

The Souls of Black Folk: Reflections on a shattering year for Black people in Buffalo, New York

Peter Sobota [00:00:01] And hi everyone, and welcome to the inSocialWork podcast. I'm Peter Sobota. On Saturday, May 14, 2022, people went to the top supermarket on Buffalo's East Side. That's not just any supermarket, mind you, but the only supermarket in the neighborhood and essentially the community hub to do their grocery shopping. Use the bank. Need a friend for a fish fry sandwich or pick up a prescription. The employees, like every other day, were making a living and serving the community in a matter of a few terrifying minutes. Aaron Salter Jr. Ruth Whitfield. Pearl Young. Katharine Massey. Heyward Patterson. Celestine Chaney. Roberta Drury. Margus Morrison, Andre McNeill and Geraldine Talley were murdered in the store. Many of these people were the elders of this tight knit community. I encourage you to Google their individual stories. Zaya, Goodman, Jennifer Worthington and Christopher Braden were injured and survived. Many people who are unnamed were injured as well. An entire community was terrorized and traumatized. The person who massacred them. An avowed white supremacist, said he chose the specific tops market. There are a bunch of these in the Buffalo area, mind you, in order to kill as many black people as possible. The caste system and racism present in our city, not unlike many other cities in our country, made it relatively easy for a racist gunman who lives 200 miles halfway across our pretty large state to research our East Side and identify a specific place where he could kill as many black people as efficiently as he wanted to. Our podcast team and the UAB School of Social Work wanted to mark this horrific event and try to respond to the reality it represents as massively devastating as this attack is. Residents of Buffalo's East Side and black people pretty much everywhere were clear. This attack was only part of a much larger and longer story. The oppression, segregation and racism experienced by black people on our East Side is a long standing and daily fact of life for them. Mere months later, Buffalo experienced a devastating blizzard, even by our standards. Soon, we learned people died related to the conditions during the storm, and soon after that we learned that the majority of them were black. As we approach. One year later, we have invited two women of color who work in the Eastside community, who have personal and professional histories there, who are friends and who are in a good position to tell us what has changed, what hasn't. How people who live on the East side are doing and to give voice to the needs of that community. Today, we're going to listen to them talk about why anti-black racism is so important to prioritize and how we might be able to help each other deal with all of our blind spots. Phylicia Brown, M.Ed is executive director of Black Love Resists in the Rust in Buffalo, New York. She was born and raised and Buffalo's East side. Kathryn Franco LSW is an adjunct faculty member at the UAB School of Social Work, and we're proud to say she's a graduate of our UB School of Social Work. We are proud to introduce you to Felicia and Katherine. Ladies. The podcast is all yours.

Phylicia Brown [00:04:17] Hey, Kathryn, How you doing?

Kathryn Franco [00:04:19] I'm good. How are you, Phylicia?

Phylicia Brown [00:04:21] I'm all right as well. So we're here today to have a bit of a conversation about the one year anniversary. It feels weird to call it an anniversary. But the one year anniversary of the massacre.

Kathryn Franco [00:04:42] And it feels weird that it's been a year. It's about to be 12 months since it happened. I think that that's the thing that feels the most shocking to me.

Phylicia Brown [00:04:53] Yeah.

Kathryn Franco [00:04:55] Not the most shocking. The event itself, the massacre itself is. Yeah. Mm hmm. But it doesn't feel like a year.

Phylicia Brown [00:05:03] Yeah. How have you? Dealt with, I guess, like since then.

