Mr. Hobson, and the principal then, Mr. Neely.

And when I got to the 11th grade, I wanted to be in a social club. And they wouldn't let me. And I thought, hmm. I'll show them. So, I started one myself. I started one. And I was able to get other people, other seniors and juniors and sophomores to become members of the club. That was the Big Sisters organization. And we were more philanthropists. Yeah.

[12:59] We weren't about the social thing, partying, and none of that. We wanted to be people who did something, stood out in the community on campus.

And of course, I graduated, I think it was almost, almost 500. I graduated number twenty in that class. So, I enjoyed school. I really did. It was a haven for me away from all my siblings and responsibilities, I could find my own place.

Britt Jenkins: What year did you graduate from high school?

Dorothy Cox: 1967.

Britt Jenkins: Okay. And when did you at that time experience or I guess what was your first experience with racism or being discriminated against, do you remember when you were a little girl?

[14:00]

Dorothy Cox: Because my first nine years was in Mississippi, I never really experienced that in Mississippi because when you grow up in the country race doesn't really matter. Because you're there helping each other and you have a sense of community because you're farming and you're laying the crops by. And no matter who you are, you're helping each farmer to help them do what they need to do to get their harvest out.

[15:02] That was not part of my world.

And the first word I heard that word, I want to say I don't think I was in, I may have been in junior high. We lived, well we moved from Mississippi. We were sharecroppers. And the person owned the land of course he was White. He was Jewish. But we saw him more as a friend. I saw him more as an extended support person for my family, rather than somebody that was racist.

Of course, I'm not my parents. I don't know what they experienced. But for me, as a child, I did not experience that. And when we would go to the doctor, I didn't experience it at the doctor's office. I didn't experience it going to the corner store or go to the store in Mississippi. I did not experience that.

[15:57] And I really owe it to my parents because they did not expose us to situations where we always had to be concerned about the color of our skin. And that never occurred to me until I really, I want to say I became an adult. It just wasn't part of my upbringing.

But this one particular incident because kids, I mean kids, White kids' be on the bus and they would come to our community. And that's the first time I heard the word "Nigger." Well, I didn't

internalize it because it wasn't part of my world. I didn't share with my parents. It was just a word I heard.

At school, of course I went to all black school. And we lived next door to Whites, in New Chicago. There was this lady. The man that owned the house where we grew up, you know he would come to our house and I didn't think about that, he was somebody because of the color of his skin that I had to be afraid of or go hide or anything like that.

[17:06] And although I know my father did experience racism, he did not pass it on to us. And there was things he would say to us as we grew up, but he didn't tell us that you had to be this way with the White man in the south and this way with the White man up north. But my friends did. And that's really who, I guess that I experienced racism with through my friends' eyes because we did. I didn't even think about it when my mom would take us places on the bus. I didn't think about why we were going to the back or downtown you couldn't go into certain stores. That was not part of my experience.

[17:49] And I really owe that to my parents and my granddad and my aunts and uncles because it wasn't something they sat around and talked about the injustices and how you had to be a Black man in America or anything like that. Even my brothers today, they don't, that's just not something we experienced. And I don't think that we're a rarity. I just think it was a wisdom of my parents that they did not visit, they did not allow their ghosts to become part of our psyche.

And so, as for me, what it did for me, I really had to educate myself on racism. And that happened, oh gosh, I think I was nearly 30. You know even when I went to get a job, I didn't go looking for the job because I was Black. I just went to get the job because I'm a female. I'm a woman. I want to work. I didn't go and anything like that, if I didn't get the job I didn't think it was because I was Black and I didn't get the job.

[19:07] I just said they didn't hire me today. And so that's how I grew up.

Video Cut 19:13

And during the '60s, I would see things on TV. Because it wasn't part of my upbringing, I didn't take it personal. It was truly an education for me. So, when I experienced it was just a word. But I didn't take it as having any power over me. And I was born in

1948. I'm sure someone in 1948 would tell you, they had a totally different experience. And I really think it's based on what they were exposed to as a child and the situation they went into.

My mom did not work outside the house. When she did decide to go to work, she went one day.

[20:00] And she said I have a full time job raising my kids. So, she didn't experience that either. Matter of fact, my mom was totally just insulated on a lot of things about life.

And I'm sure my dad did. You know I'm sure he experienced a lot of things. But he did not visit that with us. He wanted us to be able to move into any circle. You know that we didn't have to have this image of racism and slavery as a calling card. He wanted us to be, he really treated and when I think about it, I'm an American. I'm not African-American. I'm an American, just happened to be Black.

And that's how people see me today. They tell me that I don't see colors. I don't know how you cannot see color. But I understand them saying that, you know why they would say it.

[21:02] But I experienced more, racism through other people's eyes, my friends and I'll let you ask the next question --

Britt Jenkins: I know you said you graduated in '67, but are there any specific events from the Civil Rights Movement that particularly standout in your memory?

