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Transcription of Natasha Bowens-Blair: author of the Color of Food: keynote and book signing,
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BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

[00:01 - 01:39] James Pritchett: Hey. Well good afternoon everyone. Welcome. Welcome to our Rams read program this afternoon. I'm so excited and happy that you have the opportunity to join us. My name is James Pritchett. I'm the dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences. So, so this book, our common read, really resonates with me, both around a sense of place about community and what it means to, to work with the soil and living things. I know that that has that same kind of, that same kind of connection for you as you read through this book and you found narratives that were important to you, that may be challenged you a little bit and open up the lenses, to your own life. And that's what the Rams Read program is about, right? Is a shared experience, a shared experience of all of us to help create our community, to enable us to ask each other questions and to be able to share ideas and also maybe handle some difficult questions to challenge us. And so that piece, that shared experience is why we're here this afternoon. So let's acknowledge and affirm that, affirm that's our purpose for being here today. You know, at Colorado State University, we have spent a lot of time thinking with intention and, and importance about how we acknowledge the difficult history that is our university and the fact that the lands on which our university was founded, well, that was stewarded by native and indigenous peoples, that really bore a tremendous cost in our creation. So, we acknowledge that as well. And we've taken the time to develop a land acknowledgement statement that I'd like to share with you now. So let's, let's with purpose watch the Colorado State University Land Acknowledgement Statement.

[02:11 - 02:21] Speaker 1: Colorado State University acknowledges with respect that the land we are on today is a traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Ute nations and peoples.

[02:24 - 02:30] Speaker 2: This is also a site of trade, gathering and healing for numerous other native nations.

[02:32 - 02:40] Speaker 3: We recognize the indigenous peoples as original stewards of this land and all the relatives within it.

[02:43 - 02:52] Speaker 4: As these words of acknowledgement are spoken and heard, the ties nations have to their traditional homelands are renewed and reaffirmed.

[02:56 - 03:02] Speaker 5: CSU is a land grant institution, and we accept that our mission must encompass access to education and inclusion.

[03:03 - 03:13] Speaker 6: And significantly, that our founding came at a dire cost to native nations and peoples whose land this university was built upon.

[03:17 - 03:26] Speaker 7: This acknowledgement is the education and inclusion we must practice and recognize in our institutional history, responsibility and commitment.

[03:35 - 04:47] James Pritchett: We affirm and acknowledge that commitment that we share at Colorado State University to the original stewards of the land. And I think that when we think of The Color of Food, the book that is our common read, there's a fair bit around stewardship that joins us. As you read the words of Natasha Bowens Blair, I think you probably felt like you had, had a connection too. Maybe, maybe it was when you read about the station wagon, Lucille, that took Natasha Bowens Blair on her journey in the, in the Color of Food and the individuals that she met. Maybe something resonated with you. I spoke with a student just a few moments ago about the loss of a grandmother who had some, some knowledge and how that drew, drew that person in to agriculture and, and to the Color of Food. It's those kinds of things, that sense of purpose and what we feel as we read that book by Natasha Bowens Blair, that we really get a sense for this, this universal feeling that, as with the author, when you put your hands in the soil, you're changed and you feel the living things that are around you. It's that connecting point that's important, but also the importance and the themes of what it means to be underrepresented and to be marginalized and trying to be part of food and agriculture.

[04:47 - 06:12] James Pritchett: And as you read the book too, you're filled with hope as you think about the next generations and the opportunity that we might have to, to forge our own future. I heard Natasha speak this morning about now's the time, now's the time to heal. And so in contemplating this book and then contemplating this opportunity, we'll have a chance to think about

what it means to heal and our common connectedness. In a little bit, Natasha Bowens Blair will join us to, to provide a keynote address and once she provides that address, Doctor Albert Bempah, who is here in the front row will do a little question and answer session and moderate a discussion for us. That's our opportunity to be able to learn. It makes sense that we'll be able to join in a narrative, a narrative about this book with Natasha, as she describes some of what that journey is for and some of the important issues. Not only is she a farmer, but she's also a community activist and a mother and a wife, who spends her time trying to empower us and to embrace the opportunities that are there for us. She helps us to dig deep into our understandings and maybe, maybe our misunderstandings, and allows us the opportunity to really discover what true food sovereignty is. What that means, really, about being a place at the table for, for everyone. So it is really with, with great excitement and pleasure that I have the opportunity to introduce to you Natasha Bowens Blair, for her keynote address here as part of the Rams Read Project. [applause].

[06:21 - 10:31] Natasha Bowens Blair: Thank you. Thank you, Dean Pritchett, once again. If you all don't mind, I am going to remove my mask. Hello, friends in the front. Hello, friends in the back. All right. Got my clicker. Good evening. Thank you all so much for taking the time to come out. It's Friday. Classes are over. So this means a lot. And thank you so much to CSU and the Rams Read committee for all of the work you put in, not only in coordinating these, these couple of days and bringing me out here, bringing these stories and these voices into the room, but for the work well before that to, to even select this book and go through the process of choosing these books. It's really greatly appreciated and beyond what I could have ever expected when I started this project. You know, the, the, the stories and the voices that we're able to bring into the room. And now spread across this community 5000 times over, 5000 copies of this book. It is truly an honor. So thank you. And though these stories were documented about ten years ago, they're still very relevant, very, very relevant right now. And so I think that says a lot to the work that we still have yet to do of opening our eyes and sparking dialogue and building connections, which is, was the only hope for me for, for starting this project. Because I think we can do that through storytelling, and it helps us truly understand the injustice and inequity and oppression that is ingrained into our system, our food system, and all of our systems right into the history of this nation. But all of that isn't the whole story. There is also strength and beauty and joy and resilience in the land, in our food and in these stories, right in these voices and in our histories and her stories. And we carry that. We carry that as our ancestors carried them. And this to me, is the part of the stories that must be told as well. It's the part that will heal us and push us forward in this work. Because as we know, both the light and the shadow are woven into our stories, into this land, into the food and the medicine it grows. And telling these stories, unearthing them, saving them and carrying them into the healing work that I believe is in front of us, that is our work. Work passed on to us from our ancestors, and there's before them,

and there's before them, and there's before them. So thank you all for listening and coming here to dig into that work and be here with open ears and open hearts. Before we begin, let's see. Nope. We jumped way ahead. Sneak peek. Here we go. Before we begin, I want to take a minute to honor the voices carrying these stories that we'll hear from today. A few from the book, but also hopefully from right here in this room as we enter into dialogue a little bit in a little bit. Also, the stories that we won't get to those who are not here with us, and the many stories that have yet to be heard. I want to honor the triumphs and challenges, the struggles, the, the cultural histories, the family stories, the sacred lands. Just like I'd like to honor this land that we now gather on and ask permission to be here in community today.