Kathryn Franco [00:05:10] I think that that is a really good question. I think it's strange thinking about what life has been like, in part because I feel like in Buffalo we have this thing where everyone has sort of two degrees of separation. At least that's what I like to say. Buffalo is often called a big living room that you can just sort of reach out and touch somebody that you know and didn't realize was in there. And I think the the massacre really demonstrated that I had to direct connections to people who were murdered. And so watching people that I knew I love, that I care about, cared about dealing with the aftermath of this. I think it was really horrible. I think that on a professional level, the work that I had done, working with banks to hold them accountable for redlining, for policy that created the conditions that set the young white supremacist to this neighborhood. It felt really. I felt really. It felt really defeating in so many ways because it was like, this is the work that I. Set my life, too, for justice and racial justice. Economic justice is trying to write these wrongs that policy has done. So feeling really like that work was futile in that moment. I think that that was really hard. So I feel like this head on a lot of different ways. And I think that the hard thing is that since then, you know, doing the work that I do because I'm in these spaces, because I work with so many people who have done direct work with the survivors. With others who were impacted from the massacre. Watching that happen, you know, I've been able to have some of the connection to the fact that this is not an end. We have not healed from this. I continue to say in places that I don't think that buffalo, particularly black buffalo, whatever, heal from this fully. Because how do you heal? How do you heal from that? Yeah, it's been an interesting thing. Some days it's like we're okay and we're going to make it. And then other days it feels very much still like natural reality. Uh huh.

Phylicia Brown [00:07:44] Yeah. I feel similar to a lot of the things that you said. I must say that with all of. All the things that I know are the things that I study are the work that I have done. I never could have imagined something like this happening in Buffalo.

Kathryn Franco [00:08:05] No.

Phylicia Brown [00:08:06] And.

Kathryn Franco [00:08:08] You know.

Phylicia Brown [00:08:09] I think that's a large part of it for me. And especially thinking about as we're coming up on this year, right, these 12 months since the massacre, which really was a terrorist attack. Right. But coming up on that, it really. I'm still my mind is still a little blown that it happened. And I think for me and how I've been just like dealing with life since then, I think something, as you said, around not being able to step away. Right. This two degrees of separation. You know, I also knew people who were married that day. And have been working with survivors of the massacre since then. And it's really been a lot to hold and to think about. And also. The fact that you know, it is seems. Easier to grapple

with when we name the ten folks who were mad at three folks who. Were seriously injured or were injured, which as there are more folks than that, but three folks who were injured. It seems maybe easier to manage, but I'm always very clear that there are 100, almost 200 survivors. And then also an entire community like our entire community was impacted by this and the way in which. The city and us being in the city moved back to life as normal while uncle. It's been I think it's been higher for people who can't move on. Yeah.

Kathryn Franco [00:10:05] I really appreciate you saying that. That piece about, like, uplifting, that it was not simply those who were named. There are so many who are impacted around those who are not nameless but connected to the event. And I think that it goes back again to like. Buffalo is not healing from this. And it's so crazy. They think that, like you said, that you couldn't imagine it happening here in Buffalo. I feel the same. And yeah, it's not because Buffalo is not a racist city. It's not because Buffalo doesn't have a history and roots and sort of deep segregation and all of this other stuff. Buffalo, to me is a real microcosm of what racism looks like and what policies have played out to create the deep segregation that we have. So I don't feel like it wasn't imaginable because those things didn't exist here. It wasn't imaginable because it wasn't supposed to happen to us, because it wasn't supposed to happen to our people. It wasn't supposed to be. We knew, you know, I think that that's the unimaginable piece about it, that it wasn't supposed to happen in our home. Mm hmm. Yeah, for sure.

Phylicia Brown [00:11:25] I grew up on the east side of Buffalo. You live on the east side of Buffalo currently and. I often think about, you know, my own family. I think about myself. I think about my friends. The people I grew up with and what you said around the deep segregation. Right. And the systemic issues that we have in our city. That really allowed for someone to be able to target a particular place right in the city? It's an act. Such an egregious attack. And I think about that often. And just think about all the ways in which the east side of Buffalo, which is where most of the black folks in Buffalo live. Has been divested in has been extracted from. You know, I think of. Jefferson Avenue at one time was like a booming community. Right? And with a lot of businesses. And we're like so much in over the years the divestment just. Change the way that that community even looks and the entire east side. And so I'm wondering, you know, what your thoughts are about that.