Dorothy Cox: Well, I learned about the Emmit Till that I thought that was total miscarriage of justice for a young man to die such a tragic death. And I guess the next thing would be maybe Dr. King and his life, what he actually stood for.

[22:07] And that he actually became peace, that he was actually peace. He was actually non violent

That you know, seeing in on TV, because even in my community where I grew up because I'm going back to a child. I didn't ever see myself as having to go into the store and I'm Black. That happened after I experienced it as an adult. And it was through my friends' eyes and other folks experienced something different than I had.

So, you know I'm just thinking that no real incident because we didn't march. Although that wasn't part of my parents' persona.

[23:05] We didn't participate in any of the marches. And it wasn't that they were I guess you call "pacifists" because they had their hands

full raising 18 kids until, and they had to put food on the table. At the end of the day, me marching, how is this going to put food on the table?

So, I don't think that was something that was pressing. My dad felt education. He felt that if you, I could say he wanted us just to be good citizens. And their favorite word was you'll figure it out as you go. And I kind of liked that for me because I always figure things out and make my own opinion about it and not having to take what they thought out of my head, deal with their pain, their anguish, what they went through. I don't have that in my head. So, I don't have really any.

Video Cut 24:09

Britt Jenkins: Could you talk a little bit about what you did after you graduated in 1967?

Dorothy Cox: I decided I didn't want any part of college. Didn't see where it would benefit me. I worked at a factory. And I got married at 19, right out of high school. And I had my first child when I was 21. So, I was parenting.

And I said, I guess my parents had a lot to do with that because I knew it was my responsibility to raise my daughter. I got busy in the community. I started doing probation work with the memphis juvenile court. I was 21, very young and didn't know anything.
[25:00] But I thought I could make a difference. And I started a club for girls, teenagers in my community so they could have an outlet, someplace they could come talk to people about what was bothering them.

So I was able to enroll other women into that, so I did that. I joined the political organization, the_____ Democratic Organization. I learned a lot about politics through that. And I think that was also an education for me about racism through the political arena, is where I saw it. I did that for a while.

Then I decided that I needed to just be a mommy. And I think at age twenty something, I started working. And I worked for a firm, clothing store, Julius Lords. I didn't see it there.
[26:00] I didn't experience the racism there that a lot of them did, because I was looking at things different. And I got hired at the telephone company. I didn't see it there. I just didn't see a lot of things.

So, I worked from, starting working full time when I was 26. And my main focus at that time, I was in the church. And I was raising my daughters. So, I wasn't this really full grown out community person at that time. So, that was I guess my early years was raising my daughters, being a mom, being a wife, being a part-time activist. Because you can say I'm "pro" anything, I'm pro women, pro the femininities. We can talk hours about that --

[26:59] And I was about that. And if I want to look at racism, I'll look at it from that point of view, is how that has hurt women. Racism, how that energy isn't supported on this planet, but not, I just couldn't, because even in homes, how women viewed different in their roles out of the greater society. And I saw a lot of that even in the political arena, as well as in the community.

Britt Jenkins: But when you did work for the probation in Memphis and then in the political arena, could you maybe get into that a little bit and talk about how women were affected in particular and how that kind of influenced you later on to become active in that regard.

Dorothy Cox: Well, in the juvenile system when I saw, what I see today, it's very limited support for women and children.

[28:10] We were asked to help moms. And usually it was, sometimes it was couples, but usually was with women who either had kids that were, they were single or they had had kids and all their kids were grown and now they had kids.

And I'll never forget this one particular lady. She had this little girl. She was 12 years old. And she was at her wits end, as to how to help her. So, she said just take her. Take her. I can't do anything with her. And it just broke my heart because here is two people that's caught up in this system.

[28:57] And we were not able to help either one of them. The courts at that time would take her for a little while, but she's still going to go back to the community.

Here's a mom who didn't want her. She was in the way. I thought, and when I would tell my supervisor that, she would just say that's all we could do. No, that can't be all we could do. That's all they would want to do. There has to be something else in place to help this mother be able to cope with her daughter. That's what I find today is that there really isn't anything in place to help families stay together.

And I saw it then and that was in the '70s where we do the band-aid effect. We talk about supporting families. We talk about supporting mothers. And I don't have anything againts dads

[30:02] But when I see a woman struggling and here she's thinking that the system is going to help her to be a good mom and to pave the way for her and there's so many roadblocks in the way that that wasn't going to happen. That was disheartening for me. I think I was 21.

As to how we could help this one particular mom be there for herself, number one. And then have enough energy and enough withal to be there for her 12-year old daughter. And this young girl was doing some of everything. She was stealing. She was, I think she was already having sex. And it was with older people. It wasn't someone her age. And it was a cry for help. It was a cry for some real intervention.

[31:01] And that's still happening in today's juvenile court, same thing happens. There really isn't anything in place to really support families on this plant. And I tell folks, I say you know there isn't anything. I think since the '60s, the '50s, to really support the children on the planet to be all they could be. That's what I saw with that.

