

Growing Democracy PODCAST

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Ashley (Co-Host): Hi, I'm Ashley Nickels.

Shemariah (Co-Host): And I'm Shemariah Arki.

Casey (Co-Host): And I am Casey Boyd-Swan.

Ashley (Co-Host): We're podcasting from Northeast Ohio. This is the Growing Democracy Podcast: a space to amplify multiple forms of knowledge, demystify politics, policy and governance, and foster equity-centered civic engagement.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Each episode we invite a guest or two to talk about what it means to be civically engaged, how engagement can be leveraged to dismantle systems of oppression, and how to grow a socially just and equitable democracy.

Casey (Co-Host): Welcome to the show and thanks for joining us.

So Shemariah, you and I are back again. This is my first recording since we took the summer off.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Yes! Welcome.

Casey (Co-Host): Thank you. I'm late to the game, uhh, but it was nice that I got to have my first one back with you so that, umm, you could remind me of all the things I forgot how to do on the podcast.

Shemariah (Co-Host): You got it, you got it.

Casey (Co-Host): I eventually got there. And so today, we were talking with a guest from, uhh, Teaching Cleveland, and this was, uhh, I think, an interesting conversation. And more than that, I think was interesting, uhh, the conversation and thoughts that you and I had after our meeting with him. Uhh, I mean, what are your takeaways about this episode? What are your thoughts about this episode?

Shemariah (Co-Host): Well, umm, I'm pretty familiar with the program, umm, as it's been operating for a few years. I've probably been familiar maybe the last three or four, umm, and have participated in some of their programming.

I think that, umm, when we talk about, umm, the history of Cleveland, it's really important for us to share all sides of that story. Umm, we know, just being in the United States, the, the founding story of how we got here, right? All of us. When

we think about race, ethnicity, even socioeconomics, thinking about how we got here.

So, I think that as we approach teaching Cleveland history, it's imperative that those intersections are, umm... I want to say highlighted, but I – it's a little bit more than that. I think it's imperative that those intersections ground and found the curriculum and discussion. Umm, because without that, there is a propensity for information to be lost or to be glazed over. And as educators, as classroom teachers, you know, we teach in the academy for 16 weeks at a time. That's not enough time. Even in K-12, you have, you know, a semester here, a semester there. It's still not enough time.

So, when we think about teaching, we've got to think about it more than just our classroom and the clock hours that we have with folks. We have to really expand our thoughts and our processes around teaching to teaching and learning and understanding that that cannot – the classroom, cannot be the *only* place where we're engaging in teaching and learning. There's so much history, there's *so* many stories to be told, as today's guests showed us, so we have to curate spaces where we can allow folks to share their stories.

Casey (Co-Host): Yeah, that's... that's what rings true for me. And I do appreciate, umm, some of the ideas behind programs that Teaching Cleveland offers, you know, bringing it outside of the classroom. That, I think, is definitely missing in our K-12 system at least.

But, you know, another thing missing that I'm not sure how much of is captured even by this, is that there seems to be this tendency, when teaching history, that we portray events as these one-off or singular events, that they're not at all a string of events, that one thing happened because of another thing that happened because of another thing, that there's this legacy or system of events that created the current now that we're in. Umm, and I guess that's what I would really hope to see, umm, for all social studies and history lessons is some kind of connection to how our past directly and continuously connects to our present.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Yes. And our guest even spoke about, umm, referenced "The Danger of a Single Story," the text by Chimamanda. And I think we'll drop that link for you all to check that out. It's a 20-minute YouTube video. Definitely engage with it. And, you know, this is what happens when we, umm, only tell the good parts of the story.

Casey (Co-Host): Right, right.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Right? When we only tell the parts that make us feel good. When we talk about migration patterns and, you know, leave it up to, you know, share cropping debt, when we don't tell the whole story about Black people were leaving the South by the thousands because their lives were in danger, not just their economic

livelihood, right? So, the danger of that single story is that we're left with these pretty history books and we use words like "slaves" instead of "enslaved Africans," right?

And when we really are intentional about the way that we tell the story and the words that we use, that leads us towards our liberation. And so, I think that becomes a key factor – language becomes this key transmitter to dialogue, and ultimately, change.