Kathryn Franco [00:12:48] I have so many thoughts about that. And I think part of it even is in how we talk about the inside, right? So that you sort of have this affinity for it. But the inside is almost half to two thirds of our city, and yet it is just about like a neighborhood. You know, there are so many different neighborhoods on the east side of Buffalo. It stretches from the northernmost part of our city, right to the edges to pretty much the southernmost parts of our city. Mm. But it reaches those southern edges. And when are you talking about like 83% of black people live on the east side of Buffalo. That sounds crazy. That sounds wild. Uh huh. Because this shows like, seriously, this deep, deep, deep segregation. So much so that when you are from Buffalo, you know very clearly the main Street divide. It is the clear dividing line in Buffalo, where west of Maine, we see much more resources, much more affluent, all this different thing. You can walk one block east of Maine and you see a difference in the housing stock. You see a difference in the resources that are available, whether they are institutional or otherwise. And it's really, really stark. I think that the thing for me that is so devastating about this is that it was all planned, right? It's all been intentional where we've seen sort of this history of policies when it came to housing. Most people in America, they acquire wealth through housing. Black people were kept out of that very strategically with redlining. We saw that happening in Buffalo, has had the maps over the red areas where black folks were moving in and

banks were no longer providing mortgages. And so people were kept out of being able to acquire wealth. We now have seen, like you said, this sort of historical extraction and divestment from these neighborhoods where predominantly black folks were living. And so you had people talk about these neighborhoods and the Eastside generally as a whole as if it was dangerous. I felt as if it wasn't a good place to live, all of these other things. And yet the reality is that there's a whole community of people who are doing what they needed to do. When you talk about thriving business, districts like are more like Bailey, like all of these areas that have been able to thrive, that have been able to meet the needs of the people that live in these neighborhoods. It is absolutely. Astounding to see the way in which the segregation has happened, and then also to think that this has been such a problem and for so long that an outsider, somebody from outside of our community, was able to do the research. So look at census data and a look at all this other stuff to say. Where is there a concentration of black people, where the concentration of poverty and where have we seen all of this and a lack of resources that serves as the only grocery store? There are a mile, mile and a half. For people to go to. It's wild to see. How. Not only the policy was intentional and how we see all these resources stripped from communities, but how seemingly it has just been okay and consented to have been accepted and not necessarily by the people living in those communities, but by people who have the power to make the change in those communities. We've seen a lot of investment in terms of dollar amounts, quote unquote. Nobody can see those quotations that I was making with my fingers with like the Buffalo billion and that sort of thing. And yet there hasn't been tangible outcomes for neighborhoods and communities on the east side of Buffalo.

Phylicia Brown [00:17:02] Yeah. And I think you know this piece around. Policies and the intentionality behind why the ECI is the way it is, is probably one of the most important things that we have to talk about and lift up. Right. I think about. I'm so grateful for the food justice folks in the area people have been able to connect with especially. In the aftermath of the massacre. But you know, I love work, not love. That's probably the wrong time. But I really deeply appreciate the way in which they talk about. Neighborhoods, oftentimes we hear. Neighborhoods that don't have a lot of access to fresh food and fresh fruits and vegetables as food deserts. And, you know, our food justice folks are very clear that that is food apartheid. Right. It was planned for these neighborhoods to be this way. And so I think it's so important for us to talk about that and not just this being a food justice issue, but this being an issue beyond that as well. I know you've talked about housing. You've done some work with banks and community benefits agreements from those we can talk about land access, right. And like how many vacant lots that are also concentrated on the east side of Buffalo from when we decided or the city decided to tear down a bunch of houses. Right. We can talk about. The access to. Transportation for folks weekend. There are just so many different layers. The schooling system. It's layer after layer after layer after layer of. Intentional oppression, particularly for black buffalo Indians and. I think if we don't get clear about that and we are not having a conversation about that, it doesn't matter how much money pours into the city as a result of. As a way to support the city from, you know, having dealt with this. It doesn't matter how many foundations want to invest in organizations, It doesn't matter how much money Governor Hochul is going to give us. It doesn't matter how much money the federal government is going to give us, because if we don't have the intention of actually making our communities better, and if we are not taking the action steps that have to be taken, then we're going to be in the same place it is one year later almost. Right. And that much has changed. Right.