[10:31 - 15:14] Natasha Bowens Blair: And the land, the story that resides in this land, one that is right now asking to be returned, remembered and revived. So, let's all please take a minute to close our eyes, we're focusing on this beautiful artwork by climbing poetry. And simply breathe gratitude into the room and make intentional space to receive and respect each other's stories. Thank you. I appreciate that. You see, to me, the stories that we each carry, particularly those woven into our lands and into our food are sacred. They are just so intimate, right? They carry so many teachings for us. Every day, there are teachings all around us, right under our feet in the land, right under our noses, in our food, in our seeds, and we can easily take them for granted. And we can, but we can stop that. We can start beginning to really understand how sacred they are and start connecting with them by building relationship. And that's how my journey, let's see if I can figure this out correctly, with farming began through a completely unexpected relationship with the soil. The very first time I dug my hands into it, it was, it felt like a homecoming, which was bizarre for me. Someone who was completely out of my comfort zone on a farm in West Virginia, so far away from my home in South Florida, where the only digging I ever did was my toes in the sand at the beach. I had no idea what I was doing, much less any idea about the journey of growth that I was about to embark on. And I'm happy to share the story of how I got from brown girl on the beach to brown girl farming later on, but once I was out there on the farm and digging and planting seeds down into the black earth, I tapped into something that I had no idea I would encounter. It felt like something bigger than myself. It felt like something bigger than my desire to farm and to grow healthy food. It felt like something that was coming from my ancestors, though I hadn't yet learned their full stories. But I just knew that it was a call to pause and back up and try to connect and build relationship with the land and with those who had stewarded the land long before me, in my own family or otherwise, and those who were stewarding the land, who looked like me, and who were out there with their hands in the soil with the same intentions. Women like Valerie Siegrist, who carry powerful teachings on relationship. Valerie welcomed me into her home in the Puget Sounds of Washington on Muckleshoot tribal lands, her tribal lands, where she lives in relationship with the same plants, animals and fish her ancestors

have for thousands of years. She's a native food educator, nutritionist, herbalist, and founder of the Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project. She's also a mother. And just a few weeks before I arrived in her home, she'd given birth to her daughter. So I was especially grateful for her making the time for, for me. And her kitchen table was covered in baby items, as well as dried nettles and baskets of huckleberries. I want to share with you some of her words. Huckleberries are in season right now, Valerie explained. And every year on my birthday, I get a group of people together to go up there and pick. I tell them, "This is your birthday present to me. Pick a gallon of berries." She laughs. "And in that way, birthdays are awesome. Huckleberries are incredibly high in antioxidants," she continues. "So they're incredible anti-agers and long life-givers. My auntie lived to be over 100 on a diet of berries and fish. They also balance blood sugar, helping with diabetes, which is an epidemic in our community. When I go to the school to teach kids about our foods, I ask, "Who has a family member with diabetes?"

[15:15 - 19:44] Natasha Bowens Blair: And every single one raises their hands. Then we go up to the mountain and I tell them, "Welcome to your tribal territory. We're going to pick medicine today." Valerie then spoke of her deep relationships to her community, including the plant community that taught her what she knows and shares. She particularly spoke of her relationship with nettles, and she called them her greatest plant teacher, and she was one of the first people that I met that that referred to plants as teachers. So I really carried that with me. She shared with me her relationship with nettles. Some of us may only know them as the painful, stinging plant that grows along waysides and streams and shady woods edges. But Valerie will tell you that that sting heals arthritis, it sparks serotonin, gives you kind of a giddy high out there connecting with the plant. And she also went on to explain all the medicinal benefits and other ways that the nettle plant carries. She then explained that Muckleshoot families used to, and some still do carry particular foods as a family. So like a salmon family or saltwater fisherman family, or a nettle family or huckleberry family, and hers was a family that tended nettle patches. And so she spoke of how she still goes out and visits some of these patches, as well as her favorite huckleberry patches, which she told me that they yield less and less if they go unpicked. So when she's not able to get out and have that relationship of reciprocity, you know, there's, there's a direct result. And in her words, she explains a little bit more. "It's a symbiotic relationship. One we are very much intended to be a part of. It's how I express my food sovereignty. Though the food sovereignty movement is getting bigger and providing space for people to talk about a different food system, we have to remember that there is a different, there is an ancient system that has been here a long time and fed people a long time. And for tribal people especially, food sovereignty carries a different weight. Every time I go and harvest, I'm expressing my food sovereignty. To think about it in that way is really important, and it's what our ancestors traded land for. It was the number one priority for our ancestors when they signed the treaties, to

ensure we always had access to our foods and our medicine." She went on to explain that the Muckleshoot food system was their entire economic and social system at one time. It was structured on a symbiotic relationship with responsibility to the lands, but also to each other through generosity, and that in turn created sustainability. Your wealth was based on your generosity. They had potlatches, which is the origin of the word potlatch. Okay, so it was essentially a regional redistribution of resources and each family, right, that tended to these different foods would host and give their foods or goods away or trade. And so it was important to have strong relationship with your nettle patch or your huckleberry patch or your salmon, so that you could have the best and largest harvest to be able to share that wealth. Imagine. And then beyond that to watch these foods, our plants and animals survive through the adversities over time of climate change, droughts, fires, abuse by humans and to see how they feed more than just humans, how they keep so many alive in the system these plants create. In that way, they are more than just a commodity or a resource or even a food source. They inform us on how to live in the world. Come on, that was your shining moment. There we go. How can we live like our teachers, the plants and foods around us? How can we learn to grow and thrive in diversity and be big medicine in the world? Let's all marinate on that for a second.

[19:51 - 21:53] Natasha Bowens Blair: Kevin Welch would say, "We first have to recall our plant teachers through storytelling and saving and sharing their seeds, keeping both the plants and the teachings they carry alive." Now, when I sat with Kevin at the center for Cherokee Plants on the land of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation in North Carolina, I had to scoot my chair up really close, in order to hear him because he spoke so softly. And his wife, Sarah, said that that was his strategy for ensuring that you were listening. So we're going to get a little taste of that here in a minute. But first, the center for Cherokee plants that Kevin and Sarah ran is a seed bank and propagation nursery that grows, collects, and saves heirloom Cherokee plants to preserve and distribute to the entire tribal community on the Eastern Band of Cherokee land. In addition to giving out garden kits and seeds, Kevin and Sarah would travel the reservation storytelling. They even showed me they had this little wagon that they would take around and lay out a blanket and bring instruments, and they would visit everywhere, the schools, people's homes, senior centers. So let's hear from Kevin himself, and let's hear a little bit of strategy-, of his strategies for ensuring that we're listening as we hear more about what they've been doing. And I just want to make note before tech cues up the video that it was important to me in this project to really place emphasis on, you know, the voices of these farmers. And so even though at the time, you know, people were urging me to do a film documentary, I held strong and just stay in old school with the still shots and my little voice recorder, which I then, you know, went home and transcribed each word. But I say that to say that

you might hear a little fumbling of the recorder, and you'll-, but you'll be able to to listen to him and the lovely background sounds of where we were sitting as you look at these still shots.

[21:56 - 21:58] Kevin Welch: This is the basis of our people. We're agriculturalists.

[21:59 - 22:00] Natasha Bowens Blair: Maybe a little too soft. [laughs].

[22:01 - 24:08] Kevin Welch: Like little kids. I tell kids, we're not horse people like the Plains Indians, we're not salmon people or fish people like the Northwest tribes, or we're not desert people like the folks in the Southwest. We came out of the woodland, period. And we, we're agriculturalists. We grow our food, we collect our food in the woods. The one thing that's a misnomer a lot of times is that people assume that wild gathering is separate from agriculture or regular agriculture for native peoples, it's not. It's actually considered a part of agriculture for us in that we, we don't differentiate between the plants that come from the woods and the plants that we grow from the ground. What we do here at this center for Cherokee plants is we develop culturally relevant varieties that our tribe uses, and we put them back in the hands of the person that's putting food on the table for their family. Plants that we do collect and cultivate, belong, have a story that go behind-, with it. To me, that's, that's the fun part about collecting seeds is what makes them relevant to any society. And it applies to any group of people. So the plants that we collect and propagate, we interview elders, we do memory banking and collect the oral histories. When we find a plant, we try to propagate it, and, and especially, if it's in short supply. Because the job here, although we are a seed bank, is not to keep seeds here. Our job is to get them out there and to the enrolled members. We don't, we don't stockpile. There's no need, no reason for us to stockpile. A friend of ours made the commentary, the best way to save an heirloom seed is to share it. When we give them to people, we give them, we empower them.

