

SHELVIS PONDS: Welcome to the Just Space Podcast. In this series, you will hear stories and interviews that explore the intersection of spaces, places, and social justice at Duke and in Durham. The first episode is with Jeff Nelson, Residence Coordinator at Duke University, who shares his story about learning to read space.

JEFF NELSON: He was murdered in broad daylight. 12:15pm, the University Market and gas station in the West End Neighborhood of Durham. When we got the Duke Alert, I was eating lunch with a friend on Central Campus, a mile and a half away . My friend lived only three blocks from the market, and his wife and baby girl were at home. The gunman was at large and a manhunt ensued.

Seven months later, my colleagues in Residence Life took a walking tour of the West End. Well, more specifically, we took a walking tour of four city blocks: from the Durham Co-op on one end to Duke Memorial United Methodist Church on the other. The University Market, where the shooting took place, was one of our destinations.

These four blocks of earth, asphalt and concrete, have seen incredible change since I've lived in Durham. And I've been here only eight years. So this year, 2019, Durham celebrates its 150th birthday. If Durham's existence was equivalent of one day, I've only been here for about an hour of it. And in that time I've been here, these four blocks have been transformed.

One co-op was closed. Another one opened.

My mechanic shop closed and moved somewhere else.

A Black-run tinting business was evicted, and was turned into Joe Van Gogh & Local Yogurt.

An abandoned gas station-turned-church became a gastropub.

The Duke Chapel Pathways house was physically lifted and moved to another street.

The “Kent Street Corner” was created. The old buildings sitting there demolished and the Chapel Hill Street-Kent Street intersection completely reconfigured.

The Cookery filled an empty building.

A Black-owned counseling practice moved out.

On the other side of 147, a little old-fashioned gas station made way for The Bell West End condos.

Not all of the half-mile has changed: there’s still Ar-Razzaq Islamic Center, the oldest mosque in North Carolina; there’s a University Market; a Quick Meal Restaurant; Al-Taiba Halal Market; a mural of Pauli Murray; Immaculate Conception Catholic Church; Healthy Start Academy, Highway 147; the Durham Police Headquarters (which is moving); and Duke Memorial UMC.

So, on a hot and muggy July afternoon, 18 of us set off on our walking tour of the West End. We began at the Co-op, to have a conversation with its General Manager. We asked about the history of the co-op, who it’s for, and how she interprets the change she that she’s seen in the neighborhood. She spoke of the Co-op’s being *for* the neighborhood. Being a local space for the community.

Now, the reality of this is a bit complicated. She is white. The community is predominately Black. The \$3 dinners on Thursday regularly hosts folk music by bearded, flannel wearing white millennials. It makes me think that I'm more of the intended audience of the co-op than those who have actually lived in the West End for a long time.

Now, the questions we asked the Co-op were basically the same ones we asked everyone we talked to:

The Imam at Ar-Razzaq told us that folks in his congregation were having to decide whether to stay or to leave. Home prices were going up. The neighborhood was being gentrified. The changes were good in some sense – increasing home values, fresh produce within walking distance – but in other ways it was bad.

This was the tension sort of underscored by the others we talked to as well: the shop owner at Al-Taiba Halal Market, the priest at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, one of the pastors at Duke Memorial.

As we walked, we also stopped at particular places.

We stopped at the mural of Pauli Murray, a gender non-conforming Civil Rights lawyer, poet, activist, and the first African-American woman to be ordained in the Episcopal Church. The old Dean of Duke Chapel called Murray the patron saint of Durham. Her childhood home is on Carroll Street, and backs up to the historic, so built in 1872, and segregated, Maplewood Cemetery.

We stopped at the University Market to remember the life of Raiford Matthews Jr., who was shot and killed on December 7, 2015 at 12:15pm. Our silence echoing the vigils that remember the victims of gun violence in Durham.

After this, we went to a car-tinting business called TMAC, with its chain-fencing and that curiously dressed mannequin always sitting and sort of slouching near the street. It had just become public that TMAC was being asked to leave the space to make room for a yogurt store. TMAC was a Black-owned business, but the land was white-owned. TMAC was given a month to vacate the space.

We also paused along Highway 147. So, built in 1970, Highway 147 was Durham's version of a pretty common occurrence in the 1970s' "Urban Renewal" movement, where highways were, quite literally, built on top of and intersecting thriving Black communities, decimating them in the process: 147 did this to Hayti.

We tried to have a conversation with the Durham Police Department, but no one was able to participate, which may have been better, as some folks in our group were pretty offended by the "Blue Lives Matter" sign posted in one of the office windows.

The West End has *a lot* happening. And it's complex. The infusion of money means the infusion of white folks. Of middle class, upper-class folks. A high tide, though, does not lift all boats.

Now, the West End is like many places in Durham. Like many places around the country. In some ways, it's not unique. In other ways, the shape that these larger forces and cultural phenomena take *are* unique to this place. They are

unique to these particular landscapes: to the story of Durham; the story of the people who live here.

Walking around the West End was an activity in seeing a space differently. Of learning how to 'read' a space. To analyze it. To listen to its stories, to question our assumptions, to wake up and stop assuming that this "development" is good, or normal, or progress. It's complicated.

It's complicated because space matters. And space is a matter of justice. Space is the field on which issues of social justice and equity play out. I mean, these places all have stories. They configure life for those of us who live here. They tell us who's important, who particular spaces are for, and how we should interact within them.

I said before that Durham is celebrating its 150th birthday this year. And that means, and this is fairly obvious, that Durham has actually *not* been around forever. There was 'here,' before there was Durham. Before the Dukes, and Bull Durham tobacco.

This is land stolen from indigenous communities. Land forced to produce crops for white slaveholders. Land that held the blood and sweat of those displaced, enslaved, and abused.

Just Space is about discovering that space matters, and that space is a matter of justice.

In this episode, and in the next two, we're taking a dive in to how to read space. The next episode, with Duke professor Adam Rosenblatt and a bonus interview with local historian Eddie Davis, will take a look at the way racial and economic

justice manifests in graveyards, and particularly historically African-American ones.

In the following episode, with Pierce Freelon, we see what it looks like to read who space is for and what it took for him to create Blackspace. The goal of this first season is to learn how to see the injustice to see the injustice in spaces that is largely invisible. Injustice we've been taught *not* to see. We hope you listen again and we hope you discover that space is not neutral. And that our daily lives are tangled up in this mess.

PONDS: The creative director for this episode is Shelvis Ponds. The technical editing for this episode has been done by Kyle Kubovcik. Today's music is called 3 am West End, by statusq. In addition, this production is made possible by the division of Student Affairs at Duke University.