Kathryn Franco [00:19:46] I'm so curious. Like I want to hear more about that because the way that you were just speaking, my soul was coming. I was like, yes, because this is the reality of where we are. You know, I think that we saw a really strong. Support for the

victims. For the families of the victims and that sort of thing immediately in the aftermath of the massacre. And then sort of this. Weaning off where we just didn't see that same sort of thing. There was a big conversation about gun reform and that sort of thing. And I'm just so curious because I know that you've been out here doing this work that Blair has been out here doing this work. And so I'm curious from your perspective, like what that aftermath response was. And where where you see it now. What is it that you wish you would have seen more of?

Phylicia Brown [00:20:49] Well, I think exactly what you described. Right. Like we saw a bunch of. A lot of immediate rapid response, right? Like we saw people bringing in trucks of food and people giving away food. And I mean, there were so many food giveaways you you could barely get around the neighborhood. Right. I think we saw just like people doing a lot of things that they felt they should do, Right. Madiba asking the community what they needed. But just doing whatever they felt like they needed to do from their perspective as individuals or organizations or churches or folks. A lot of people who came in from other places in the country. There was a lot of press conferences and a lot of media happening. And I know that's a thing that happens when something like this occurs in a community. But there was just a lot of rapid movement. And by the time we got to the summer night, deep into the summer, it was gone for the most part. Right. And I know myself and some of my colleagues, you know, we would sit around and be like, okay, which day do you think is going to be the last day that we see this? At one point we were calling it a circus. Like, which point do you think will be the last day of this? As we were canvassing the community, doing needs assessments, trying to figure out what the need was in the community so that we could meet people where their need was. And you know what we found? Most of the people who had needs in the community had needs prior to this thing happening. Right.

Kathryn Franco [00:22:36] Thank you.

Phylicia Brown [00:22:37] Even in my support of folks who survived the massacre, folks were already three months behind in rent right before the massacre happened. Folks already didn't have transportation to get to and from work and get their child to and from daycare folks already didn't have. Adequate housing. Right. And so it's just like. It's so important that we are talking about this in the sense of that it is a thing that happens in the community and also that there are so many systemic issues that folks are struggling through just on a day to day basis that have been for decades. That this only exacerbates what? What's already going on for folks.

Kathryn Franco [00:23:29] When I say thank you so much for saying that, to have that little thank you introduction, because I think that that's lost on people. Sometimes I think it's lost on people who are here right in Buffalo, who are Babylonians. And then I think also for people who are not from here. Right. When I'm talking about Buffalo as being like this microcosm of America, like all in one little small city, it really does show so much. But I liken not the massacre to this, but we saw this sort of thing with our bed where COVID really exposed a lot of the issues that already existed. And it just exasperated it. Right. And it simply exposed that like the safety nets that we thought that we have do not exist. Whatever else that we think that we had, it just did not exist and called it like the rip the Band-Aid off, because that's what we had. We were giving Band-Aid approaches to it. And for me, when I think about the massacre. It's devastating because this community was targeted because of the conditions that were created that had people struggling already for some time. And simply this now made it into.

Phylicia Brown [00:24:51] Oh, well.

Kathryn Franco [00:24:53] We're looking at this community, but none of the stuff that anybody was talking about in terms of 83% of black people live over here. This is the only grocery store that's available. None of those stats were no information to people. We knew those things. We already knew those things as Babylonians, as our elected leaders like these were facts already. And I think the hard part about it, too, is that we saw all of this land, outpour of support and that sort of thing, where people were showing up and being the city of good neighbors, as Buffalo is called. And just like you said, that by the time it was like summer and like really summer, that a lot of that had peeled off and was gone. Not to mention that there was so much money that came into the city because of this. Yep. I know that you can speak to this more, but many survivors and many family members haven't actually seen any of the money that was being raised to support them during this horrific time, but still in duress for many of them. Yeah.