In the political world and I think even with that, with the juvenile court system, hind side I would say that, was there racism in play? Absolutely. Were you able to see it? No. Because once again, I'd rather talk more about the haves than the have-nots, than call it racism. If I have it, the means or withall, and the money and the means and have the right connection. They can rise above this. They can rise above everything.

Video Cut 31:59

So, that's what this lady didn't have the means. She didn't have the support structure and what was behind it. So we're just not going, we're going to pretend. I'm going to pretend I care. And that's going on today in our society.

In the political world, what did I learn? There were some people who were good people, really cared and wanted to make a difference in a Black community. Truly do not, did not, and probably today do not understand how politics work. There are very few people who truly understand even how voting works. Voting is about your emotions. You know you vote based on your

emotions or you vote based on a memory. Vote based on what society says you should vote for.

[33:01] When you, when people really understand why you go to the polls to vote, our country will change. Our country will be transformed. We're going to vote today based on because well, what we use today is that people died. Black people died so I could go vote. People got lyched.

And I'm not saying there's a negative, putting that down because those things actually did happen. And that did not give us the vote. That allowed us to go and pull the lever. But we were not really electing anybody and so because it's all based on emotions. And so, I saw that, to understand the full impact of it

But I saw people really in earnest, wanting to get the vote out, getting people to go get registered, going to the poll and vote.
[34:00] But are you an informed voter? Do you really know what's at stake? I didn't see education. I didn't see people really moving past their emotions to be able to choose. You know let me peel this onion. Let me see what's really going on here. This isn't my candidate. This is the party's candidate. Why are they in my face? That's what I, when I think about the movement and think about civil rights and I think about all the things going on in this country, we haven't scratched the surface. Why voting's important.

We haven't ever, ever lived under the Constitution. "By the people, for the people, of the people."
[35:00] Why hasn't that been? If we had ever lived under the Constitution, there would not have been slavery. There would not have been racism. We wouldn't be having this conversation about this today. We're talking about partying, right. Let's celebrate something really wonderful. Not that this isn't really something wonderful.

But think about it. We got back to the basics of this country and why it was started. And what our forefathers saw and wanted for this country. And why isn't being taught in schools today? Why isn't Civics being taught? Why don't we talk about our American ancestry, that this is a great country? It's a wonderful country. I finished reading "The Kite Runner" If you want to talk about racism, prejudice, people that look just like you, kill you.

[36:04] I mean when we think about other countries, how we haven't had our country bombed. How we haven't really lived in any fear. How we are really a great nation. But we get so caught up every time a story that really isn't going to move our country forward.

You know if we could tell the story about how great our nation is, you know how the candidate isn't a candidate for the people. The people didn't say, oh, that's my choice. My party said that. Well, why do we need two parties? Why do we need a Republican Party? Why do we need a Democratic Party? We don't. It's a story, and we keep living it.

[36:59] That's the things that concern me about this great country. That how kids, children do not even know that. This is one of the richest countries on the planet. It is. But what makes it rich? It's not about the oil. It's the people. It's every day people, where ordinary people are doing extraordinary work. And that's what I saw in this Democratic Club. That didn't have a clue about what everybody together, that they really want to make a difference.

And one of the ladies who started, Emma Morris died recently. She was 87 years old. And how she was there doing just regular work and just doing, an ordinary lady doing extraordinary things. And I think we've forgotten that. We don't touch on how you and I are just alike.

[38:02] How if you cut us both open, what you'll get, guts and blood. You won't see racism there. You won't see struggle, strife.

We get caught up in it. And we choose not to love each other, choose not to care about each other because we've got to keep telling a story. And it's okay to tell the story, but let's leave it where it is. And let's figure out how we can transform our great nation where we're all created equal and not be born that way. Be born a little prouder like I was born.

Because I usually ask myself, now, Dorothy if you wanted to be rich, why did you choose a woman's gonna have 18 children? You know you wanted to be alone, why'd you do that? That's probably wasn't what you really wanted. So, you get a chance to live in a country where you can explore options. That you can think. That you can create a livelihood.

[39:00] And that's what my parents instilled in me, that you could think, Dorothy. It's okay to think, and think. I want to say, "what if?" What if that? What if we do this or do that? And that's basically my life thinking of "what ifs." Why you and I, why we can't get along? Are we truly different? My mom any different than your mom? No. Did she want the best for her children? Yes. Did she have all the advantages to make that happen? No. Were the cards stacked against her? Yes. Why were they? Why is it that a few rise to the top? That was the question I ask.

[40:01] Why are we still talking about that in 2008? Why wont we address the real issues? Why won't we talk about the "haves" and "have nots?" It's the haves, it's the have-nots with the power. You don't have a lot of "haves." But that's who we think. But we're all in this together. I hurt. You hurt. The group loses. You lose, you're in the group, I lose. We don't talk about it. We talk about winning all parts, go right ahead.

