
Appendix 3: Excerpts for discussion about racial wealth gaps and community resilience

Trymaine Lee, *The Wealth Gap*

Elmore Bolling, whose brothers called him Buddy, was a kind of one-man economy in Lowndesboro, Ala. He leased a plantation, where he had a general store with a gas station out front and a catering business; he grew cotton, corn and sugar cane. He also owned a small fleet of trucks that ran livestock and made deliveries between Lowndesboro and Montgomery. At his peak, Bolling employed as many as 40 people, all of them black like him.

One December day in 1947, a group of white men showed up along a stretch of Highway 80 just yards from Bolling's home and store, where he lived with his wife, Bertha Mae, and their seven young children. The men confronted him on a section of road he had helped lay and shot him seven times — six times with a pistol and once with a shotgun blast to the back. His family rushed from the store to find him lying dead in a ditch.

The shooters didn't even cover their faces; they didn't need to. Everyone knew who had done it and why. "He was too successful to be a Negro," someone who knew Bolling told a newspaper at the time. When Bolling was killed, his family estimates he had as much as \$40,000 in the bank and more than \$5,000 in assets, about \$500,000 in today's dollars. But within months of his murder nearly all of it would be gone. White creditors and people posing as creditors took the money the family got from the sale of their trucks and cattle. They even staked claims on what was left of the family's savings. The jobs that he provided were gone, too. Almost overnight the Bollings went from prosperity to poverty. Bertha Mae found work at a dry cleaner. The older children dropped out of school to help support the family. Within two years, the Bollings fled Lowndes County, fearing for their lives.

bell hooks, "The Chitlin' Circuit," from hooks, b. (2015) *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* New York: Routledge, pp.48-49.

....We only knew the world we lived in, and as children we loved that world in a deep and profound way.

It was the world of Southern, rural, black growing up, of folks sitting on porches day and night, of folks calling your mama, 'cause you walked by and didn't speak, and of the switch waiting when you got home so you could be taught some manners. It was a world of single older black women school teachers, dedicated, tough; they had taught your mama, her sisters, and her friends. They knew your people in ways that you never would and shared their insight, keeping us in touch with generations. It was a world where we had a history. There grandfathers and great-grandfathers, whose knees we sat on, gave us everything wonderful they could think about giving. It was a world where that something wonderful might be a ripe tomato, found

as we walked through the rows of Daddy Jerry’s garden, or you thought it was his garden then, ’cause you did not know that word you would learn later— “sharecropper.” You did not know then that it was not his property. To your child mind it had to be his land, ’cause he worked it, ’cause he held that dirt in his hands and taught you to love it—land, that rich Kentucky soil that was good for growing things. It was a world where we had a history. At tent meetings and hot Sunday services we cooled ourselves with fans that waved familiar images back to us. Carried away by pure religious ecstasy we found ourselves and God. It was a sacred world, a world where we had a history.

That black world of my growing up began to fundamentally change when the schools were desegregated. What I remember most about that time is a deep sense of loss. It hurt to leave behind memories, schools that were “ours,” places we loved and cherished, places that honored us. It was one of the first great tragedies of growing up. I mourned for that experience. I sat in classes in the integrated white high school where there was mostly contempt for us, a long tradition of hatred, and I wept. I wept throughout my high school years. I wept and longed for what we had lost and wondered why the grown black folks had acted as though they did not know we would be surrendering so much for so little, that we would be leaving behind a history.