Casey (Co-Host): Yeah. I – it reminds me of the saying, and maybe we should tweak it, that the winner of the battle, the victor, writes the history. But really, it's the group with the power writes the history.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Absolutely.

Casey (Co-Host): And pulling that apart and finding why is it that this power had this history be written in this way, I think is a really important endeavor, especially when teaching children.

So, our guest today is Greg Deegan. And Greg Deegan has guided Teaching Cleveland since January 2022. He served as the Community Education Director for University Circle Incorporated from 2017 to 2022. And prior to that, he taught social studies at Beachwood High School for 21 years. He's the owner of Cleveland Landmarks Press Incorporated and an author, or co-author, of four books on Cleveland history. In addition, he served as a Library of Congress Fellow, a Fulbright Exchange teacher in Hungary, and a member of the Facing History and Ourselves National Teacher Leadership Team. He was a Sam's Club Teacher of the Year in 2007.

All right. So, joining us today is Greg Deegan. And Greg, could you tell us and our listeners just a little bit about yourself and also your journey to serving as an Executive Director at Teaching Cleveland? What is an executive director even?

Greg Deegan: For this tiny little organization, you just do everything. So, umm... No, thank you for being, uhh, a part of this conversation. I am so honored that I was even asked to be here. Umm. I think the world... I know Shemariah and some of her work, so I'm so honored to be here.

But I was a high school social studies teacher of 21 years at Beachwood High School. And umm, I did that, I loved it, I loved teaching, umm, but I had a nagging feeling that as I taught social studies, that I was still being apart from a lot of issues and, umm, realities that I wasn't up close with. So, umm, about five years ago, a friend of mine, Chris Ronayne, and I started talking; he was the President of University Circle Incorporated, and umm, he kind of encouraged me to move into the education space, the education non-profit space. So, I became the Education Director at University Circle Incorporated.

And so, while I was doing both of those, I had already founded Teaching Cleveland years ago, but it was part-time – it was sort of like a hobby. And about a year ago, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District came to Teaching Cleveland and said, "We've had many teachers go through some of your professional development and we'd like you to be a partner to help us teach about race, uhh, in Cleveland to all 7,000 employees, from the CEO down to everybody else."

So, that is how I've come to be the first full-time Executive Director of Teaching Cleveland, even though we've been doing some of the work for actually about 10 years now.

Casey (Co-Host): Wow.

Shemariah (Co-Host): All right. Thank you for, umm, sharing that. And you started to tell us a little bit about Teaching Cleveland, but I want to ask a little bit more. Umm, that was your origin story, so moving on to motivation and tell us more about what programs and services you offer now.

Greg Deegan: So, we started out, umm, mainly off – really focused on educators and their students, mainly educators. We first started our Teaching Cleveland Institute and the idea was... Here's the big picture, I think, problem or issue in Greater Cleveland. 75% of all adults who live in the area were born and raised here. But when you ask adults what they learned formally about Cleveland growing up, they'll tell you virtually nothing, which is true. And so, umm, I thought that that was sort of a problem, right? You know, kids get out of high school and we're supposed to be the authors of our future, and yet, we don't even have historical context for how this place came to be. So to me, that was always nagging.

And I should also say, I also own a part-time publishing company called Cleveland Landmarks Press. We produce books in the history of Cleveland. My high school English teacher had started it because he was just, he was a great writer and he was frustrated by the narrative in the '70s about Cleveland. And he's like, "People should know about this history of this town." So he started this, but he was teaching and we both did it part-time and found some authors. So, while I was doing my teaching, I was writing about and publishing books about the history of Cleveland. And then I thought, "My God, no one's learning about it in school," so I started a class in Beachwood.

But that's really – was the motivation, this idea that, my God, there are so many really interesting stories and tons of experiences of individuals here, that one, on their own need to be learned, and then two, how that ties into larger trends in the United States, in the world, et cetera. So, for me, I thought there was just a huge... just a huge gap in education in tying our sort of local historical experiences to our present.

Casey (Co-Host): So, the next question that we had pre-planned was asking, in your mission statement, you guys talk about, "Infusing Cleveland into the classroom," and I think you've talked about that to some degree. I mean, what's the larger goal of doing so?

Is it, that... So, I grew up in Phoenix, and now thinking back on it, I don't know how much that they infused into Phoenix into the classroom. I actually probably knew more about Cleveland than I did Phoenix just because my dad was a conscientious objector in Vietnam and served here actually in Cleveland in hospitals to serve that time.