[24:10 - 27:00] Natasha Bowens Blair: So thank you. Thank you to Kevin. Empowering whole communities with a handful of seeds. And I know that was, you know, maybe a little bit hard to hear. But overall, he was summarizing that, you know, the, the misunderstanding or the separation of agriculture from wild harvesting. That is one that is, you know, a separation that does not jive well in indigenous communities because that is one and the same, particularly as he said for the Eastern Band and the Cherokee Nation, who consider themselves agriculturalists people who came out of the woodlands and then just talking about the, the stories within those seeds. And I love, I love that he emphasized that we don't need to be stockpiling and sitting on these seeds. Okay. And I just found out about this seed bank here, the one in the nation. Maybe we can dive into that a little bit later. But the best way to save our seeds is to share them and share the stories that, that are woven into them, and empowering these community with just a handful of seeds, building that relationship

from seed to community. Kevin mentioned, just as Valerie did, the importance of wild harvesting and access to traditional foods to sustain that relationship. He told me how Cherokee traditional foodways have been restricted over time, like so many indigenous nations worldwide, as their lands have been taken and tribal ways banned. I'm not just talking about our history right when lands were colonized, but still today, through land grabbing, urban development, even efforts as well-intentioned as conservation and well, building educational institutions. Cherokee land, Kevin informed me, used to include what is now the 11 million acre Smoky Mountain National Park. 11 million acres stood out to me in preparing to come out here to CSU and diving into a little bit of what's going on here with lands and indigenous land, I couldn't help but note that this 11 million acres is the exact same number of acres taken from indigenous tribes across the country under the Morrill Act, a bill that Lincoln signed in 1862 to take stolen indigenous land and turn it into college endowments, creating the land grant universities that we now have today, like this one. I'm going to leave that there for you all. So in the name of education and conservation, what have we lost? Right. And these well-intentioned efforts to create these beautiful parks and these wonderful institutions, what has been lost? For Kevin's people, the tribal land they are left with is massively reduced, of course, and sits right next to the lands that they no longer have access to traditional gather in and express their food sovereign in. So like Valerie's people, their health is suffering because of it. And if we think that there's not a relationship between community health and the generational trauma that's carried from losing land, sovereignty, freedom, the impact that continues to have today, as we have been forcibly disconnected from who we are and gaslighted to believe that our lives don't matter. And if we think there's no relationship there, we're all walking around with PTSD. You know, this is trauma that our bodies carry.

[28:02 - 33:41] Natasha Bowens Blair: And it just keeps building up as we carry that of our ancestors as well. So, I think we really have to open our eyes to that. Now, we're going to get a little personal for a second. My great paternal grandmother was born a sharecropper and lived the rest of her life cooking for white plantation owners in Greenville, South Carolina. In the midst of the Jim Crow era in the South, Lala, as we all called her, worked hard and raised her children harder, alone, a single mother. Her daughter, my Nana then did the same. Raising a son, my father, Harry, who went to school during segregation, worked to fight his pain and trauma, living as a black man in America his whole life. Until he died alone from his own self-medicating. Years later when I began farming, I wondered how Lala would feel about it. Right. I thought of her experience growing up as a child and watching her father get worked into the ground. And I had no doubt that she walked away from farming to try and forget that life. It was a real conflict for me at first. But then I thought of my father, and I wondered how different his life would have been if he'd grown up connected to the land, providing for himself and his family, and leaning into those healing whispers that I now was able to.

And so that is why I feel like this is the work, the healing work that we have to do, that we have a responsibility to do, particularly in BIPOC communities for those who came before us, and for those who are coming after us, and for ourselves right now. And they have the path laid out for us. Right? So maybe my father didn't have the path consciously in his waking life, but now I very much believe him and Nana and Lala and all my other ancestors have that path, and they're whispering it to me and laying it out for me and, and bringing me into the open arms of, of the community of solidarity and healing that I needed to continue this work with the land. And, and I believe that it's all left in the land for us to find. Because despite the painful and complex relationship with land that communities of color carry, bless you, there is still such strength and empowerment in how we have survived off the land from the beginning, and how our ways of living on Mother Earth were first deemed uncivilized and are now being co-opted and presented as cutting edge, sustainable solutions with zero regard to the history herstory that we, that we owned. As we were our own indigenous peoples and our indigenous ways rooted on our own homelands before being taken from them, right? Because as people of color, we were, we were all indigenous to our own lands at some point before being forced from them in one way or another. From colonization to corporatization to gentrification, it's still happening. But despite this reality, despite all of it, we still carry a fiercely resilient relationship with the lands, whether we've unearthed it for ourselves or not, rich with stories and wisdom. And tapping back into that, rooting down into that, that is our work. It's revolutionary work. That's our resistance. It's the only work that's going to save and sustain us. Because, you know, all of us, we're all on this sinking ship together. Right. So our work to decolonize is what lies ahead for all of us. But I want to point out that though white allies have their own very important work to do in decolonization, being our saviors is not one of them. Is not part of the work, right? I, I always have to make this point and mention because, you know, the book has a lot of great examples and feedback on the Savior complex and how it is so, so very problematic. You know, it's just, backwards and blind solutions on top of backwards and blind solutions that, you know, looking at the broken food system and then getting into this very well-intentioned movements of food justice to fix the broken food system had so many of the same exact issues. Right? So we have to, we have to really look at this, you know, because as folks walk out of here today or out of, you know, future conversations with open eyes and open hearts, determined to help with good intentions, it's important to recognize that our work as BIPOC communities is for us, and it needs to be led by us.

[33:42 - 37:31] Natasha Bowens Blair: We no longer need a seat at the table. We're not coming in to be the token leg to help carry your table. We're building our own table. Because it's necessary, it's our healing and it's our time. Our table may be open for visits for you to come, sit and listen with an open heart and carry what is your work back to your community. But there has to be trust first. Okay. That's so very important. Trust was a very important aspect for me when I first hit the road. Here, I

was venturing out to gather, and then retell the stories of BIPOC farmers. Communities who have long had their stories taken, twisted, turned into profit, disrespected, mistold, and erased. So entering that space was a very delicate responsibility that I took very seriously. I'd never met most of the farmers I interviewed beforehand. They didn't know me from jump. We may have shared a little melanin, a little love for the soil, but that didn't matter. I was just this strange girl from outside the community showing up with my racially ambiguous skin tone that's been confusing folks since 1983, asking them all kinds of personal questions, living out my station wagon, ou know. I was fully prepared for a lot of no's and door closes in my face and understandable distrust. At the time of hitting the road in 2012 as well, the discrimination lawsuit filed by thousands of black farmers against the USDA was coming to a close. I knew folks were tired of telling their stories and having it end with nothing but dollars to, you know, in exchange for their silence. And this last suit and that discrimination, you know, that sparked it were just the most recent experiences of broken trust, right? Mistrust runs deep in the BIPOC communities, as deep as the generational trauma that we carry. So I say this to say that this work, if you're serious about this work, especially as an ally, you have to understand this issue of distrust and understand that building trust is number one and it's not light work. You got to dig deep, deep into yourself, into your own privilege, and into these stories to gain understanding. If you're not familiar with the, oh, sorry about that. If you're not familiar with the discrimination lawsuit filed against the USDA by thousands of black farmers, Pigford versus Glickman, Mr. Gary Grant can fill you in a bit. He and the BFAA, the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, based in Tillery, North Carolina, which is also where Mr. Pigford himself was based. It's a place in the South that has a deep history of sharecropping, where the majority of elders there, including one of my favorite interviewees from the book, Mr. the late Mr. Daniel Whitaker. They all remember growing up as sharecropping families and have a wealth of stories and insight to share. And they, along with tens of thousands of other black farmers across this nation, fought for decades, decades to right the injustice of racism woven into our agricultural system. They came forward and shared their stories and hearing after hearing. Let's go ahead and listen directly from Mr. Grant to tell us more.