Phylicia Brown [00:25:57] Yeah, for sure. And survivors especially. Right. Like, you know, they even just the way that folks were categorized and just like the whole process of how people were able to even access any support that was available. And thinking of the people who have to live the rest of their lives. Having experienced this, thinking of the children. There were children in that story, right? There was there was a seven year old kid in that story. There was a 14 year old kid in that store. Right. Who will live the rest of their lives with having experienced this and have not gotten adequate support. Right. To be able to. Cope because I don't even know that hill is the town, right? Healing is such a lifelong process. But to be able to cope with what they have been through, you know. Yeah.

Kathryn Franco [00:26:58] I'm glad that you bring that distinction. I think that for me, this is always. This is always a moment to reflect on where it is that we really need to go. And yet I think that. One thing that the massacre really demonstrated for me was it's so easy for people to just go back to life as usual, you know? And I think the. Like you said in the beginning, there's so many like there is no going back to life as usual because either they were there, they know somebody, you know. There just isn't an ability to move on. And yet we did that. Mm.

Phylicia Brown [00:27:48] I think that makes me think about during COVID when people we were quarantining and that was like the mandatory national quarantine, and people would be like, I can't wait to go back to life as normal. And there was so much conversation about there is now life as normal, right? Like that. Whatever that it did prior to COVID will never exist again. Like that's just done. And so there is no going back to that. And I feel the very same way about the massacre, right. That like whatever we thought was normal prior to that happening in our community, there is no going back to that. And even still, is that something we want to go back to? Right. And. Yeah, I think that's something that I'm sitting with as well. But I do think that it is much easier for a community of people to move on, quote unquote, or to go back to what they think is normal. When the leadership of the city is doing that right now. Shortly after the massacre happened, the city budget passed. The kids went back to school the following week. There was never a moment for us to just like, stop and take a deep breath as a community and as a group of people who had suffered. An unimaginable loss who has suffered an unimaginable. Attack on our community. Right. Who have been through all. Something that none of us could have, could have fathomed. And for our city to be pushing us to, you know, keep it up, keep going. There was never. I always say there was never no, like declaration of a state of emergency. I mean, we had the kids going back to school and then the schools were getting all kinds of calls and threats to them every single day. The kids were having to be

sent back home. You know, like all of this stuff, I think it happened downtown at one point. And we had to clear out some of the official buildings. All of this stuff was happening, and yet we were being forced to kind of like move on from it in a very weird way.

Kathryn Franco [00:30:15] No, I do know it was very much just like status quo. I know teachers who were in the schools, pools, kids like that's that's out because they live over there. So they know people or they were around when when everything sort of was happening and that sort of thing. And I remember asking one of my teacher friends and I was like, you know, how are you managing? And she was like, I'm not. It's basically just trying to give them space. But we're not teaching today because how can we teach after this just happened? And one thing that I think is that hit home for me is Mr. Wakefield, the son of the whip who was killed in the massacre. He's spoken out a bit recently and he was talking about this same sort of moving away from the event, moving away from the massacre as if it was. No big deal. Shortly thereafter. There was the school shooting all day, and he said, you know, that community lost its next generation. He said, We lost our elders. We lost. We lost our grandparents and, you know, our aunts and those sort of things. And it was wild to hear that because it was so true. Think about who it was that was lost in this and again, how senseless that was, and to be able to not have that space to breathe and to process and to really acknowledge the trauma, like actual trauma that this community now is going to grapple with and is still grappling with, like to this day, like there's so much that hasn't been discussed, there's so much that hasn't been acknowledged. And I think that that's huge. And I think that that it's really messed. And not to mention like Buffalo has been going through it. So not only did we move on from the massacre, but it really felt then like it was not this acknowledgment of black death, black trauma. So then also move into a season of continued and accumulated accumulation of black death and black trauma. Buffalo has really gone through from 2020 to coping. I know that I was hoping that 2023 like, okay, it's going to be a new year. And it was just really a continuation of that. Yeah.