But I wonder, like, what's the broader goal of doing that? And is – does that goal actually extend just beyond Cleveland? Is that important in places like Detroit and Pittsburgh? And you know, even, I don't know, Boston, which you would think people have a lot of Boston infused already in the classroom.

Greg Deegan: Right. So, that's a great question. It's funny, I was just talking to a consultant yesterday who flew in from LA and somehow we got on the subject of Cleveland. She's like, "I remember learning about Cleveland in public schools in LA." And I was like, "What? So people in LA are learning more about Cleveland?" And she said it was in the context of, like, the decline of the Midwest and industrialization or whatever. And I was like, "Oh my God, maybe we have to go to LA to figure out, like, how to teach about Cleveland. It's crazy."

So, the broader idea, this idea of infusing Cleveland is to one, meet teachers where they are. So, we provide this professional development experience, whatever disciplines they teach, whatever grade levels, to say, "Look, here's something interesting about Cleveland and its history." Usually, we'll have it by subject matter or topic, but, umm, in what ways can we help you infuse something about Cleveland into whatever you're teaching so that if we do it well enough across many disciplines, by the time a kid graduates by, say, 12th grade, maybe those, umh, students will be able to have a better understanding of our historical context, have a better, frankly, connection to the people doing the work, so that's a piece of our Teaching Cleveland work, as well.

Not only do we do work with, umm, teachers, but we try to connect, especially to high school kids, the students with people doing the work about building this place, about maintaining this place, about addressing challenges so that they can sort of see that there are individuals in their community, number one, doing the work and that this community is worth it. And hopefully, if you do this well enough, to remind kids that they are so important: their own experiences, their own beliefs, their own skills, so that we could use them as we continue to, you know, move forward as a community, hopefully that's inclusive and equitable.

So, umm, for Teaching Cleveland, it is about infusing Cleveland wherever you can so that kids know something about this place and then they meet people doing the work so that they can envision a future here. Umm, so, that's a key piece of it.

And I would say, so, for all of our institutes, we have four pillars: history, economics, public policy, and always, always, always ending with youth engagement. None of that matters unless you talk about ways to engage youth. And umm, so that they can feel like they have a sense of efficacy and agency.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Awesome. So, now we want to ask you, umm, to be a little bit more specific around how that shows up in teaching and learning spaces. So, we know that you taught social studies for a number of years. That's where we met, on those front lines. And now we also know that, just to layer the conversation, social studies tends to be dominated by stories centering white folks, white men, and disproportionately taught by white men, also. So, how does that narrative shape how students view race and gender as shaping our history?

Greg Deegan: So, that is a good... those are incredible questions, I think, and very relevant to so many of our conflicts that we experience today and so many of our social issues that so many people are trying to figure out.

Umm, I got to be honest with you, what I saw when I was teaching social studies was exactly as you say. So, I taught in a suburban school district, and when you went to professional development conferences or whatever, it was dominated by white men. And, umm, and it's really interesting. When I talked to people... First of all, when I talked to adults when I was a teacher about what I did to a person, they would say, "Gosh, I really hated history. I really hated government. It wasn't relevant to me. I hated it. But now as an adult, I wish I would've paid attention." And I'm convinced that a lot of it has to do with the fact that the approach by people in the classroom... was so inadequate. Was so inadequate.

I saw it myself. I think I started out with this one perspective that I think many people would say, "You know what, you know what I've come to learn is as long as the story's interesting, that's good teaching." And I was like, "That's..." I came to learn that that's still sort of the sage on the stage from the perspective of whoever's up there telling this one story, right? The danger of one story. And there is a danger, because what it leaves kids thinking is that history is this one story and you just have to peel back the layers. You just have to uncover it. And that's not true.

Umm, and I give credit – I would love to say I came upon these ideas myself, but I would give credit to an organization that I came across after my first or second year teaching called Facing History and Ourselves. And umm, to this day, it's the best professional development that I ever experienced because it was founded by a middle school social studies teacher who thought that teaching social studies and history was so awful and it was so unengaging for kids because it lacked the approach of centering the learners. And so, what Facing History taught you to do, umm, through all sorts of professional development experiences, is how to free yourself from feeling the need to control the narrative and what information is being taught, to centering it around the learners.