[37:37 - 38:45] Gary Grant: No matter where the hearings were held. Whether it was in Halifax County, whether it was in Mississippi, whether it was in California, all the black farmers were telling the same story. I don't get my, I'm told there's no money, I'm not given an application. I am told it's, it's in the process. I'll get my money after the window of planting season, you know. So that's why we know that it was a national crisis. And if our ancestors from slavery up until 1900 could manage to get almost 17 million acres of land and we had lost 70, 80% of it between 1920 and 1996. Something wrong. Daddy would say, "Something wrong." Something is wrong.

[38:46 - 38:49] Natasha Bowens Blair: Have a quick pause there and we're going to come back to that in a minute.

[38:50 - 38:52] Gary Grant: But when we go back and look.

[38:52 - 42:15] Natasha Bowens Blair: Thank you. I forgot to tell you all that before. Something wrong? Right. I love, I love Mr. Gary Grant from slavery up to 1900. You all can see that. Okay. Oh, okay. Yeah. There we go. Black folks managed to acquire almost 17 million acres of land, have lost 70 to 80% of that. And people always love to say, "Well, all farmers are losing land." Here's the facts right here. All right. Yeah. Farmers are losing land. Who's, who's losing way more of it? Also losing farmers, you know, when we lose that land, that's your livelihood. You're no longer farming. So we're also losing black farmers. By 1920, we were just talking about this a little bit earlier, 1 million strong black farmers were thriving and then somebody came up with a solution. Jim Crow, okay, was one of them. And then all of these targeted discriminatory practices from the USDA to put these farmers out of business or drive them with fear out of the rural areas. And now, we make up less than 2 percent of the nation's farmers. Let's look at a few more figures here. Okay, because the black farmers were not the only group to file lawsuits for discrimination against the USDA. Native American farmers, Hispanic farmers, women farmers even. And look at these numbers. It's just, it's still shocking. It's shocking, but not a surprise because land is king. Land is power. So to me, these demographics say it all about who has held and continues to clutch tightly onto that power. You can't get it more blatant than that. So as I said, all of these groups of Bipoc farmers, as well as female farmers have also filed these lawsuits and challenging that power or at least asking for a little bit of return of so much loss when you think about the fight, just that any legal battle. This battle took decades. So before entering the legal battle, there was already profits lost and land lost and livelihood lost. And then during that, Mister Greg, I think he might say it again. So forgive me for repeating, but during that, you know, so many elder farmers were waiting for recompense. You know, that's it. It was over. They all ended in settlement and despite the media claims, especially about the amount of money that went to black farmers who were successful, and not all folks who filed these, these cases were successful, which mean got their money in the case. But of course, you read them headlines and oh my goodness, \$1 billion. Good Lord, going to these black farmers. That should be more than enough reparations. Let's listen one last time to Mr. Grant give his take on that.

[42:19 - 43:36] Gary Grant: And, you know, in the first impeachment one, there were 30-, 23,000, 23,000 applicants I believe it was. And only 12,000 of them were successful. When we look at who was successful, it was folk who were like me, who went in to get along and were mistreated, who had lost their land, who were no longer in farming, and who had no intention of going back into

farming. Very few of the folk who were farming were successful in Pigford. Why? Because the ultimate goal of USDA was to put small farmers out of business. And they have pretty much, pretty much done it. You, you got 990,000 black farmers in 1920 and by-, to the year 2000, remember the quote, about the year 2000, you have less than 20,000 farmers. They're gone. You're not even a political mass to be dealt with.

[43:38 - 48:00] Natasha Bowens Blair: Not even a political mass to be dealt with. [pauses] As the veteran civil rights activist, Curtis Hayes Muhammad once said, "We must recognize that land and food have always been used as a weapon to keep the oppressed, oppressed. But we also must recognize that land and food are essential for our liberation." And have no doubt you all, that that's exactly what our communities are farming for. For Liberation. For Revolution. For resistance. Stewarding our own land. Imagine tha. Being able to have one slice of land and steward it is an act of resistance. It's a revolutionary act. We are here to break dependence on a broken system. To decolonize the system or as Renard Turner would say, "To remember the skills and knowledge we carry to be self-sufficient and create true wealth that is lasting and inheritable." BIPOC farmers are here, rebuilding our political mass. Reviving ancestral and cultural systems of farming cooperatively, both with each other and the earth. Sharing lands and traditional knowledge and practices that have been co-opted and presented as new concepts, when in reality, they've been in practice for thousands of years rooted in that relationship, that reciprocity, that generosity, and community. Systems, like the acequia system. In ancient, communally owned irrigation system that is still in place today in the Southwest, even here in Colorado. It's a system of small canals engineered to carry water from the mountains of the high, high depths to the fields, making water a commons for the farmers who use it. It's a system rooted in Arabic and Muslim culture, actually in the high deserts of the Middle East and northern Africa. And it spread from Spain, from there to Spain, with the community of the Moors, and then to the Americas and to the Pueblo Indian communities. The acequia system is not just about water and ancient cultural practices like safeguarding the commons. It was also one of the earliest forms of democracy in our country. With a system based on the number of water users in an area, who elects and appoint community commissioners to oversee water usage. And that, of course, then led to other cooperative and democratic systems like shared labor and community food systems. Community food systems like those of Luis. Community in the heart of the Chihuahuan Desert in chaparral, New Mexico. Luis is co-owner of Solar Farm, a cooperative farm run by farmers who transitioned out of migrant farm work. Together, they're working cooperatively to create community-run farmers markets, community-based education programs, supporting other farm workers looking to transition to farm owners, training young and beginning farmers through education programs, and carrying knowledge and skills from the farms they lost in their home countries due to our trade policies, by the way. And they're doing this training

alongside groups like the National Immigrant Farming Initiative. There's the executive director, Rigo Delgado, who I now want to connect with, Eric [inaudible] and the folks in Fort Morgan who are already, you know, doing amazing community work and might just need a little bit of support on the agricultural front to get the, the, the, the, the guidance and kind of resources that they need. And that is what Nephi does best, [inaudible] as well in New Mexico. And Don Bustos kneeling down there in the greenhouse, who, you know, has been just lone wolfing it up and down his home state of New Mexico, where he has his own farm that he's stewarded and his family has stewarded for 300 years and has been passed down. He's actually the first male to, to gain ownership of the land. It was passed down through all the women in his family, generation after generation. And I just loved that. He also had an acequia canal running through his farm. And anyways, he's, he has his own farm, but he's also training young and beginning farmers, building up that political mass for Latinx farmers and migrant farm workers transitioning to farmers.