Phylicia Brown [00:33:00] I often wonder how different our community would be if we did take the time to truly acknowledge what has happened in a very real and radically honest way. Right. Because I think part of what happened is making this all about a gun violence issue. Not being honest that this was a white supremacist terrorist attack on a community. And focusing solely on gun violence and access to food. Right. And then I think with that not being honest about that, then also the layer of wanting to point to, oh, well, this is an outsider that came into our community, that enacted this violence on our community. And that wanting to hold the truth that folks, folks who are just like that live in this community with us. And I hear every day. And so I think I think those things. And then I think exactly what you said, this piece about Mike moving on and then getting to, you know, just just feeling like trauma on top of trauma. On top of trauma. On top of trauma. Losing a very prominent doctor in the in the black community and his two daughters in a house fire, then moving to the winter time and the blizzard. Then the four, five children died in a house fire. Right. And so it was just all of these things. And I don't know about you, but it felt like I didn't get any closure from 2022. It did not feel like we moved from a year that was very hard and tough into anything new. And I think part of it is the feeling that nothing has changed. And that even in the blizzard, even at all of these things that are continuing to happen in our community, we are always left to fend for ourselves.

Kathryn Franco [00:35:05] And it's interesting because mutual aid is fantastic and that's what we saw. So and these moments, right, that people were coming out and supporting one another, really coming together quickly and that sort of thing. And for me, I think the. We play roles and how this happens. We play roles and how we respond to things and that

sort of thing. And I feel like my response. Is part of. What I'm doing now, looking at looking at the responsibility of our elected leaders in some of this and the way that policy is continued to be upheld and forced, laid out all these different things. And how after all this time we haven't made different decisions. Why are we all this time we haven't seen change. I think that it's fantastic to talk about change and all of these different things. I think also at the same time, as a member of this community, I'm tired of hearing about it and nothing actually happening. And I think that the massacre, the laser, these house, like all of these different things, feel like, okay, I don't know how many more times we can say thoughts and prayers for these families when there's tangible steps that we can take that actually change the outcomes of some of these things. How many more lessons do we have to learn? How many more lives do we have to lose? How much more trauma do we have to take on until we say this is enough and actually do something?

Phylicia Brown [00:36:54] Yeah. I think about you saying all of this. Thank you. It makes me think about the work that I know. You and I are both engaged in very community, grassroots level work and. It makes me think about how hard it is even for us to win on the campaigns that we are running. Right. And even for us to. The lengths that we have to go through just to get. One foot ahead. How much pushback we often get from those who are supposed to be leading us and those who are supposed to be taking up the charge to. Change the material conditions of our communities. Again, it's not because and I want to make this very clear, it's not because we don't have the resources to do it. It isn't that. Not now, not after the blizzard, not after the massacre, not after. Those excuses may have worked some other time, but not now. They don't work now. And so. It makes me think about that. And I'm curious. How are you finding your ability to. Do the work that you want to do in the community. And if it has gotten any easier, like if you feel like our elected officials are. More ready to come to the table or are more ready to. Make the shifts and changes needed for us to live better lives.

Kathryn Franco [00:38:39] Yeah. Wow. So I will preface this with saying that I think that I am a little bit more critical of our elected leaders because, again, none of these conditions, none of these statistics, none of these. None of these environments in which people have been enjoying and living in our new right. Many of our elected leaders have been in office for at least a decade, many, some of them for two decades. And so I think that for me. I don't feel that they necessarily are more willing. What I do think is that they. Feel the need to do the performance to make it seem as if they are paying attention and they actually care because like you said, those excuses aren't going to work anymore. So you can't give those same lines and expect for people to be satisfied. And yet I do not feel personal opinions. I do not feel that our elected leaders have really stepped up. We do see, like you said, there was no declaration. There was no nothing that happened sort of after the massacre. Even after that blizzard like it was still was just. Being born so many lives.

Phylicia Brown [00:39:59] Yes.