So, Facing History and Ourselves views history through the lens of personal choice. And it reminds kids who are taking the class that they themselves are historical actors. I used to start every, umm, year with the video clip of Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Little Rock Nine – the only one who didn't have a phone, of the Little Rock Nine who missed a phone call, showed up by public transportation while the other eight were gathering. And of course famously, was harassed by white men saying, "We should lynch her," until one woman comes out of the crowd and gets her onto a bus to safety back home. And so, we'd always say, like, "Here's a 15-year-old kid just going to school just like you did on her first day. Do you think that she saw herself as an historical actor?"

So, umm, the long and short of it is I think that your question, Shemariah, is, is a brilliant question and I think the social studies world, in terms of teaching, is slowly changing, but it's really slowly changing. And I think it causes major problems, and I think that those major problems, then, manifest themselves by a very... I'd say we, we, we don't have very good civics conversations. Umm, you can see how polarized we are today, and they seem to be missing the mark in so many ways. Most importantly, recognizing the humanity of the people who are making the case for various interpretations.

Umm, so, I would say yes, Shemariah, that is really accurate. And for someone like me, umm, I check out all the boxes of the dominant group in virtually everything. I'm white, I'm cisgendered, I'm Christian, I'm a male, you name it. I mean, that's me. And I've found that it is incumbent upon me to learn. If you believe that history needs to be uncovered and discovered, then clearly what we all know, history has been taught in the past by a small sliver of people who have power: white men. And so, if it means for yourself that you have to understand it in your community, then we have to understand that historically, and to be far more inclusive in the stories that we tell.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Yes, I definitely agree with you.

Umm, and so next, I want to take the same conversation and move into, umm, some sort of practical application for our listeners. So, you outlined for us your identities. Thank you. We really appreciate that. Umm, and I want to pull back into the Facing History piece. So, Facing History, you know, really focuses on this individual engagement. So, thinking about that kind of piece or curriculum from Facing History, along with your identities, how do you infuse the education around, umm, recognizing the history and intention of systems and institutions along with our personal agency? How do you – how does that happen in the classroom for you?

Greg Deegan: Yeah. It's a great question. So, because we've done it part-time for so long, we're right at the beginning of doing a lot of that work, but the one piece that... Because really what we're doing is teachers, you know, they always have to keep their certification updated, so what we offer are these Cleveland historical experiences and numerous strategies that they can engage in. So, during our professional development, ways to engage in conversations that are around

identity, et cetera. But there's also a lot of, like, sort of historical, being very intentional about bringing multiple stories into, umm, a subject matter that we're studying. One that seems to be overwhelmingly requested by people who we work with is the history of race in Cleveland, for instance, or the history of race and ethnicity. All the immigrant groups that came to Cleveland and the Black migrant families who came up to the North from the South.

But, umm, one specific program that we have developed is called the Teaching Cleveland Student Challenge. So, what we do is we go to Teaching Cleveland teachers – people who have gone through our professional development who thought it was worthwhile – and we tell them we're going to pay them a small stipend to recruit five students to, umm... who want to study something about Cleveland, meet kids from other communities, and come up with new creative ideas about ways to solve some of our challenges. So, it is a year-long experience, funded generously by the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation and the Nordson Corporation Foundation.

And so, a typical Student Challenge cohort is about 50 kids from about 10 schools, 10 to 12 schools, 50 to 60 kids. And so, we meet with them five times throughout the academic year. So, this is all in addition to school, so it's an evening meeting. Umm, we meet at the Greater Cleveland Partnership. We're members there, the Greater Cleveland Partnership loves that we're engaging kids in these experiences. So, they go throughout an experience.

In the first session, we actually just started one on how do we create, the challenge is, how do we create a more sustainable Northeast Ohio? So on Wednesday, we just met, and the kids talked about or they learned about the history of industrialization in Cleveland and early environmental efforts to address the environmental issues caused by industrialization. Next month, we're going to have them meet and we're going to look at post-industrial Cleveland, umm, the burning of the river, how the environment was left, umm, disproportionately impacting certain groups compared to other groups. Uhh, and so, leaving us with these pretty inequitable systems.

