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WINTER 2023



WHAT'S NEXT FOR
THE ROUNDHOUSE?
Confronting the Past
to Shape the Future

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FINAL WORD

BY DANIEL BANKS AND ADAM W. MCKINNEY

Transform 1012 North Main Street: 'Repurposing Terror and Making It Freedom'



Daniel Banks |
Photo: Lobsang Tenzin



Adam W. McKinney |
Photo: Amy Peterson

What would you do if you discovered an abandoned Ku Klux Klan meeting hall less than 2 miles from your home?

Soon after moving to Fort Worth, Texas, we learned that, in the early 1920s, the Fort Worth branch of the KKK had one of the largest memberships in the U.S. In 1924 they built a mammoth auditorium on North Main Street that served as their Texas headquarters. The original auditorium burned soon after opening, and a second building opened on the site in 1925 as a 2,000-seat auditorium with a proscenium stage. This brick behemoth has a 22,000-square-foot floor plate and sits just over 1 mile due north of Tarrant County Courthouse at the gateway of the historically Hispanic, Black and immigrant Northside. Anyone coming from downtown to this under-invested district would have had to pass by the imposing building, which sent — and still sends — a clear message about who controlled Fort Worth and surrounding residential areas through violence and economic marginalization.

We are co-founders and co-directors of DNAWORKS, a 17-year-old arts and service organization dedicated to dialogue and healing through the arts (www.dnaworks.org). When we learned about the meeting hall, we had the same thought — “It needs to be an arts center.”

Very few people with whom we spoke knew about the building’s history. To most, it was the Ellis Pecan Building (the penultimate owner that left in 1999). Many residents who were aware of the history did not talk about that past, either because it was too painful or because they were concerned about how it would reflect on the image of a city that had been experiencing record growth (from 2016-2022, Fort Worth grew from the 16th- to the 13th-largest city in the U.S.).

We began gently sharing our idea for a radical repurposing of the property. After discussing the project with Councilmember Carlos Flores, in whose district the building sits, and receiving his support and counsel, one of the first people with whom we spoke was Tina Gorski, a descendant of one of Fort Worth’s founding families and manager of film and performing arts programs at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. Her response was immediate: “It’s about time Fort Worth reckoned with its history of racism and racial violence!” Daniel was heartened by this response — and a little surprised. Even though, in 2019, the country was already beginning to show

signs of the increased racial justice activity that would take center stage in 2020, we had no idea, as recent transplants to North Texas, that this idea would find such support among a wide range of people.

“Repurposing terror and making it freedom” is how one early supporter, former Grand Prairie City Planner and *The Commish Radio Show* host Ed Gray, described the project. That phrase has become a bellwether for our cause. There have been questions about whether preserving the building will cause more harm than good. Our intent is not to preserve history, but to learn from it and heal. And to do that, we cannot ignore the trauma — we must face it head-on, together.

We convened a coalition of seven other organizations that represent and/or serve all the groups that were

targeted by the KKK in Fort Worth — Black, Catholic, Hispanic, immigrant, Jewish, LGBTQQIP2SAA+ — and began a two-year process of meeting, sharing, exploring, dreaming and discussing with our constituencies and elected officials. Only after demonstrating that we could attain a truly plural-cultural, co-created and shared leadership organization did we apply for our nonprofit status, which we received in September 2021. In December 2021, we acquired the site with a generous grant from the local Rainwater Charitable Foundation and a significant donation from the building owners, an LLP of individuals who purchased the building in 2004 with the unrealized intention of gifting it to Texas Ballet Theater. Thanks to other funding (see below), we have recently hired a full-time executive director, Carlos Gonzalez-Jaime.

Building Use

- State-of-the-art performance and rehearsal spaces
- Arts training and programming services for underserved and LGBTQ+ youth
- Exhibit spaces dedicated to social justice and civil rights
- Makerspace and tool library for local do-it-yourself (DIY) classes
- Meeting spaces for racial equity and leadership workshops and community events
- Outdoor urban agriculture and artisan marketplace
- Affordable live/work spaces for artists and entrepreneurs in residence

Founding Organizations

1012 Youth Council
DNAWORKS
LGBTQ SAVES
Opal Lee Foundation
SOL Ballet Folklórico
Tarrant County Coalition for Peace and Justice
The Welman Project
Window to Your World

Funding

Atmos Energy
Federal Community Projects Funding
(Congressman Marc Veasey)
The Ford Foundation
MASS Design Group
Mellon Foundation
National Endowment for the Arts
North Texas Community Foundation
Rainwater Charitable Foundation
The Tecovas Foundation

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Now named The Fred Rouse Center for Arts and Community Healing, the building is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Fred Rouse, a Black father and butcher lynched by a white mob in Fort Worth in 1921, whose name and legacy the city only recently acknowledged. His grandson, Mr. Fred Rouse III, joined the Board this year to represent the Rouse family. As The Center's name reflects, reparative justice, our work's greater purpose, guides every level of decision-making and programming. Striving to return resources to the communities targeted for violence and economic marginalization by the KKK, we are creating a vibrant cultural hub where once-siloed groups feel a sense of cultural belonging while having opportunities to connect meaningfully with one another. We all understand firsthand the traumatic history implicit in this project — and bringing this hidden history to light has already begun a healing process.

We leave you with the words of the inspiring and courageous Dr. Opal Lee, also known as “the grandmother of Juneteenth,” who, at 96 years old, sits on our Board and urges us forward: “We cannot undo what has been done. We can learn from it.”

Please visit our website to learn more about the support, funding and community partnerships from which the project has benefited and to join the movement — www.transform1012.org. ■

Adam W. McKinney, M.A., is a dancer, choreographer, activist, installation artist, and co-director of DNAWORKS, an arts and service organization committed to healing through the arts and dialogue. He is the president of Tarrant County Coalition for Peace and Justice, which works to build capacities for community healing by bringing awareness to the 1921 racial terror lynching of Mr. Fred Rouse. He is an associate professor of dance at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth.

Daniel Banks, PhD, co-director of DNAWORKS, has directed, led workshops and instigated projects in 36 states and 23 countries. He is associate director of Theatre Without Borders, on The Drama League's Directors Council, and on the Advisory Board of Tarrant County Coalition for Peace and Justice as well as founder of the Hip Hop Theatre Initiative, promoting youth self-expression and leadership through the integration of Hip Hop culture's art forms.




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On it.

Ending racial injustice requires all of us to work together and take real action.

What can you do to help?

- Educate yourself about the history of American racism, privilege and what it means to be anti-racist.
- Commit to actions that challenge injustice and make everyone feel like they belong, such as challenging biased or racist language when you hear it.
- Vote in national and local elections to ensure your elected officials share your vision of public safety.
- Donate to organizations, campaigns and initiatives who are committed to racial justice.

love has no labels

Let's come together to take action against racism and fight for racial justice for the Black community. Visit www.lovehasnolabels.com/forhermedium

ad COUNCIL