Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency

**Audio Clip #1:**

Donald Frazier: When I came on board, the focus was really around homelessness and housing and a lot of contracts with Housing and Urban Development, federal contracts with HUD. We intentionally did an environmental scan of the communities that we serve. At the time, BOSS was serving Oakland, Berkeley, and Hayward in primarily transitional housing and shelters. We did an environmental scan in the community to see what's going on, because what we knew that Oakland was ground zero for homelessness, violence, poverty, you name it. Oakland was ground zero, at least in Alameda County.

In that environmental scan, we found some really interesting and quite disturbing things. From a historical context, just the level of discrimination that was happening against certain groups of folks, mainly Black people, and Latinx folks as well, but primarily black people. The historical roots of persistent poverty and racial residential segregation played a tremendous role in where we are now. There was discriminatory mortgage underwriting. There was redlining and blockbusting. There was racial steering. A host of other things.

In addition to that, what you would call middle class or white flight to the suburbs, which basically demolished the tax base and kind of created these pockets of poverty, particularly in deep East Oakland, East Oakland, and West Oakland, primarily. Then, when you kind of take it a step further and look at health issues or the key determinants of health inequities, which in and of itself, in our mind, kind of set the stage for looking at this as a structural racism issue. It had the issues around concentrated and persistent poverty. It had racial residential segregation, inequitable economic conditions, inequitable psychosocial conditions, health modalities. It just created poor and inequitable health outcomes in low-income communities of color.

Then we looked at the issue around violence and we brought on an intern from UC Berkeley. I asked him to track, because at the time, we would get reports around the violence in Oakland, primarily. Violence is county wide, but it is primarily, again, ground zero is Oakland, and to track the violence. And I told her to also look at where liquor stores are located, where churches are located. Then, to look at where job training opportunities or access are located. Believe it or not, the violence lined up with the liquor stores and the churches in predominantly black communities.

Then, the four or five job training venues were peppered, but it was outside of the community, so primarily downtown area. Then, we just said, "Okay, this is basically a poverty and crime and incarceration quarter." We looked at the poverty status in Alameda County, where 24% of black people are below the poverty level, 18% of Latin X population below poverty level, 16% Native American, 9% Asian, 8% Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and 8% white. Then we said, "Okay, what's the percentage of black people living in Alameda County?" At the time, it was 11 or 12. Now it's down to about 10 or 11, maybe 10.5.

So, ten percent of the population, 24% living in poverty. Then, we looked at the zip codes in Oakland, looking at zip codes in Deep East Oakland, East Oakland, and West Oakland, and the Fruitvale area. At the time, it was 9%. Now, because of COVID, it, of course, has ballooned.

The city at the time was at 3% unemployment and the country was doing great. But in these specific communities, in these specific zip codes, it was off the charts, as high as 9%. So, we’re looking at unemployment, we're looking at poverty, we're looking at homelessness. All problematic, black people at the highest levels of disparity in every area whatsoever. So, with all of that data, all that information, we said, "Okay, what are we going to do about it?" We got around the table with the executive staff and just came up, "Okay, we need to create reentry employment programs, we need to create peer support programs, we need to conduct prevention programs. How are we going to do this?" So, we aggressively went after grants and services to support our ideas around solving the problem or at least helping to solve the problem.

**Audio Clip #2:**

Donald Frazier: Folks are believing that it's their fault that they're in the situation that they're in. We're saying: Let's split it 50/50. Don't take 100% of that. Maybe take 50% of that and then do what you can do to get better, but you have to understand that the system was designed and the conditions were designed. How can we now redesign those systems? And that's through convincing our government sources and foundation sources to reinvest into these communities. Because it has to start somewhere.

The government has historically subsidized homeownership for whites and where that group of folks could create wealth, could literally create generational wealth. And it just wasn't true for Black people. And that’s just a fact. If that can happen with the government subsidizing them, why can't they subsidize the communities that have been historically ignored? And that's what we're pushing for. Some call it reparation, some call it something else, but I think it's appropriate to fight for.

And we're letting the folks know who are coming through this that it's appropriate to fight for. It's appropriate to speak about. It's appropriate to different remedies in terms of how this can occur. It's appropriate to use your mind to create these things because it's the right thing to do.