The third session where they will gather, they're going to meet representatives, I think, from seven or eight different organizations, nonprofits, who are doing work in various aspects of sustainability. Uhh, for instance, the Rid-All Green Partnership, you know, uhh... an urban farm that has been doing incredible work. We will have Dink Water Drink Tap, umm, a local organization that encourages kids to utilize their skills to make the world more just through water. Umm, we've – Cleveland Tree Coalition, the Environmental Health Watch, Black Environmental Leaders. So, all these different individuals – we will have representatives from these groups. What they do, we love this, it's a little speed dating experience. We break the kids up into small groups. And, as a little side note because this relates to Facing History, when the whole cohort is together, we make sure that the kids from each of their schools are never together. They're always meeting, they're in groups with other kids from other schools. It's about breaking down those hyper-local psychological barriers so that they

understand that they need to meet people who have different lived experiences. But when we do this little, uhh, sort of speed dating experience, the idea is for about 15 minutes, groups of seven kids can ask questions about what the organization is, what it does, why are they are motivated to do what they're doing. Umm, they can get information and it's a much better, we think, way than doing a huge round table conversation where – for 50 kids where five people are really precocious and they get to ask all the questions, right? So, this is a way to get kids to meet people, and it's also literally networking like, "Wow, that's really cool. I'm so interested in having met an organization or a person who does this work." And it might even have the impact of getting them to do some volunteer work, for instance.

Umm, the second last session, we look at case studies about successes and failures. In this case, actually, we're going to highlight the Rid-All Green Partnership and some of the successes and failures that they experience. And then in the fifth session, we've already given them the challenge. Umm, each of the groups are going to present their idea about, umm, a way to make Northeast Ohio more sustainable. They have to have chosen a topic and where to dive in deep.

So along the way, we give them historical context, we get them to meet people. We actually do a lot of skills practicing in terms of, umm, getting to talk to people who are different, presenting in front of other people, hearing multiple perspectives. And so, umm, we're – we believe we're practicing the skills of civic engagement in ways that we think will be meaningful, so when they leave the Teaching Cleveland Student Challenge, they will be more confident, number one, about the issue and the history behind it, and number two, about engaging in their community.

So, that's one example of the work that we do.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Okay, awesome. I want to continue on this since we've moved to the, uhh, Student Challenge.

So, when we think about equitable sustainability, what are those, umm, things, specific things, that you're connecting to systems and institutions for these young people? Like do they understand why Cleveland is called "The Mistake on the Lake?" If they – you know, do they understand the history of the EPA? Understanding that because it's systemic divestment from certain neighborhoods that have certain people, people who are people of color, Black in Cleveland, people who are poor, right? How does that show up in your curriculum and how do the students respond to that?

Greg Deegan: So, it's a great question. Yes is the answer to a lot of the topics that you just raised. The mo– most of that's going to be in our second session about what we've been left with after having seen this sort of industrial boom. So, umm, so the answer to your question is really, we have... So, one little side note too is

that these Student Challenges, this is the fourth Student Challenge we've ever done, and we do a different topic each time.

So, for – in relation to your question, Shemariah, we... so, about the burning of the river, the creation of the EPA, the leadership of, umm, Carl Stokes and the sort of systemic, environmental legacies that are clearly, umm, poisoning, continuing to poison, uhh, largely non-white, largely poorer areas in Northeast Ohio. We have a bunch of resources to show exactly where that is and, you know, lead poisoning, et cetera. So, so that's what we're actually introducing to them in our next session.

And also, umm, introducing the idea of environmental sustain– umm, environmental justice, the idea that justice has been unfair, there has not been justice in the environment over the course of the city's history, especially as it relates to industrialization and the environment. So, umm, so we're actually really looking forward to it.

In the past, you know, we have that sort of formula where we do the history, the current, the meeting of the people, the looking at the case study, and then having them come up with ideas. Umm, so, this being new, this is like our first time through with this one. And the one, the one group that we reached out to that we knew we could learn a ton from, the Black Environmental Leaders, we were like, "Help. We have these questions and we have these ideas. Is there any way that you can help us frame it and point us in the direction of getting resources to share with kids and an approach to use?"