Video Cut 40:40

Britt Jenkins: Well, I'm just curious if you could talk a little bit about your involvement now in the Mid-Town-North community? What your position is and maybe explain what you do there in the community in general.

Dorothy Cox: Oh, gosh.
[41:00] Project manager for the Rhodes Hollywood-Springdale Partnership, of course, that was under the Coxy Grant. I know yall don't want to hear about that. I'm sure you heard enough about that.

My role, how I always saw, is to see my role is to be a catalyst for the community and Rhodes and that two communities to merge, to marry, that the college shares resources, students, faculty, and staff. And that the community feels that they are a true partner in this partnership. When I first started working in that role, I was totally in the dark

.
[42:03] And now you have all these answers and no one asked me a question. And so, I set out to really bridge the gap. Because I'm thinking that okay, Rhodes has already asked all those wonderful questions. And I've got all these answers and now we could forge ahead. Well, that wasn't true. What I found was a community disenfranchised. A community sick, spiritual sick, emotionally sick, really from, from no efforts, not from them. They had began to believe it was their fault. They had done something wrong.
[43:00] And they didn't know what to do about it. You know if I were to tear this room apart, I probably could put it back together, right. Check out. See where the books are.

So, here's a community torn apart and really didn't know what happened. And all I would hear, well, probably the first 18 months I did a lot of just listening, asking questions and sitting on porches and talking to people, and finding my way. And over and over

again, I would hear the same thing. This was a great community. I'd say, well, what happened? Did the boogie man come in and run all the brave people away, what happened? That's what I'm asking myself, because I'm storing this in my memory. And I'm thinking okay, then what did happen?

[43:59] So, I began to piece things together that I was aware of, the closing of Hyde Park, West Drive to keep the community from being able to drive through Hyde Park. As well as a slap in the face and even the Supreme Court blessed that one. Then I thought of another incident that happened. There was an incident called the "Shannon Street Siege," where this particular resident was off his meds and that siege lasted for 30 hours and several people died. I thought well, that definitely would not make a community thrive anymore. And so I said, no, that can't be just it.

And then I met another lady and she started sharing some things with me after they figured I was okay, and I'm not going to call the police on a lot of different stuff. So, they started sharing information with me. So, I began to venture out a little bit more and ask some questions.

[45:00] And open the center up so people could come in and feel that this was their center.

And I saw a document that said all of the properties, the parcels north of the creek, it's all commercial. I said commercial. Well, our house is here. And I said okay. And then someone said to me, she said you know the houses just wore out. I said that doesn't make sense because we've got houses in the town that's older than these houses. They're not worn out. What happened? So, you know that's more of my research going on.

And I saw that document and I talked to this particular lady. She said my family owned Main Street. I said owned Main Street, really? I said well, what happened? They don't own it now.

[46:03] I said, oh, you mean, they bought houses on Main Street and now they're no longer on it. But they didn't build them right. She said yes. And then she shared with me, she said you know all the children, we all got along out here. I said, okay. I didn't grow up out there. I grew up in famous New Chicago. I said okay, well, then still, I don't understand. I said, oh, you mean the children got along. She said yeah. So, I said that the community, probably 50% of it, is emotionally and spiritually sick.

[47:00] During that time when houses was being built in the community it was supposed to be farmland, highway, industrial and commercial. Then there were companies out there, chemical companies, meat packing companies and all that was out there. So, there wasn't a problem with the creek because there was no homes out there. Right as they built up, with the manufacturing they needed people to come work.

So, the city allowed several developers to just build any kind of a house they wanted and that's what they did. You basically have one bedroom, two baths, living room, kitchen and on a 40 by 140 lot or whatever they need to do. And those houses are now worn out because no one did upkeep on them.

And so the men in the community have resources. They can do whatever they want to do with it and the women. If they worked, they were day workers or they were domestics or they stayed home. So if, a man wanted to walk away from his family, and go on the next street and marry, that's what he did.

Video Cut 48:09

So, and that next union there were children. And so you can imagine if you and I are friends and then my husband decides to leave me to go be with you, and you have children. Well, guess what our kids call each other. Play children. Play children, this community, I never heard of that phrase. And so the women have this pain that's there. And I say okay, that's why they won't come to meetings. I'm reminded, you remind me. And that's why they won't call the police if there's any criminal activity because everybody's related.

[49:08] I said, oh, shit. What can you do with that? I mean you have a community that's sick. That really has a growth opportunity from having Rhodes College as a partner. Really, what do you do? I mean how do I work around that? How do I get you and I to get engaged again in the community? Because I used to think, I said can't do it. No, they can't do it. They don't know how to do it. They said no, there's something in the way. And that's what's in the way.

Britt Jenkins: What is this kind of repeated discrimination within this community you've mentioned a couple of cases of with not having the road built to connect the communities?

[50:07] And then I know that you have experienced some kind of discrimination from surrounding communities in terms of Midtown North. Could you maybe go into how this affects the mindset of the individuals in that community?