[48:00 - 52:38] Natasha Bowens Blair: And I was just so inspired by my time in Fort Morgan yesterday, meeting with similar, you know, migrant, communities who've come here and are working, you know, in these oppressive food systems that are based here and at the same time, you know, coming together in community to, to fill each other's needs from childcare to education, to just solidarity. And, and then our dreaming and gardening in their backyards and wondering how they can turn that into something and bring in foods from their homelands and bring in nutrients to the, you know, dead soil and bring in camels. There was a group of Somali men who were talking about camel milk. And, I mean, it just is so exciting to have these conversations and all that these communities need are the resources and support. So it was just very cool to to see another lone wolf, Eric, going out there every week, making that drive and building that trust and building that relationship with the communities and being consistent. And yeah, I hope we can we can, you know, see more of that to come from from this institution and the resources it has for communities right here in your backyard. So I always like to end with this incredible farm right here. When we're talking about new farmer training and the Bipoc community, and building back up the political mass of what we have lost, I think that they are running one of the most impactful programs in the country, and it was started out of their own pockets and out of their own will. This small family farm, Leah Penniman and her husband, as well as her sister, Naima Penniman, who's also an amazing artist, and most of the artwork I shared tonight was hers, and also a larger network of just amazing BIPOC folks. And they have built up this farming, BIPOC farming immersion program that digs into everything from regenerative farming to food sovereignty and healing, from the trauma rooted in oppression on the lands for Bipoc communities. Last year, they trained almost 5000 farmer activists, just last year during Covid and reached almost 70,000 people through online classes, public speaking programs and more. Their immersion training is really just a slice of what they do. I highly encourage you to go

to their website, as they have a wealth of resources for uprooting racism, ceding sovereignty in our food system. Leah wrote the book, *Farming While Black*, and her and her sister also featured in a new book, *We Are Each Other's Harvest*, by the same author of *Queen Sugar*, that program, that TV program. Anyways, there are so many books and so many resources out there, but I always recommend to start with Soul Fire Farm, if anywhere. They have an Uprooting Racism online workshop each month. Open to anyone. It is virtual and there is one coming up on October 20th. So when we're asking what we can do as we walk out of here, go sign up for that course. Another really exciting project. Oh, I just want to point out, look at these beautiful photos of, oh, I just love and and even just to go and start with looking at all the photos, they do an incredible job of capturing and telling their stories of what they're doing on the land.

[52:38 - 55:27] Natasha Bowens Blair: And they've also added on Leah's husband as a very skilled builder. And so they've added on building immersion training as well. And so they've they built their entire workshop and classroom facility on the lands as well as some other structures. And then, as if that is not enough, they got together with some other groups, some other Northeast Farmers of Color Alliance and the National Black Food and Justice Alliance, to build this reparations map for black and indigenous farmers. And it's you know, I don't want to say it's similar to the Land Link program, but if you're familiar with any land link programs, as far as you can sign up as someone in need of land, and then someone who has land can then go on and, and you know, if it's in your area, then boom, boom, make it happen. But this is very specific to reparations for BIPOC farmers. So in order to sign up as a need, you know, it has to be BIPOC-led, and I pretty sure that's the only requirement. But in order to sign up to be able to provide resources, it's very clear to provide the land that, you know, you're not coming on here to find to basically take advantage of this list, right? You're not coming on here to find the Bipoc communities that are farming and, you know, your agenda aside, you're coming on here to share land and give back because you're ready for that, that next very powerful step in this decolonizing work. So I really praise them for the work they did to put this together. And it's really exciting to see the conversation about land back and reparations. I'm really starting to gain what I feel like is traction. So this is all a lot to take in and unpack. And of course, we only scratched the very, very surface. And it should be a lot to take in, right? We've all been carrying this heavy load for far too long. It's not easy work. Revolutions never are. Healing takes time. No one has all the steps figured out. But I believe that we can start by sharing stories, building relationship with each other, with the lands. Building that trust. And I know no better way to do that than over food. Thank you. [applause] [unintelligible]

[55:30 - 55:31] Speaker 8: I'll give you some choices. Check them out.

[55:32 - 55:34] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes. Thank you. Perfect.

[55:35 - 55:36] Albert Bempah: He's dropping his Instagram.

[55:38 - 55:39] Natasha Bowens Blair: You know him well, huh? [laughs]

[55:41 - 55:44] Albert Bempah: Well, thank you all. Let's give Natasha one more round of applause.
[applause]

[55:44 - 55:45] Natasha Bowens Blair: Thank you.

[55:47 - 55:48] Albert Bempah: Can I invite you to sit?

[55:48 - 55:54] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes, please. Here I come. Hold on. Let me get a little bit more water and then I'll mask up. And I'm so excited to sit with you, Albert.

[55:54 - 56:04] ALBERT: We're going to take a few minutes and then a little bit of just discussion between us two, and then we'll have some time for some Q&A, maybe three questions or so for time, but.

[56:04 - 56:05] Natasha Bowens Blair: That's it.

[56:06 - 56:07] ALBERT: As she's grabbing some water-

[56:07 - 56:10] Natasha Bowens Blair: But we're having a reception after where we can all really talk, right?

[56:10 - 56:11] A: We are.

[56:11 - 56:11] Natasha Bowens Blair: Okay.

[56:11 - 56:12] A: It's going to be right outside.

[56:12 - 56:12] Natasha Bowens Blair: Good.

[56:12 - 56:37] ALBERT: So we can get some good news. You got your book ready? You got your marker ready? I'm ready. There you go. For those-, I'm Doctor Albert Bempah. I serve as an associate professor in ethnic studies department. One of my other roles, and I might kind of speak to

it today is I'm Assistant Vice President for Student Athlete Support Services. So I have really enjoyed the, the book and enjoyed the, the the the the talk today.

[56:37 - 56:38] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[56:38 - 56:41] Albert Bempah: But some of the questions I have, actually, you kind of hit a button for me.

[56:41 - 56:42] Natasha Bowens Blair: Okay.

[56:42 - 56:42] Albert Bempah: You hit a button.

[56:42 - 56:43] Natasha Bowens Blair: We hit some buttons.

[56:43 - 57:08] Albert Bempah: It was the, the moment in which, we'll come back to you one second. Your personal kind of moment, when you talked about the tension of kind of putting your own hands in the dirt. As I was reading the book, it really took me back to a text, a similar text in the work that I do around black studies is *The Miseducation of the Negro*.

[57:08 - 57:08] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes.

[57:08 - 57:26] Albert Bempah: And so this idea of the, that Carter G. Woodson introduces is that through conditions and socialization, black folks were being miseducated, and your book kind of brings to the light of how we have been miseducated through food and through systems of food.

[57:26 - 57:27] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes.

[57:27 - 57:54] Albert Bempah: Not just black folk or, [laughs] but in many ways, so many different communities. Your book kind of ends towards this idea of kind of generations and the generational kind of, or the handing off to generations. What do you think is kind of the, the biggest next step to combat this miseducation? To the work you're doing for education through food for the next generation?

[57:54 - 01:01:07] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah. No, thank you, Albert, for for raising attention to that because it's exactly right. *The Miseducation of the Negro* and the assimilation and erasure of our, our, our foodways and our cultural ways and, you know, having us believe and having us feel even ashamed. You know, I felt a little bit ashamed or just kind of in doubt, like, should I be returning to this? And even with our food, you know, I say our food is so sacred. It's so intimate because even

our food choices. Right? Like we were taught to be ashamed of our foods. Oh, you know, that's soul food. It's going to get you. That's my home. That's my, you know, you get me some chitlins and some sweet potato pie and, you know, you're going to have to wait a few minutes while I travel all the way back. I don't care who you are. And as it should be, we should, you know what I mean? We, we, we can no longer live in someone else's reality where we're being miseducated and especially losing that connection to our food because food is at the center. You know, I think it's one of the things that are at the center of who we are in our culture. Right? Like at the center of culture, so much is that music, that art, that food, and the stories. So absolutely, so the next steps is remembering, a massive remembering and healing, you know. I'm going to be a broken record on this healing because we we can't move forward. Like I said, we're walking around with PTSD. We've been walking around PTSD. My dad was walking around with PTSD. His mama was walking around, you know what I mean? It's just continually building up, as I said. And so we have to stop and take the time to do that healing. This mask is going to drive me crazy. We have to take the time to step back and do that healing within ourselves, individually and as a community. And I think truly, that what that healing can look like is returning to our ways and being able to come together in safe spaces and, and in community and celebrate those ways and remember, help each other remember those ways through the stories and help the plants whisper those ways back to us. And the elders, you know, I've said this over and over again as well. It's they hold knowledge that is so sacred that we're just going to lose if we can't sit at their knee now and take it all in. And so I think that's so important. And, you know, it may sound like, okay, but what about we have to be out here doing this, and we have to be out here fighting for this, and what about this policy or what about demanding this. And okay. Yeah. But how can we be giving our energy to that without doing the healing first? And so I think that is our work and that is the work. And from that blooms, you know, all the answers and the steps forward.