So, a lot of our – a lot of the planning for these Student Challenges are about making sure we're talking to people doing the work and having a, sort of, a broad range of perspectives. Because our Teaching Cleveland team doesn't know... we're a bunch of teachers, but we don't know a lot about the details of, for instance, environmental sustainability in Northeast Ohio. So, umm, so I'm actually really looking forward to seeing how that unfolds and how students' awareness of, umm, so many of these issues starts to become more sophisticated and clearer.

At the end of our first session, we had all these primary sources where, you know, we broke them up into groups of air, water, land and soil, transportation. And so, one, they could appreciate some of the huge developments that were taking place in basically the late 19th century to about mid-century, but when we asked them, what is your great takeaway? They said, "Oh man, the sacrifices that people made because of the importance of jobs and what that means for our environmental legacy. Now we have, sort of, the mess to clean up." And so, they are already getting at least a piece of it.

So anyway, the long and short of it is we're really looking forward to having students come to a better understanding of environmental injustice.

Casey (Co-Host): Now, I proposed this question and I think there was, I don't know, maybe some just nervousness on my part because, umm, my question was about critical race theory. And of course, we know that critical race theory isn't taught in K-12. I mean, it's really barely taught in university. It's grad classes only. So, the fact that there's this, like, large discussion about critical race theory, I don't know, kind of boggles my mind. But there's been a lot of pushback recently, uhh, ongoing apparently about critical race theory in the classroom, and this has really snowballed into a general demand, you know, from some, from many, for teachers to *stop* teaching about topics that tangentially or directly are focused on or related to race, racism, racial inequality, kind of on block, right?

Do you see that this creates a barrier for teachers that are looking to implement, kind of, lesson plans offered through Teaching Cleveland? Umm, but more to the point about any ability to kind of, uhh, infuse into any curriculum these ideas that there are historical systems of oppression that continue on to this day and shape our current environment, which uhh, which we live in in Cleveland?

Greg Deegan: Yes. I, uhh... Troubling doesn't even scratch the surface of the push behind this sort of anti-CRT, umm, thing. I would argue it's usually individuals who really are not very familiar with what actually goes on in classrooms, one. Uhh, two, take some, you know, awful examples of potentially awful teaching and then blow that up as if that's what's happening everywhere.

So, but the big picture answer I would say is yes: if nothing else, the psychological fear that teachers have. Teachers go in... in my experience, teachers go into their field because they love kids, they love the educational and discovery process. And... I have to admit, 21 years and meeting teachers, I don't know of teachers who go in with some sort of ideological, "I've got this fight I need to fight." Umm, they don't do that. They're usually too busy responding to parents' phone calls, making sure that everything is in line with, you know, the state standards, putting out fires, et cetera. So, anything that seems to smack of these sorts of, supposedly very controversial topics, I think you do get – we do get teachers.

In fact, I talked to Dr. Gordon at the CMSD and I said, you know... When we were putting together the CMSD series on the history of race in Cleveland, we also do a piece on, umm, it's the Racial Equity Institute's groundwater metaphor of system–systemic racism. And I said to Dr. Gordon, "When this gets out, right, you're going to have to answer to critics who will just reflexively say these, umm, these talking points." And he said, "I'm game for it. I'm happy to share what we're doing." And umm, so I appreciated that.

But, one of the... We've been asked, like, when we go into a school or a school district and we say we're doing the history of race or ethnicity in Cleveland, we've been asked like, "Well, is this going to... could this potentially break a law?" Which, I don't think there are those laws, I don't think they've been passed yet in Ohio. But the idea of them–this approach breaking laws, what we're doing is teaching history. So, I'll give a very explicit–

Shemariah (Co-Host): Okay. Wait, Greg, I have a question. I have a question. So, the pushback that you're getting, tell us where it's from. Is it from the CMSD that has majority Black students, or is it from entering suburbs that are navigating shifting demographics, or is it in outer ring suburbs that are also navigating shifting demographics?

Greg Deegan: Great question. I would say more the latter. No CMSD is like, "You know what? Tell them to come at us," you know, that sort of thing. So, it's a great clarifying question because it's not... And, and a lot of this is anecdotal, right, and so it's more stating the kind of fear about the general diving into it.

And I think to your point, like the question, is this larger conversation pushing people away from these topics? Yes, I think it is, umm, teachers from doing that. What we try to do is to say, "Look, we are studying Cleveland experiences through the lens of the people who lived it." So, we focus a lot on primary sources of families who came up from the South trying to escape the debt, the generational debt of sharecropping, umm, immigrants who come from other countries and what their experiences are, and we ask them to draw some conclusions about what they experienced and then we ask them to draw some comparisons.