Kathryn Franco [00:40:01] And I'm like many people feel that it was preventable all of these lives law. And so it feels wild to me. That our elected officials were not like, I almost curse, but I'm not going to be anything. But they just weren't like ready to stand up and be like, immediately we need to do something immediately and names to be changed immediately. We're going to have generators in our community centers and our schools and that sort of thing. We're going to set up these processes. It was wild to me. And I'm thinking specifically about the blizzard with this one. It was wild to me to hear our elected leaders, our mayor in particular, come on television and just be fine with saying we don't have a plan for blizzard or snow, but not for blizzards. I don't know. I live in Buffalo so

much. So much so that when I go to other places in America, even other places not in America, and people are like, Where are you from? I'm from Buffalo, New York. And they say, Oh, is it snowing? So which people can't see my face, but I have to be like, No, it's not snowing. It's July. Why would it be snowing here? But we have such a reputation. So it makes no sense to me how we have no plan for a blizzard for all of this snow that we know that we will get. I think it's been difficult. I think that there is also a lot of pressure on our elected officials right now. I will acknowledge that. I think that pressure is there because people are fed up, though, and because people are feeling like, what have you been doing? It feels like you've been asleep at the wheel for your time in office. And so I think that there is this pressure to do more and to be more active. I don't necessarily feel that they are moving in that direction. Of the actual doing.

Phylicia Brown [00:42:00] Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I even think of, again, the work that I do with Blair and the work that I also do in my personal life. And I haven't seen much of a change either. Right. It hasn't gotten any easier that I've seen. We haven't been able to. Move work that we wanted to move, I think is I appreciate you bringing up this sentiment around the blizzard and how like we didn't see an immediate less source of the community centers with generators that source churches with generators less ensure that. Places where people frequent in the community have a stash of food and a stash of diapers and a stash of formula and a stash of all of those things. But it is, again, like I said before, we are always left to fend for ourselves. It is small community organizations that are doing that work, that are trying to make partnerships and coalitions to be able to ensure that. We do not suffer something like that in the same way that we did prior to. And I have to go back to this piece around the trauma. Right. I know for me, even for me, the next time it snowed, right, I was a little shaken up right in the eye. And I was nervous. Right. And I remember talking to so many people who also were scared and they want to go outside and all of those things into what you bring up about Buffalo being a city where always snows. That blizzard was very different for us. And I think similarly to the massacre, there are lots of things that changed for the way people navigate their lives because something like that happened in our community.

Kathryn Franco [00:43:59] Yeah.

Phylicia Brown [00:44:00] Yeah, go ahead.

Kathryn Franco [00:44:03] No, I'm absolutely agree with you. I think that that's something that people don't realize. But we're talking about the coping and the healing and how to move on, like in a healthy way that acknowledges all of the trauma that we have gone through and yet at the same time. This has changed buffalo. This has changed a lot in Buffalo. And like this has changed us. And there is no going back, like you said, like there's no going back to before, like the before times and the before times. And there is a marker of that's not us anymore. I think that the only thing that keeps me going and keeps me into like and so being to stay here in Buffalo and all that other stuff is because of small community organizations like BLRR, because I believe in a better Buffalo, the buffalo that we deserve. And I'm just curious because I think that particularly for our generation and younger and maybe it doesn't have to be a generational thing, I think that all Buffalo Anyons have dreamed at one time of a better buffalo, you know, as a visionary in Buffalo. And I'm just curious from you like what that looks like.

Phylicia Brown [00:45:23] If I had to just give one line, just one line I could go on for days about. My dreams of a better, brighter buffalo. But if I had to just give one mind, it would be. Being in a community and having communities across the city that. Have what they

need to thrive, right? Not survive. You know, but their have what they need to actually thrive and to live. Oh, for long lives. Right. I've been talking to a lot of my comrades about what it means to about visions of the future being about. Black elders. Like being able to grow into black elder hood and the fact that so many of our lives are cut short by so many different things that are mostly systemic. But what does it mean to build our futures in a way that see us from the cradle to adulthood? What about you?