[01:01:07 - 01:01:11] Albert Bempah: I find myself in so many different spaces always trying to-

[01:01:11 - 01:01:12] Natasha Bowens Blair: Pivot myself.

[01:01:12 - 01:01:22] Albert Bempah: Go back and negotiate this, my own miseducation. And, and I currently live in Wellington and, and and we've got a little plot there.

[01:01:22 - 01:01:23] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes.

[01:01:23 - 01:01:23] Albert Bempah: And so-

[01:01:23 - 01:01:23] Speaker 9: You got that.

[01:01:24 - 01:01:28] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes. Come on. We want to talk about this now.

[crosstalk] Yes.

[01:01:28 - 01:01:47] Albert Bempah: So this idea of I remember standing next to my, my first head of cattle and feeling like I wasn't supposed to be there. And so this moment of where you like, there was a tension. I remember personally. That's what hit a nerve for me was this tension of like, people are going to question, do I believe, do I belong here?

[01:01:47 - 01:01:47] Natasha Bowens Blair: Who is he? Mm-hmm.

[01:01:48 - 01:01:51] Albert Bempah: Right? And so and my kids are like, what are we doing?

[01:01:51 - 01:01:52] Natasha Bowens Blair: Right, right.

[01:01:52 - 01:01:52] Albert Bempah: Where do we go?

[01:01:52 - 01:01:53] Natasha Bowens Blair: Right, right.

[01:01:53 - 01:01:00] Albert Bempah: And so for so young, they too may have already been or experiencing their own miseducation.

[01:01:00 - 01:01:00] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mmh.

[01:01:00 - 01:02:07] Albert Bempah: And so we moved to this place because of food. But, you know, I'm thinking about your book really brought that out of me.

[01:02:07 - 01:02:20] Natasha Bowens Blair: Well, I appreciate that. And I hope we'll have some time for you to share more about what you're doing is so important, and you're changing that miseducation for your children now as they're out there with you on the land. So, it's beautiful.

[01:02:20 - 01:02:25] Albert Bempah: Now, you've used the word a few times today, and you began with the word of sovereignty.

[01:02:25 - 01:02:25] Natasha Bowens Blair: Hmm.

[01:02:26 - 01:02:37] Albert Bempah: And, and I'm kind of interested to hear your thoughts of this distinction or why you've really kind of honed in of the word of sovereignty, probably for many of the stories in the book.

[01:02:37 - 01:02:37] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:02:37 - 01:02:42] Albert Bempah: Versus the broader conversation of just food justice. Where does sovereignty really land for you?

[01:02:42 - 01:04:00] Natasha Bowens Blair: Hmm. That's a good question. You know, sometimes I get frustrated. All the terminology and it's ever changing. We get hung up on these terms, and sometimes they can really create a lot of disconnect to. Particularly, in a lot of ways across cultural communities, across generations and across, you know, kind of like lived experiences versus academia, you know? So I-, none of the terms are really my favorite. But since I do consider myself a storyteller and I'm going to, you know, I have to choose some words, right? And I think that the reason sovereignty although yesterday I want to call Shannon Francis his voice into the room of spirit of the sun. She was on the panel yesterday, and she spoke her truth about the word sovereignty and said it really didn't jibe with her at all because the, you know, the definition of it on Webster Merriam. You know, just bring I forget exactly. But it just it's sovereign to reign over, you know, to reign over. And so, yeah, that doesn't jive with me at all either. But for me, I think I've just taken that into and twisted the definition to be my own. And it's just self-sufficiency having, having beyond just freedom. You know, I think for me and beyond just justice because I think justice, you know, is too limiting, um, in my opinion, because we have such a miseducation about what just means or what righting injustice is like. You know, plenty of people want to believe that that lawsuit settlement was was enough justice. And so I feel like, you know, I'm throwing justice to the side. And maybe next is freedom. But even that is like, okay, now I'm free, just like my ancestors were free. But then, you know, where are they really free? Are we really still free? You know what's beyond freedom. And that is to be free and to be sovereign to, to have my own power, to be empowered and to be in control of, you know, my land, to have ownership over my land, over my ways, over my foodways. So maybe I created my own definition for it. But, you know, that's kind of why I've clinging on to that word.

[01:05:00 - 01:05:13] Albert Bempah: No, no. I think it's been interesting and kind of to take it from the ways that it was introduced, even in your talk through the, the indigenous farmers, but also even for myself, speaking to my own kids, again, it's like, why are we out here and why are we doing this?

[01:05:13 - 01:05:13] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes.

[01:05:13 - 01:05:29] Albert Bempah: And it is the sense of I want them to have a sense of self agency about their food and regenerative food and kind of nutrient rich food, and which kind of our

systems of efficiency have most educated them on. And so, like, that's this idea. I think there's a sovereign story to tell.

[01:05:29 - 01:05:29] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:05:29 - 01:05:30] Albert Bempah: So I appreciated that.

[01:05:30 - 01:05:31] Natasha Bowens Blair: Thank you.

[01:05:31 - 01:05:32] Albert Bempah: Monica White.

[01:05:32 - 01:05:32] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mmh.

[01:05:32 - 01:05:38] Albert Bempah: There you go. [laughs] The author of a Freedom Farmers.

[01:05:38 - 01:05:38] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:05:38 - 01:05:42] Albert Bempah: She, she tries to take on the definition of farmer...

[01:05:42 - 01:05:43] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mhm. Mm-hmm.

[01:05:43 - 01:05:43] Albert Bempah: ...right?

[01:05:43 - 01:05:43] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:05:43 - 01:05:53] Albert Bempah: And this idea of moving from the, I may be misquoting but like a USDA framing of those that own the land...

[01:05:53 - 01:05:53] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes. Correct.

[01:05:53 - 01:05:55] Albert Bempah: ...versus those that produce...

[01:05:55 - 01:05:56] Natasha Bowens Blair: Correct.

[01:05:56 - 01:05:56] Albert Bempah: ...right?

[01:05:56 - 01:05:57] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes, absolutely.

[01:05:57 - 01:05:59] Albert Bempah: Those that are now food producers...

[01:05:59 - 01:05:00] Natasha Bowens Blair: Right.

[01:05:00 - 01:06:01] Albert Bempah: ...are also farmers.

[01:06:01 - 01:06:02] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes, absolutely.

[01:06:02 - 01:06:03] Albert Bempah: What does that mean to you? Who does that...

[01:06:03 - 01:06:03] Natasha Bowens Blair: Right

[01:06:03 - 01:06:04] Albert Bempah: ...open it up to? [laughs]

[01:06:04 - 01:06:53] Natasha Bowens Blair: Everybody, okay? I consider I started calling myself my blog, Brown Girl Farming. I didn't have no land when I started that blog. I had my little garden bed. I was not technically a farm. Also, the way that the farm is defined, I think there's a certain amount of acreage or maybe a certain amount of profit that have to be coming in and and it's lower, but no. Steward of the land, I, I-, like I said, the land told me I was meant to be there. And once I had that validation, I was claiming that word. And so. Absolutely, I think that is so important. And just kind of carries over to how we have to, you know, we just redefine sovereignty. We just redefine farming. Let's keep going. You know, what else are we going to redefine and all these systems? We have to. We're now living in, in someone else's reality anymore.