Now, I'll be totally honest with you. When you identify comparisons of European immigrants, umm, coming to the United States and to the Black migration experience and what many families experience here in Cleveland, it hasn't been taught. It hasn't been taught that the average Black family contributed 40% of their monthly income to rent, or that rents – even studies showed back in 1918, the 1920s and '30s – that rents in the Black ghetto, which by the way was an official ghetto, it was created by white people, umm, were much higher. Substandard housing. There's evidence that shows that police made choices not to enforce laws in the Cedar, Central, Woodland neighborhoods. Well, so then of course, Black space becomes associated with illegality, right? But those were choices that were made while Black leaders were saying, "We could really use more help here as all these individuals are coming in."

So, that's our job is to say, "I'm glad you've explored the primary sources. Let me also set a context and then let me show you a little bit about redlining, and then here's what the experience was," and then allow them to draw their conclusions. But we're not going to shy away from what the evidence shows, so... and that evidence clearly shows systemic inequities.

So, I guess that's a long way of saying it's a great question, but if you, if you frame it or if you anchor it in primary sources and evidence, you can't really do much fighting against those sources. You can— you want— you can argue till you're all blue in the face about the causes, about the effect, you can do all of that, and I would encourage those conversations. But if... in my experience, if white people have never been taught of the structural differences that Black families experience compared to white immigrant families, it's our job to do that, right? It's our job to, like, fill in those gaps of knowledge, I think.

Casey (Co-Host): Yeah. I— you know, what... And, I don't know if this is the question or if you want to respond to this. You know, another... Uhh, it was brought to my attention, my daughter was in middle school when we moved here, that in her social studies history courses, there was no discussion of, right, pre-white people settlement and, and the issue of Native Americans being driven from their land. And I kinda, you know, part of me went, "Well, that makes sense. They've got Chief Wahoo as their baseball mascot." Umm, and it seems to me that existing curriculums — and hopefully that is changing — pays as little attention to non-white narratives as possible, with an idea that what it means to branch out is really just talking about, uhh, immigrant experiences of other non-whites or of other whites. Right?

Greg Deegan: Right, right. And you know, it's funny that you brought in Chief Wahoo, by the way. So, here's one example of just, really, a philosophical approach.

So, I was, umm... So, before I started teaching, I wrote my master's thesis on tribal colleges that are on reservations. I had actually envisioned myself living on a Native reservation and teaching at a tribal college. Umm, and so, when I came back to Cleveland, I got a job and I didn't have anywhere to, like, express my support for Native peoples, et cetera. Chief Wahoo was right there in our face, right, I grew up a huge baseball fan, et cetera. So, I was... in 1996, I decided to boycott the Cleveland Indians, and I just never stepped foot in there again until they changed it. And so, I was one of those people holding signs outside of wherever, Progressive Field.

And so, it's something I felt very strongly about. But when I taught history, umm, and we taught about Native America, we would dive right into it. I'm like, "This is Cleveland. We have this Chief Wahoo. We should have this relevant conversation." And the way I framed it was, "Okay, you got these two sides of a debate. Okay, let's hear what you've ever heard about this side and let's hear what you've ever heard about the other side." And so I would ask them, how many people are pretty well-versed in this one side or the other side? And where do you stand? And like, they literally, kids would just share what they did.

Well, as you might imagine, almost everybody was in the camp of, "It's no big deal, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," right? And so I said, "Well, to me, it strikes me that a job of a teacher, especially a social studies teacher, is to make sure you understand that when people are protesting, which is their American right, that you should understand where it's coming from. So that... let's try to understand and balance the perspectives in ways that have, in your experience so far, not been balanced." So, it was basically my way to say, "Let me show you about blah, blah, blah and blah." And so it just so happened that one of the first books I wrote was about Louis Sockalexis, and all the lies around, you know, how they honored him with the name.

And so at the end of it, I said, "Okay, so now you have both sides. Where do you stand on it?" And I didn't have a strong feeling and I just allowed them to say those things. Umm, but I left it with, "Now you have both sides. You can still

have your opinion, but now at least you've been educated more to understand the conversation in ways that are far more, umm, helpful for you when you're trying to make sense of the conflicts that you come across in your community."