Dorothy Cox: I would say the one, the Hyde Park community, that's the one that sticks out when they closed West Drive, when houses south of the creek, it was populated mostly by the Jews. And you know they could go to church down at the Barren-Hurse Synagogue. It now is a church, Gethsemane I think at Evergreen and Vollentine. But when the Jews moving out then they usually go move closer to a temple.

[50:59] So, when Blacks began to move into the community and from Springdale to Parkway, West Drive is the quickest route. So, there were more Blacks belong to the community. And you had Blacks lived there but those were Blacks with the "haves." So, they went to --

They went all the way to the Supreme Court to stop the street closing. And the person who was very instrumental in that, the leader was Brother Ned T. Grain. He's now deceased. Also, a person to interview of course, he's deceased. He lost the fight but what was amazing about that is that no one in the Black community, he had no help.

[52:03] No prominent Black really, stepped up and became part of that. To me, it's not that Blacks didn't step up, but to the community it was a slap in the face. And that to me was racism.

That to me, above racism was the "haves" who have the power. And it feeds into that. The message in my mind that is said to the folks in the community and by the way I live in Midtown North is that it says here is the highest court in the land that's supposed to be "of the people, by the people, and for the people." And they allowed this street to be closed based on the color of someone's skin, based on the "haves" having power once again, to make this happen.

[53:04] That also sent a clear message to realtors, Hollywood, Midtown North is excellent for what I call "your first house." You buy there, then you buy up. Well, the buying up stopped. No one was coming in as a new buyer to buy homes. Say I bought a house there and my income changed and I was making more money. I could buy a different house.

Video Cut 53:36

So, that affected the housing industry. It affected people looking positive on the community to buy a house in the community. And that was a slap in the face. So, even realtors now do not direct people to that community. You have to specifically say do you have anything in North Memphis?

[54:01] Do you have anything in Hollywood? That's where I want to buy. Well, I mean think about it. We're talking economics here. If I'm a realtor agent and a realtor and I could see you $200,000.00 in housing Collierville or just sell you a $6,000.00 house in Midtown North, well, you do the math. They're making commission.

So, that hurt the community. It's not having those young moms to come into the community and buy a house. They eventually sell it and you buy up. And that's what's happening in communities. That's why communities stay vibrant because you have that mix.

So, now what you have is a lot of seniors and older folks still own their homes. You have a lot of renters. You have seniors who are now deceased. And when the Hyde Park thing started and actually was accomplished and the "Shannon Street Siege," then older folks in the community was telling their kids get out.

[55:12] Don't come back. There ain't nothing here for you.

You know I questioned that because I said you all are still here. Who's going to help you? So, you left, the community was left vulnerable for anybody to bring drugs into the community, but we couldn't bring jobs, can bring a way of life. And the community was self-contained. It had a grocery store. It had a bank. It had a dry goods store. It had a movie theater. It had three schools, Hollywood, actually four, Hollywood, Springdale, Hyde Park and Shannon.

And so, it was really very much, self-sufficient. And then government stopped giving services.

[56:03] And when services stop, people say I don't want to live there, crime come in. Okay.

Britt Jenkins: How does poverty directly correlate with discrimination and racism?

Dorothy Cox: I think it's done on purpose. Racism, poverty, all those about money, it's commerce. If there's no profit in anything, it dies. And you take away the profit margin, and poverty from racism it

wouldn't even be discussed. And the people who benefit from it feeds it. The people who suffer from it, feeds it.

[56:58] Because it keeps the people who suffer from it, the victim. And you have this vicious cycle, this spiral where it's repeated.

And what has directly impacted that in our community is the seniors are not passing on the wealth. So, you pass the wealth on. And because we're not taught that, to pass wealth on, If I have two daughters. And if they don't see the advantage of keeping the house, that I have and passing it on, so you pass the money on. And that isn't what, racism to me is professed out. Because people don't understand that passing on something, you don't have to start all over with, even in a business.

[58:00] As one owner in our community, he's been able to pass the wealth on to his children, several businesses. But that isn't thought of.

And in the Black community, in my mind perpetuates racism also, as organized religion. It keeps you at the poverty level. It keeps you thinking there's a higher power and there's a higher source. And you have to suffer. You have to live with that. You have to be poor. Jesus was poor. It's okay to be sick. You know, so it feeds that also, that thought pattern that I don't have to expire to live a good life on earth.

See, I tell people this is my heaven.

[59:00] I don't know about any other place. This is it. But if I'm taught as a child that this isn't so, that I'm not going to expire to even look at where I live as my heaven because there's a better place for me. And it's okay for me to go without now because God is good.

Video Cut 59:29

And I hate to say this but that's part of racism because it's fed from the top. It's how a church can thrive in a community. See, that's a question. You have mega churches next door to drug houses, where drugs be sold in the street. Say, what's up with that?

Well, people commute in. They don't live with that every day.