[01:06:53 - 01:07:27] Albert Bempah: I hear that, I hear that. Does that make sense? This idea that we've we changed the idea and the focus of who is a farmer to those that produce the food. If you told that story from day one to young kids and to others, all of a sudden that miseducation or the kind of right the ship a little bit and allow people to be in the space in ways our definitions, our systems, our narratives have have done something to what I also think your book does is does is challenge us to think about the seen and unseen through food.

[01:07:27 - 01:08:39] Natasha Bowens Blair: Thank you. That's I was just going to circle back because thank you for bringing that up because, yeah. I think there's two that conversation is twofold. And I wanted to say like the narrative, you know, even though sometimes the terminology and the words we choose can cause a disconnect and we can get hung up on them. It's also so important how we're choosing these words and how we're telling the. Story to our children, right? And to each other and to ourselves. Um, right. So if we're sitting there telling ourselves, you know, even just now, okay, now there's only 20,000 or so black farmers or there's only X amount of Latinx farmers. Well, is that the true narrative? Because how many folks are stewarding the land? How

many folks have grown this food? And then that leads to exactly what you're saying is the seen and the unseen. It's a false narrative. To say that, you know, though, they own the land, these white men primarily are not the ones that they're going to food, okay? So if you want to get to know your farmer, you need to get to know whoever's growing the food, whether they own the land or are defined as farmer or not. So thank you. That's wonderful.

[01:08:39 - 01:09:01] Albert Bempah: We've got a few minutes and I and I'm about to open it up for questions, but and this might just be more of a statement, but I mentioned overseeing some of our work with our student athletes in terms of student athlete support services, a program we did we have a John Mosley leadership program. And one of the semesters we focused on agriculture. And I remember it was like an interesting moment where all of them said, doc, what are we doing?

[01:09:01 - 01:09:01] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah. [unintelligible]

[01:09:02 - 01:09:09] Albert Bempah: Not all of them. Some of them came from this space, but others were like, I don't know what, what are we doing? [laughs] And I said, well, how do we think about how we are seen and unseen?

[01:09:10 - 01:09:10] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mmh.

[01:09:10 - 01:09:15] Albert Bempah: And we went out to the cardiac research center and we talked about where food and what this looks like. All the research that's happening here locally...

[01:09:16 - 01:09:16] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mmh.

[01:09:16 - 01:09:31] Albert Bempah: ...with our professors and this idea of things they wanted to do was go back to communities, improve communities. They've, you know, they've come from, from school or from home to here and some of those kind of nonprofit work [laughs] that happens...

[01:09:32 - 01:09:32] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:09:32 - 01:09:36] Albert Bempah: ...in oftentimes more local, I think sometimes in the more urban areas.

[01:09:36 - 01:09:36] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mhm.

[01:09:37 - 01:09:42] Albert Bempah: You know, thinking about ways in which they've come from communities unseen through agriculture.

[01:09:42 - 01:09:42] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:09:43 - 01:09:49] Albert Bempah: Unseen through water, how water and dirty water has allowed us to unsee communities.

[01:09:49 - 01:09:50] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mmh.

[01:09:50 - 01:09:58] Albert Bempah: You know how we've kind of thought about the efficiencies and the production of food, who's to get certain types of stores and all these things.

[01:09:58 - 01:09:58] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:09:58 - 01:10:10] Albert Bempah: It really ignited some thought for them and [crosstalk] said, well if I'm to go back and affect change, it may not just be some of these systems, but it may be even just through food. I could affect the third grader in class.

[01:10:10 - 01:10:10] Natasha Bowens Blair: Absolutely.

[01:10:12 - 01:10:17] Albert Bempah: Right. And and you know, so that was a really powerful moment for us. And so, you know, it's out of the lane.

[01:10:17 - 01:10:17] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:10:17 - 01:10:19] Albert Bempah: You know sometimes we think about in athletics. But it was...

[01:10:19 - 01:10:21] Natasha Bowens Blair: But it's not because we all eat...

[01:10:21 - 01:10:21] Albert Bempah: ...it was not.

[01:10:21 - 01:10:21] Natasha Bowens Blair: the food.

[01:10:22 - 01:10:24] Albert Bempah: We all eat the food.

[01:10:24 - 01:10:24] Natasha Bowens Blair: We all eat the food.

[01:10:24 - 01:10:32] Albert Bempah: All right. So we want to open it up. I've got Marissa right out here in the back. Any anyone with a question, she's willing to give you the mic.

[01:10:32 - 01:10:33] Natasha Bowens Blair: Or a comment or a story?

[01:10:33 - 01:10:38] Albert Bempah: Or comment a story. She's willing to give you the mic kinda. She's going to hold the mic.

[01:10:38 - 01:10:38] Natasha Bowens Blair: Oh. [laughs].

[01:10:40 - 01:10:53] Albert Bempah: So, if you just raise your hand, we'll, we'll come to you. Let's say this isn't silence. This is being full on all the new knowledge they've received.

[01:10:53 - 01:10:56] Natasha Bowens Blair: Can I ask a question, Albert?

[01:10:57 - 01:10:57] Albert Bempah: You got it.

[01:10:57 - 01:11:01] Natasha Bowens Blair: You have such a beautiful story of how you entered agriculture.

[01:11:01 - 01:11:01] Albert Bempah: Oh.

[01:11:01 - 01:11:02] Natasha Bowens Blair: Do you mind sharing it?

[01:11:03 - 01:11:04] Albert Bempah: I'm about to get in trouble.

[01:11:04 - 01:11:05] Natasha Bowens Blair: Let's go.

[01:11:07 - 01:11:08] Albert Bempah: The real story?

[01:11:10 - 01:11:14] Natasha Bowens Blair: [laughs] It's a little story. Let's start with a nugget to get started in the sharing.

[01:11:14 - 01:11:16] Albert Bempah: My, my wife and I were having a little debate...

[01:11:16 - 01:11:17] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mm-hmm.

[01:11:17 - 01:11:22] Albert Bempah: ...about what is organic eggs? And so we had different opinions.

[01:11:22 - 01:11:23] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mm-hmm.

[01:11:23 - 01:11:30] Albert Bempah: And it was healthy, healthy dialogue. And so I was, I was told to go get some organic eggs no matter what I thought. So I...

[01:11:31 - 01:11:33] Natasha Bowens Blair: Okay. [laughs] had to get them eggs.

[01:11:33 - 01:11:48] Albert Bempah: ...so I went to a local store up here at Jackson. Uh, I came back with a box of baby chicks and put it on the counter. So that's the organic eggs. [laughs]. That then sent me to we got to move out of the neighborhood. And it was good.

[01:11:48 - 01:11:50] Natasha Bowens Blair: Because of the HOA.

[01:11:50 - 01:11:50] Albert Bempah: Yes.

[01:11:50 - 01:11:57] Natasha Bowens Blair: You know, they were like, what are you raising chickens on? So now you're on some lands and you got some more chickens. You got-

[01:11:57 - 01:12:21] Albert Bempah: You got lot chickens. We raised our own chickens. We got egg layers and meat birds and cattle, I got B's. It's all different now. Something like. Wow [laughs] [applause] All right. So that's my share. [applause]. I hope I still have bees after winter. I'm just saying. [laughs]. Anybody, please.

[01:12:23 - 01:12:26] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yes. Mm-hmm. I got two hands.