Kathryn Franco [00:46:41] So let me compose myself because I wanted to cry a little bit because it's. It's a beautiful it's a beautiful vision that I want to be our reality. When you talk about systems and just like the institutional racism. It's deep here in the city that I love. And for me, I think that I don't necessarily approach the work differently because I think. That vision of buffalo is exactly what I want, like where people's quality of life is just raised, like people have a quality of life. When you talk about going from surviving to just trying to make it from day to day to actually thriving like. What a concept. It it really I feel like I'm taking my breath away because I want to sit in that conceptual and from being blank, I feel that I continuously talk about these policies. And I think part of it is like the work that I've done, the way that I've seen Buffalo unfold to me and all these different things. You know, I remember being a kid and growing up on a lower West Side and it was rough. And I just remember all of these different things and then being an adult and the same park that I used to go to is a very different park now. It has seen a lot of investment that while I was growing up, I had never seen a not a paved road, not nothing. So looking at all of the way in which investment, which resources are put out there, other, I think that like as a kid, I didn't realize the world that I was growing up in, in the same way that I've been able to conceptualize it now. And thank God because I was able to have a childhood, then, you know, have hopes and dreams. But I think it's that same hope and dream that I hope now that I. You can live anywhere in Buffalo. Thrive. Right. And you don't have to move to North Buffalo. You don't have to go over here. You don't have to, you know, have a certain zip code. To be able to have a thriving life. And for me, that means that we have elected leaders who are accountable. We have elected leaders that come from us, that have the understanding and really care about where it is that we want to go. So, you know, I haven't seen the violence, and I hate to say it all the time, because I feel like policy is where it starts, not work. So I think that policy is a piece of it. I think that policy helps to codify. The buffalo that we want to see because it gives us an additional layer and structure on top of all of the organizing work that happens on the ground. All of the people who make our city work, it gives them that extra layer of protection. And so for me. I think about a Buffalo Lane band that really is for all people, for all of us, but that particularly focuses on. The injustices that have happened to our neglected neighborhoods, to our black people, and acknowledges the trauma not just from 2022 and the massacre and the blizzard, but the long history of disinvestment and the long history. Of neglect.

Phylicia Brown [00:50:26] Yeah. Yeah, we don't have time for it on this podcast. There is a conversation about reparations to be had. Uh huh. Maybe. Maybe we'll be invited back to have that conversation. Right. Because. I think that is a one way forward. So we have about 5 minutes left. And I want to ask you. What is your one greatest wish for Buffalo?

Kathryn Franco [00:51:05] Hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo. I think the. That the mainstream divide doesn't exist anymore, that that is not. Invisible marker. I don't. I wish that from Buffalo. That to me would be a huge thing. And that would be. That would be like astounding to not have the main street divide people like must that. That no matter where you walked, one block this way, two blocks that way. It looks. It looks the same. Mm hmm. What about you? I mean, you kind of said it already, but.

Phylicia Brown [00:51:53] Yes. And my vision for Buffalo. But yeah, that we invest in. Buffalo's east side invest in Buffalo's black communities and that our children get to get to grow up in their whole bright. Brilliance which lies in that we do to that we get a piece of that to.

Kathryn Franco [00:52:24] Do you think we do you think in doing this work you get some of that?

Phylicia Brown [00:52:28] Yeah.

Kathryn Franco [00:52:31] Yeah. Yeah. It's from my sister. Mm hmm. I appreciate in your vision that you brought in and your first iteration, it was the elders and then the second generation. It was the youth. Our children. Which is given the next step. I love it.

Phylicia Brown [00:52:50] Thank you so much for having this conversation with me.

Kathryn Franco [00:52:53] No, thank you. And as you know, it will be a continued conversation because this work doesn't stop. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Because it's our lives. It's not really work. Yeah.

Peter Sobota [00:53:07] And my thanks again to Katherine and Felicia for joining us today. We love to hear your thoughts on this episode or any of them, for that matter. You can leave comments on our website at insocialwork.org and you can follow us on your favorite social media platform or wherever you get your podcasts. The In Social Work podcast team is Steve Sturman, our chair in media to our terrific Chia production assistant and guest coordinator Nic DeSmet. Say hi, Nic. And I'm Peter Szabo. To see you next time, everybody.