[60:00] They get in their car and it's like you live in the suburbs. You don't know your neighbors. You drive in your garage. You get out. You go in your house. Next morning get back in your car in your garage. You drive out. Well, that's how it is with the churches. You drive into community. You get out. You go in. You come back and if the people there come to the church, you may help them. If they don't come, well so be it. We did our thing.

So, that to me also feeds into the racism and into poverty in the community that the churches in communities really, truly are not engaged. I mean, it's sad that in the Black community, the Black church is in reach. And other communities, other races it's out of reach. It's not selling the Black community within the walls of the church.

[61:00] And but that is also taught that's part of our culture. And I think it's more so now, than it probably was when I was a little girl. It's that a direct, indirect result of the powers that be driving it? Absolutely. This isn't something, it's so subtle that because even that makes money. Because if I can keep you divided, I'll conquer you. If I can keep you thinking, that you do all these good things you'll go to heaven. And people do not believe the way you believe, we're not going to communicate.

So, to me that is a condition and a thought that is communicated throughout the media, the news media.

[61:59] It's communicated in our schools. It's communicated how we socialize together in high schools. It is a indirect hit that works. And because I'm so caught up in not knowing how you and I are alike, you know the average person would say that you have no problems because of the color of your skin because I won't have a conversation with you. And I won't have a conversation with you, so I won't learn that you want the same thing that my daughters want because I've been conditioned. I can't talk to you.

I've been conditioned that you have everything that you want. You know you're going to get them the best education. You're going to get them the best house. If you're married, you're going to have a man that loves you. You're going to have loving children. You have a supported family structure.

[63:00] And that's by design. That is communicated in our society. And we don't communicate. We don't talk about those things. And I guess fortune or misfortune for me, I'm able to get in those circles and I know that isn't true. But to try to convince people who every day wake up in a survival mode, then you got them brainwashed.

Britt Jenkins: Okay. If you want to get up and stretch your legs or get a cup of water --

Dorothy Cox: All right.

[End of Audio – Side Cox]

[Start of Audio – Side Cox2]

Video Cut 01:03:38

Britt Jenkins: I guess if you're talking to somebody younger, what would you say like one thing that or say that needs to be improved kind of progress the situation you're experiencing in the community or what that community is experiencing?

Dorothy Cox: I would, I'll speak to you all because you all *(crosstalk)*. Asking all the questions. They're with you, where you are and come to the table not so much to help. Because when you come to the table, you want to help. You actually tell the people you want to help, that there's something wrong with them.

01:04:37 And it isn't anything wrong with them.

We are impeccable beings, capable of, I mean untold, I mean I can't imagine the things that we're capable of doing and being. But we get so caught up in trying to fix the person. And why we trying to fix the person, that transformation has to happen in a group, in a community. It doesn't take place.

So, that's the first thing I would say. Please don't show up to say, I've come to help you because I'm going to turn around and oh, is something wrong with me? And I mean that's sad, but you absolutely lost me. And that's what happens to people in the community, too. Find out what the community is doing, you know whatever that is. Somebody's doing something.

01:05:39 Find that person and just let them, say here I am. What's going on? I always say to people, what are you up to? People that I ask that say, I'm up to everything and nothing. That means at nothing I'm open to receive

I would tell young people show up. Listen. Ask questions. I mean you might say well, Dorothy why are you doing it like that? Because we're more inclined to say, hmmm, because I'm going back in my memory bank, how I would do it. And I'd say you know that won't work. Guess what? I may have already tried what you're going to suggest. So, that's what I tell people. Just ask questions. Why are you doing it like that? I mean you see someone pulling a thing down the street. Say why are you pulling that? Where are you taking it?

01:06:39 And they say you know I had a car and it broke down. See, now you're learning some things.

The next thing I would say be eager to work on transformation of situation of maybe a way of thinking. Have you thought about what you just said? Why do you think that? And most people think you're saying that to disagree with them. I'm really not. I just want, some people talk just to talk. So, why are you saying that? It doesn't make sense. And young people, you're very good at that. Because you know as you get older people just want to talk, talk. They just bored me. But I listen because eventually I'm going to learn something about what I'm working on.

01:07:40 So, I would, for young people, keep asking those questions. Keep asking until you figure it out. Don't settle for the pat answer because there's something deeper there. Stay engaged in communities, wherever you are, wherever you go. Stay with the group. If the group, if anyone in the group loses, the whole group is lost. I want the group to win. Nobody in that group is going to win without you. So, make sure everybody wins. And everybody has an agenda. Everybody's up to something.

Video Cut 01:08:37

If a grown person tell you that or anyone tell you that, you can say, mm-mm. You're up to something. What is it that you're up to? So, oh, really, that's what you want to do. And you can choose then whether or not you want to become part of it. Most of us are so conditioned that we don't feel we can win. We don't feel that anyone cares. So, we stop very early in our childhood and we take on this act and we pretend to be so brave. We all have something of interest in our lives.