[01:12:33 - 01:12:33] Speaker 10: [inaudible].

[01:12:33 - 01:12:35] Natasha Bowens Blair: Okay, we're getting the mic going for you.

[01:12:35 - 01:12:36] Marissa: Testing, testing.

[01:12:36 - 01:12:37] Natasha Bowens Blair: There we go.

[01:12:38 - 01:12:49] Speaker 10: Thank you so much for speaking today. I really appreciate you coming out here. Taking the time. Started reading your book. I'll be honest, I'm only like Chapter 2 maybe, but-

[01:12:50 - 01:12:51] Natasha Bowens Blair: It's all good. You bite it off in chunks.

[01:12:51 - 01:13:37] Speaker 10: Right. Yeah. Totally. [laughs] Totally. Got to But-, yeah. I guess you talking about bees. I was, I was intrigued, like. Okay. What are your thoughts on beekeeping? Right. Like. Is a bee there an insect or look down on insects. Should we like okay? Like there, okay. You talk about like African killer bees. You talk about, like, hybridization, things like that. Like, I don't know. I'm just kind of trying to. I didn't have a question formulated before I started talking, so it's kind

of obvious, but I don't know. I, I'm interested in bees. I actually have a coworker I work for OE, and like, he has his own beehive he actually brought from Texas. [crosstalk] And I was thinking, did the bees want to come from Texas, right? Like, you know what I mean? So...

[01:13:37 - 01:13:38] Natasha Bowens Blair: Right. Right.

[01:13:38 - 01:13:38] Speaker 11:

[01:13:39 - 01:14:38] Natasha Bowens Blair: [laughs]. You know, I appreciate that. And, yeah, I don't know. We'll both tackle that. I feel like, um, you know, if I get a sense of where you're going with that, you seem to be interested in the bees, like, follow, you know, follow that call. In my opinion, that's what I did. That's clearly what Albert did when he was sent to the store to get them eggs. And, you know, just follow that call and see where it it leads you and in your community. And for the community of bees, um, you know, we have lost so many of our pollinators, and they are definitely an endangered species right now because of our, um, toxic agricultural system and other systems. And so if we can be keeping bees and, you know, creating safe spaces for them to return to and thrive in, then I'm all for it. But I am no bee expert. I do not keep bees. Albert, what's your take on it?

[01:14:38 - 01:15:03] Albert Bempah: I'll be real quick. But yeah, for for me it was it's kind of, I think in a way they became or something else became a gateway for me to be thinking about systems. And so suddenly it was the chickens. And then it became a one to plant trees and for the trees, the pollination. And so I started thinking about systems. And all this became great conversations for family and neighbors, and to kind of see you in different ways in which all that there was a system that I was a part of.

[01:15:04 - 01:15:07] Natasha Bowens Blair: Mm-hmm. Beautiful. Yes.

[01:15:07 - 01:15:09] Flo: Good to see you again.

[01:15:09 - 01:15:09] Natasha Bowens Blair: Good to see you, Flo.

[01:15:10 - 01:16:11] Flo: ...Tasha. I just want to say I'm going to make a comment because I don't think I have had many times to reflect on my own family and farming and and all that kind of stuff. And so I just want to take this moment to say, I sent the book to my mom. Yes. My dad passed away in 2009, but he was such he he enjoyed all the stuff he hunted. He did fishing, he could harvest all that stuff. And he always grew a huge vegetable garden. And I grew up like that, and I kind of took it for granted to some degree. And I, I really wish I had spent more time with him to learn more about

it. And during the pandemic, I did grow some vegetables. They weren't as amazing as my dad's, but they were edible. [laughs]. And one of the ways that, um, I was in Connecticut and moved here in 2016 and I said, I'm going to, to feel closer to my dad because I really miss him.

[01:16:11 - 01:16:12] Natasha Bowens Blair: Yeah.

[01:16:12 - 01:18:03] Flo: I started fishing again. And so that's been my way to get reconnected to the land. And it has done so much for me. So when you talk about that, really understand that if before before that, I would have been like, oh, she's just talking some stuff. But thank you. It really has done so much for me, and I, I want to eventually learn hunting and and this is my dad. He's a black man from Tennessee. This is why I love Robert so much. Because my dad would walk around Toledo, Ohio, in his cowboy hats and boots and he didn't care. And I love that about him. And, but he was so connected to the land, and I recently did some ancestry stuff. And I know that's the history we come from. And I wonder, I always link my family heritage to the different movements that have happened. So I know I'm a a I'm a beneficiary of the two great black migration movements from south to north. I can trace all that back. That's amazing. And I know now because for so long we talked about, um, Tennessee. We thought Tennessee and Alabama was the end game in Arkansas. But we actually recently I recently found out was North Carolina. Okay. That really and I wonder how many of my family were impacted by some of those events that you talked about today. So I just I just want to say, I guess all that's to say thank you. Your book has touched my family. I'm probably going to order a bunch of them and send them out for Christmas gifts. I did that, I did a black feminist book one year. Beautiful. So I think this is going to be the book that I sent out to my family to remind them. But I just want to say thank you. Really it's so emotional. It is because it gets-

[01:18:03 - 01:18:04] Natasha Bowens Blair: You have me crying.

[01:18:04 - 01:18:19] Flo: ...that connection back to my family that I love so much. But I know a lot of them had to give up a lot to because they felt like they had to pursue other choices. And I'm trying to figure out, like, how to get reconnected even beyond the fishing. So thank you very much. So-

[01:18:19 - 01:19:46] Natasha Bowens Blair: Thank you, Flo, so much for sharing that. [applause]. Honestly, that's so beautiful. And it seems like you've already heard the call. And you out there growing in the garden and fishing. And that's exactly what I'm talking about, right? Like, I know it can sound like I'm up here just talking a bunch of stuff, but you hit right on it. Follow that call, follow that connection, build that relationship. Your father is leading you and the ancestors before him and before him. And you know, who knows where it's going to lead. But it's beautiful and it's healing for you and for your family. And, you know, I also want to take this moment to say that CSU Yale came

out with, like, rolling out the red carpet. And, you know, everyone has been saying such, you know, wonderful things that really do touch my heart. I'm so glad these stories can have such an impact. But, you know, it's not about my writings or even, you know, these stories specifically. It's about what's in you. And when you come across something that then unearths that and, you know, resonates for you, you know, that's all. So this is just this is just one of the many tools. And storytelling is such a powerful tool to be able to tap into our own selves and what we carry in our path. And so, you know, I, I really appreciate that.

[01:19:47 - 01:20:00] Albert Bempah: We'll take that as a word. You've unearthed something in us, and we hope something has been earthed in you. Unearthed in you. Thank you for joining us. Thank you for bringing these stories. Um, but thank you for also maybe inspiring us to look into our own stories, right?

[01:20:00 - 01:20:01] Natasha Bowens Blair: Absolutely.

[01:20:01 - 01:20:05] Albert Bempah: So we're going to close with that. Let's give one round, one last round of applause. [applause].

[01:20:05 - 01:20:07] Natasha Bowens Blair: Thank you. Thank you [laughs]

[01:20:14 - 01:20:37] Albert Bempah: So this brings us to the end. I hope you don't leave us too quickly. Please join us right outside. And we will have, will give us a minute or two. But we'll have Natasha out there and you'll be able to connect with her. Ask the questions you didn't want to necessarily raise. I get that. My students do that in class so [laughs] You can ask the questions after class now. And also, if you have the book, she's very much willing to sign a book for you. So again, thank you all for joining us.

[01:20:37 - 01:20:37] Natasha Bowens Blair: Thank you all. [applause].

END TRANSCRIPTION