

**Living Denver**  
**History Colorado Podcast**  
**S1E1: Kenya “Mahogany” Fashaw**

**María Islas-Lopez:** In the spirit of healing and education, History Colorado acknowledges the 48 contemporary tribes with historic ties to the state of Colorado. These tribes are our partners. We consult with them when we plan exhibits; collect, preserve, and interpret artifacts; do archaeological work; and create educational programs. We recognize these Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of this land.

My name is María Islas-Lopez, and I’m the museum of memory manager at History Colorado.

In this four-part series Denverites perform original poetry inspired by their neighborhoods. Each episode features a unique glimpse into community building, current challenges in our city, and visions for the future.

Welcome to *Living Denver!*

**Kenya Fashaw:** My name is Kenya Fashaw. I am from the Parkhill neighborhood area, but my artistic roots are in the Five Points Welton Street community.

**María Islas-Lopez:** Kenya "Mahogany" Fashaw is a spoken word artist & an award winning playwright. She believes in telling stories that have been untold. Here’s Kenya reading her poem, “Change Gon’ Come”

**Change Gon’ Come**

I raise my eyes to the Sun  
FULL  
BROWN  
AND BIG  
hoping the superpowers of its  
illumination kisses this melanin  
Giving me strength to  
To face this day  
a brighter day  
Better days  
Better than today  
A Change gon come- Sam Cooke use to sang  
Mr. Cooke if you were alive today  
You'd be disappointed to see

That lately  
We keep repeating  
the same ol' recipes  
Dishing out the same ol' bogus  
BUT No more insanity  
These WOKE Eyes are focused  
THIRD EYE- WAS NEVER BLIND  
Seeing through the hocus-pocus  
Of 2020 visions  
Dreaming of a future  
Sliced in half by the blades of my tongue  
So Fasho Mr. Cook,  
It may not be right now  
But a change is gonna come  
We have to do the work  
For what it's worth  
I bleed community  
until there is nothing left  
Giving birth to my voice  
Shout out  
5 Points  
Welton St.  
brother jeff's  
For allowing  
This Black voice  
To Know nothing but  
Power  
love  
& UNITY  
Black mind  
Black surface  
Black heart  
Black purpose  
Will no longer be  
Duplicated  
Suffocated  
Or ignored  
You can't steal this liberation  
The way you stole a community  
gentrification

Nostalgia  
Missing the old hood  
'93  
Juneteenth celebrations  
My vocal chords will still  
speak Fearlessly  
my voice  
the rhythm to this melody  
That keeps society  
On beat  
Without me  
Leaves a future obsolete  
And it can't hold peace  
Until I'm seen  
In all of my essence  
as a Queen  
I dream  
Dream Bigger dreams than Dr. KING  
Bigger than an intergalactic Galaxies  
Because that's how much  
SPACE  
It will take  
For the stars in my universe to shine  
And NOTHING  
Will dim this  
SHINE  
So My purpose  
is to spark  
The mind  
that shifts the world  
Dreaming to a BRIGHTER future  
To infinity and beyond  
Mr. COOKE  
FULL  
BROWN  
AND BIG  
I've kept my eyes raised to the sun  
I can feel  
The vibrations  
Of vibranium

Turning its power  
And now  
I can finally see  
That  
CHANGE  
That you sung about  
Sure is  
Gon  
COME.

## **Ad Break**

### **House of Pod**

Hello listener, have you thought about making a podcast? Would you like to work with a production company to help you produce your show? If so, check out House of Pod, a podcast coworking space and production company in Denver, Colorado.

They're the producers behind the show you're listening to right now, and have worked with other Colorado clients like the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and Rocky Mountain PBS, as well as international partners like the National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project.

They have also helped over 1,000 aspiring independent producers start, record, edit, and publish their shows out of their community studio and audio incubation space.

So if you're hoping to launch a new show, or level-up your existing production, visit [houseofpod.org](http://houseofpod.org) to learn more.

### **History Colorado**

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## **Juneteenth Memories**

**Kenya Mahogany Fashaw:** An early memory that I have of the Five Points area is the Juneteenth celebrations that my family would go to. And it was a very big deal for my father, he's the one that kind of taught me the importance of why we should celebrate Juneteenth.

And so he would dress up in a three piece suit in this 90 degree weather, and we would go walk down the street and eat turkey legs and see friends and family and just kind of congregate in the streets and laugh.

He had this Jerry Curl, and he had a gold tooth. He doesn't have it anymore, but he used to have this gold tooth that would just shine.

And so when my dad would put on his suit, he would have on his hat and, and you know, he would go out and he would just look—he just knew he looked good. And he would just walk down the street and say, “Hey, man, how you doing? All right. Hey, brother. Hey. Hey. Happy June...” Like, he was just so happy about it, but just basically showing off his outfit.

Going to Juneteenth on a Saturday, I would hear a lot of old school music and people laughing and dancing in the street. I'd smell turkey legs and oversalted ears of corn that have been grilled. And Sunday's Juneteenth was about gospel and soul.