And there was this principal, L. B. Hobson told us right after high school. He came out at a class reunion. He said to be with people your age. He said stay away from old people like me. I thought, really, I mean that was just amazing that he said that.

01:09:39 And because although, most elderly people, all they want to do is talk. Now, that's a good thing. But it can stop you from moving forward.

So, that's why you want to know, what are you up to? What are you doing? Because you'll do something just to talk, so you know what. I'm going to put you on my calendar. I'll be back next Friday at 1:00 and let you talk, because that's good too. But elderly people will stop you from moving forward. And that's

what he was telling us. That they feel that they've lived their lives and all they want to do is talk about it.

Well, to me the fat lady hasn't sung. There's lots to do. All of us have hands. All of us need to be busy doing something that I'm up to or you're up to. So, I would, really, just get busy. Ask questions. Get involved.

01:10:40 Find out what makes your heart sing, say what brings you joy? What makes you jump out of bed and sing like a robin every day. Everyone has that too. And that's very challenging for us as human beings is to really get involved and find out what someone else is doing. And truly listen. Truly start the dialogue and in your head and listen.

And I have many opportunities to do that with people when they show up because I'm thinking, why are they at that door. Don't they know I'm busy? I don't have time for this but when I go to that door all that's gone. And I stop what I'm doing and I become present at that moment in their lives, at that moment.

01:11:38 Because that's all I have. All I have is right now. Really all I have is my word and right now. I don't have anything else. I'm up to nothing. Yet, I'm up to everything. So, if you show up-- , what's going on? What can I do? Why are you calling?

Because I know, you're up to something. And that's a wonderful place to be, is to be present every moment where you are to that situation because we've been told as little kids to plan your lives 50 years from now. That's no fun, is it? Because you won't be present, see. If someone had told me that, I wouldn't be wearing my cap backwards today. Did that answer your question.

Video Cut 01:12:27

Brit Jenkins: On behalf of the Crossroads to Freedom Project, I just wanted to thank you again for coming out and sharing your story and your advice with us.

Dorothy Cox: Oh, it's over.

Lauren Turner: Can I ask you another question?
01:12:38

Dorothy Cox: Sure. Go right ahead.

Lauren Turner: In terms of race and gender and what's going on today in America, how do you feel about the progressions that have been made as a

country? I know you were talking about, you said something about us, indirectly like backsliding, in like talking about church and the community and I was just wondering how you felt about gender in the community and race and how we're doing now as a country?

Dorothy Cox: Is this on tape? Is it? Okay. I'll be nice. I think as far as may be buying where we want to buy, living where we want to live, traveling. I think we made some great inroads in that. And that, if I have the money I could live wherever, I want to live. I could travel where I want to travel.

01:13:36 What distresses me is I hear too much, I got mine. You get yours. I play by the rules. You know I dotted the "i" I crossed the "t." You know I went to college. I did this. I did that. And I don't see, what I feel, we don't have a sense of community anymore. We don't have a sense of sisterhood, brotherhood. And I'm not talking about Black/Black. I'm talking about just people in general.

I feel we've lost that to be real authentic with each other. We don't even tell each other the truth anymore. I should be able to say, hey, look girl. The road you're going, that's not going to get you anything.

01:14:37 We don't do that anymore. We don't risk. We all want to be liked. I want you to like me. So, I can let you know how I really feel about you, as a person. See, if I cared about you. I can't care about you. I don't care about me.

I don't sense that in our country anymore, in our communities that we genuinely care. It's about where's the next grant money? Or, where's the next job? Not do I really care? Do, I really care about you as a human being that you succeed? That you have a good life. That you're productive. That's what I see we lost. And I think that's across racial lines. I don't think it has anything to do with the Black community or the White community. I see it all over the country.

01:15:36 I spent three weeks in Phoenix this winter. And I went back and I was there for two weeks. And I went to this amazing class Landmark education and they're really up to something big. They're up to transform this planet. And in that curriculum, we were there for three days, 14-hour days. And you got in touch with who you are. And before you left that room, you were a group. You were concerned about everybody. Everybody had to win. And I thought I was knew group before I went there and I thought you know I'm about, no, that wasn't true. I was about Dorothy.

Making sure, she got to where she's supposed to be, on time, if you got there fine. I may think about you an hour or two later. But I didn't really. It wasn't part of my persona. It isn't part of this country. Because we're taught to be solo.

01:16:39 You get yours, great for you. And if your classmate makes theirs, fine. But, you're not really concerned enough to say, hey, do you have trouble studying? Do we need to get together and have a study session? I sense that you're struggling. We don't do that enough. You know I'll do it if I know you. You know if you're part of my fraternity or sorority or one of the home girls or neighbor, just to feel that sense of communion.

Video Cut 01:17:09

And I feel that, I won't blame it on racism. I won't say racism just that. I'm going to say many things that has attributed to, it's just not being human beings anymore. We, you know the rat race succeeding at all costs, getting in the best schools.

