



Justice League of Greater Lansing Michigan

Reparations Scholarship Recipient — 2024

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What is your understanding of Generational Wealth?

Proverbs 13:22 reads, "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children."

In 1912, Willa and Charles purchased a parcel of beachfront property for \$1,225 and created a luxurious coastal tourist destination for African Americans, complete with gorgeous ocean views, a dancehall, and café! At that time, Black families weren't allowed at most beaches or resorts due to segregation. The Bruce family set out to change that, and shortly thereafter, their resort was thriving and growing in popularity. Unfortunately, they also gained the attention of the KKK and angry white residents, who were disquieted by the joy and pride that Willa and Charles were bringing to so many Black families. Within 12 years, their land and bustling new business would be seized from the Bruce family - citing eminent domain. Fast-forward to 2021, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed Senate Bill No 796 which made it possible for the Bruce descendants to reclaim the beachfront land that Charles and Willa purchased for their family almost 100 years ago. The valuation of that land was \$20 million dollars. This is a mere fraction of the generational wealth that the Bruce heirs stood to gain, had it not been for the arrested development of their great-great-grandparent's dreams, 98 years ago. How much profit could this still-growing business have generated over a century? Would they have expanded to add other attractions, different locations, a franchise even? And what would that have been worth? Would "The Bruce" have become the go-to hotel in 2024 for young, hip celebrities?

Generational wealth is the tangible hope that's handed over to the next generation to carry forward what was begun, bought, built, and now bequeathed. It is a baton that the previous wave cherished, protected, and labored to pass on to the next leg-with a goal of a shorter road to the finish line.

While I was never directly robbed of my land, labor, or freedom, I'm still harmed by what was done to my ancestors. Just like the descendants of Charles and Willa Bruce, the things stolen from my great-great-grandparents, rightfully belong to me. They toiled, suffered, sacrificed, prayed, and built-for me. They were honorable, hard-working, intelligent, creative, and good, yet there is nothing left for their children's children. In addition to the material wealth, potential wealth, wisdom, culture, ingenuity, and pride that I would never see, the history of their love was stolen. Along with the hard evidence, the stories of their perseverance and hope for me were taken, too.

The theft of generational wealth reverberates throughout the entire family line. An article from the Institute of Policy Studies reports that, "at the beginning of the 20th century, African Americans owned at least 14 million acres of land. By the 21st century, 90 percent of the land had been stolen from them." My ancestors are due honor for what they accomplished for me. And we owe it to them to not let their reputations continually be maligned, and their work be in vain.