My dad was a more Friday, Saturday kind of person. And my mom would just be like, we're just going to go to the gospel portion. I don't need to be around them, other people on the weekend. So it was like I had a whole full, like, experience with both my mom and my dad in a different perspective.

### **Gentrification and The Gemini Tea Emporium**

**Kenya Fashaw:** I think the biggest challenge is gentrification, you know.

I grew up in these neighborhoods where it was predominantly people of color living in them. And seeing them now, this neighborhood that I've been so comfortable in, I feel not as comfortable.

Day to day life, Imma be honest with you, there's a lot of things that you kind of have to research before you even go out on a day of life in Denver. You have to kind of Google it to see if it's racist or you have to kind of make sure that you would be accepted in this place because you don't know they like Black people.

For that reason it's, I don't know, it's kind of hard to deal with the changes, I feel like change is inevitable. But when you're driving people out of their homes that they've been in and when you're making people leave and forcing them to leave by raising the rent or doing all these things, it's just, it's evil.

So just kind of having that PTSD fear of not being able to fully be in a space and be because you're Black and now you are seen as kind of an outcast and you're seen as just not belonging there.

I mean, going back to the Gemini Tea Emporium, I think they kind of rebuilt that spot on the corner there on 29th and Welton. But I think it's a bar now.

The Gemini Tea Emporium was kind of like a tea place as well, and they held little events and poetry events and all that. And so I remember after the poetry set a couple of years ago, me and a friend were like, hey, let's go grab a drink before we go to the poetry set and stumbled upon that bar. And I'm thinking, this is Welton Street, this is a new bar. Let's go into it, let's see what it is.

And I just remember walking in and feeling like, if you ever seen that Western movie where, like, the cowboy will walk into the room and everybody just stops and looks at them and the music scratches?

So I think that's what happened when we walked into this bar. And I'm thinking this is just a bar on Welton Street and we walk in and it just kind of stopped and everybody just kind of looks at us and I'm like, uh ok, let's go in here and have a drink, which a double shot of something ended up to be like \$35.

But it's not about the liquor. It's about the nostalgia feeling of just knowing that you're at a place that, you know, they'll take care of you and that you're at this place that you just know that you are with people that you know are your people.

The loss of the Gemini Tea Emporium means to me just a piece of my artistic soul that I've shared there. I feel like every place that I have recited a poem or performed, I leave my fingerprint. And to be able to know that I performed at the Gemini Emporium and it's no longer there, I still feel like my fingerprint is still on that landmark, even though it's a completely different building. I feel that just that soil and that space I still owned with my words.

### **Poetry at brother jeff's Cultural Center**

**Kenya Fashaw:** brother jeff is definitely a pillar in the community. He has his own newspaper, he's definitely been in the community for a long time and his building is still there to this day. And he talks about how much he fights to keep it open for the community, so.

[brother jeff's community center](#) is basically a center that he opens up to artists. I feel that brother jeff doesn't let anyone go unnoticed. So as soon as you walk into the door, you see this big smile saying, "Welcome, welcome. Have a seat. Welcome to Brother Jeff. So glad to see you. Welcome. Welcome."

And he usually cooks fish in the back. So you smell this fish aroma and somebody hosting and all of this art on the wall of Black art. And. And it's a big, like warehouse-y space. But just the people and the atmosphere makes you feel like you're at home.

Performing my first poem at brother jeff's, and I believe I was 16, 17 years old. it meant a lot to get the affirmations that I did. It felt like that I had someone to relate to, that people understood my art.

### **Juneteenth Now**

**Kenya Fashaw:** I still want to introduce my children to the Juneteenth celebration, and trying to introduce them to the culture, as my father did to me.

There was people selling the same products that they used to sell every year—usually it's like Black art or, you know, oils or T-shirts. But now, like there was so many different types of food trucks there and so many different types of food. So it was definitely different.

I definitely made sure we got turkey legs because I think that's just traditional. So we shared turkey legs together. There was definitely old school music still playing.

I think they enjoyed just seeing so many people of color in one spot and so many types of people. I think that was the amazement for them. So I think that was the same feeling I had, being around community and so many people, and just and having that free feeling.

### **Credits**

**María Islas-Lopez:** That was Kenya "Mahogany" Fashaw. Learn more about Kenya at [5280ArtistCoop.com](https://www.5280ArtistCoop.com) and listen to her poetry on her [YouTube channel](#).

For a transcript of this episode and to learn more about the Building Denver Initiative visit [HistoryColorado.org/Building-Denver](https://HistoryColorado.org/Building-Denver).

And if you're interested in how Denver's ever-changing built environment has shaped the city from 1860 to today, visit our exhibition, *Building Denver: Visions of the Capital City*. You can experience this exhibition at the History Colorado Center beginning May 29, 2021. Mention this podcast to receive \$2 off admission.

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And I'm Maria Islas-Lopez. Thanks for listening.