And so, I would say that, a critic of my approach would say I was looking for an opportunity, right, to share my opinion about it. I just think it's *right* for people who are in the midst of a debate to hear multiple sides and try to be as, umm, as generous to the individuals who are sharing their opinion and respectful to know that they're coming from their lived experience and allow them to try to unpack it and guide those conversations in ways that hopefully are, umm, meaningful and educational.

Casey (Co-Host): Yeah, I appreciate that. Umm, so we're actually at our last question. This went super fast. Unless, of course, there's follow-ups, lots of follow-ups, which I'm known for.

Uhh, as you and our listeners know, we like to talk about, I mean the entire name of our podcast is Growing Democracy. Umm, so I guess we'd like to hear from your perspective: how do you, and how do programs, like Teaching Cleveland, foster democracy or have the goal of work towards fostering democracy?

Greg Deegan: Umm, so... I think that's a great question. I have long been troubled, frankly. Even just the founding of, umm, Teaching Cleveland was done in part because I feel like when we think about ourselves as a, umm, community with multiple perspectives, I believe personally that we have a very vibrant conversation about our own personal rights. I believe that you can, when listening to conversations, civic dialogue, political conversations, you can hear that loud and clear.

What I rarely hear, or that seems to be left out of so many conversations, are collective responsibilities. Even though in government we teach, "Oh, with rights come responsibilities," but we're always talking rights and we rarely talk responsibilities as a community, about what it means to live with other human beings who may not be our same... whatever. So, umm, Teaching Cleveland is... we believe deeply that empowering kids and getting kids – especially in high school, but we're starting to work with Tri-C students as well and in post-secondary institutions – to say that you have a responsibility. If you're not going to engage, someone else is. And if they don't have any information or if they don't even respect people who are disagreeing, then it's going to be probably an ugly outcome.

So to me, this is – you know, I mentioned that one of the pillars of Teaching Cleveland is always ending with youth engagement. And that youth engagement sometimes is a minefield, right, because there are kids who are like, "Look, when I engage, no one cares about what I have to say," or, "I have, like... I know a lot of people where my voice isn't added." So, trying to figure out a way to say, "You're right, that's your lived experience and there's a power dynamic that we have to uncover and be honest about," it can be profoundly, umm, depressing. It

can be profoundly, umm... Oh, it can create a profound cynicism, like, "Forget it. My voice is never going to mean anything."

And so, we tread really... we try to tread really respectfully into this space of saying, "You each have lived experiences. Here are skills that we think will make you more successful or more oriented towards community engagement. And also, by the way, historical context says there hasn't been much power for these groups and these groups and these groups, and we need to be honest about that." So you put those all together and you hope that someone who has come across Teaching Cleveland, whether you are a teacher or a student, that you have a fuller, more sophisticated understanding of how complicated this is. But also, I would argue, an appetite for doing it. You know, because a key piece is to say, "You mean something. You are a key part of our community."

There's a lot of people, when it comes to civics, and... they'll learn all the, whatever, branches of government, the amendments, they'll memorize stuff. But to be actually invited into conversations, to be invited into this, to say, "It's hard, but we need you," that's where I want Teaching Cleveland to continue to grow and do better for students and teachers.

Casey (Co-Host): I love it. Okay, well, Greg Deegan, thank you so much for coming on the show and it was a pleasure talking with you.

Greg Deegan: Thank you. I appreciate you asking, uhh, me to come on the show, and thanks for the work that you do. It's so essential and it's so nice to meet other like-minded individuals who are do— doing such important work. So, thank you.

Casey (Co-Host): Thanks for listening to the Growing Democracy Podcast. Our podcast is edited by Gheramy Demery at Golden Ox Studio right here in Cleveland, Ohio. This podcast is supported by the Center for Pan-African Culture and the School of Peace and Conflict Studies at Kent State University with additional support from Mark Lewine and the John Gray Paynther Program. If you like our show and want to know more, check out our website, GrowingDemocracyOH.org. If you want to support the podcast as well as get access to behind-the-scenes content, live chat, and swag featuring designs by Donuts and Coffee, head over to patreon.com/growingdemocracyoh. Join us next time when we continue this conversation around growing democracy.