01:17:40 Make sure your child gets into Central. Make sure your child does well. And it makes us very competitive. And I'm only thinking about me, my house, my yard, my dog, my cat. I'm thinking about the entire community. I'm not thinking about the world. You know people in the community I see those sweep right in front of their little street, in front of their houses. They don't think about going on in the street. They say that isn't _____. I got my own. I did my street. I did it in front of my house. I painted my house.

And we don't think about seniors. I was out yesterday doing some community work. And you know like I say, I'm the fix-it all girl. She says, Ms. Cox. I need someone to fix that. I got to talk to those Rhodes College students to help you. And she needs help on her house.

01:18:38 Well, when I was growing up, everybody got together and did that. And she has, even her son, her son is not on her page. He wants her to move. He's living in Collierville. He does not understand that that is her community where she lives. She does not want to leave her home. See that's what I mean. That's where we lost ourselves in this race to be somebody one day.

We are, when I become somebody then I'll have something. Then I'll do something. You know I got to do it first and then have it and I'll be, no, I need to be somebody right now. Who do I need to be to help this lady get her house done? That's all. I don't need to be the one-to-one with Dorothy.

01:19:39 I need to be powerful groups and community. I need to care enough to get outside of my world to get in her world and to bring some resources. She's 70-something years old. She loves her community. She keeps the vacant lot next door to her cut. That's worth something. I feel that's where we've missed. And I probably went all the way around the world to give you the answer. We've lost it as a people, as a race of people. It's about people. We've lost that. We've lost just the ability to care about each other in a humane way. We've lost the ability if you're on drugs or my kid can't speak to me. We don't feel safe anymore.

I hear people telling me be careful. You don't have to tell me at the most, people go to church. I said where is your faith?

01:20:41 So, we've lost that ability just to be kind to each other on purpose. Yall should be kind on purpose. It shouldn't be, and once I do it on purpose, become happy for me. It's happy for me to be kind to you. It's happy for me to think and want the best for you. See, it should be just part of who I am, not because it's going to get me something or get me an interview or get me a raise. It's because who I am. We don't practice the six pillars, character. You know I can trust the same old, we're irresponsible. We're not fair. We don't care. And we have no citizenship. Where did all that go?

01:21:36 See, did we lose our wisdom on the road to success? Those things don't matter anymore, just be kind, to care. Can I not be a doctor of philosophy and still be kind to you? Can I not come back and help you fix on your house because I have a Master's degree? I mean what happened to all that. Have we become so full of knowledge, what we call education, information that we forgot to be human beings to each other. I mean where did we go that we can't even tell a young man, pull your britches up. Pull your pants up, baby. They say, oh, you can't talk. I said yes, you can. Just open your mouth and say it.

Video Cut 01:22:27

And how often have we really lived in fear? How often in the last six days or five days that our lives were in jeopardy?

1:22:38 Yet, the TV tell us every night, all day long we should be very careful, right. Well how often are we really faced with a life-threatening situation? But that's the way we live. We put bars on our windows. We buy alarm systems. And we shut ourselves from the world. And yet, we wonder what had happened. We did it. We did this to ourselves.

Now, if we had, is this enough and we're very savvy to do this to ourselves, I think we can get ourselves out of this fix, don't you? I think that we can. See you smile. It's easy, isn't it? Now, we've experience as this other crap. So, experience some peace, some love and some joy and some happiness. It's just on purpose. Be kind to each other, to care enough.

01:23:40 There's a entity that says, I love myself just enough to love you more. And when I thought about that, I said what does that really mean? That's what came to me. I may be a cigarette smoker, you know. And I'm not. Just say I smoke cigarettes, and my daughter wants me to give it up. Well, to me its no problem smoking cigarettes. I'm going to live to 90, but for her, because I love myself just enough, stop smoking.

Those are the types of adjustments that we make in our lives when people care about each other. Say I love myself just enough to be brave for this 70-something year old woman to help her get her house fixed. It isn't about me. It isn't. It's about caring about her. It's one less thing she has to worry about.

01:24:35 So, I'll pick up the phone and call some of these companies and say don't yall have an outreach program that you can come out and fix her house? That's what you do when you care. If I don't care, I'm going to go home and put the note down and say, mmm, somebody else whining again. And you know what I told her. I said you know, if I don't do this you call me back, and you tell me. Remind me. It's because you know I get busy, but it's on my radar. I'm sure.

See, I'm enrolling you all in the possibility of us creating a solution to her problem. That's why we share. So, you share. You enroll people in what you're up to. Transformation isn't just a language. You don't share it, it dies. So, I'm sharing with you all today. I'm creating something magical for this wonderful lady, so she can work in her garden and do some great things and share wonderful

01:25:38 Does that answer your question?

Lauren Turner: Yes ma'am. Okay, thank you for sharing.

Dorothy Cox: Thank you all for having me. You know I share. Are we still taping, okay, good. Shared with Francesca, I said you know I don't have --

[End of Audio]