

Jovan Scott Lewis, Political & Economic Geographer

"WE MUST ASK THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION."

Jovan Scott Lewis is the chair of the UC-Berkeley's Geography Department. But he also uses his superpower as an author and advisor who served on the United States' first-ever Reparations Task Force, for the state of California. Dr. Lewis has dedicated his life to "understand the earth," especially the systems human beings use to take advantage of the earth's resources.



Dr. Lewis rests an unflinching gaze on the categories of difference—like race, class, and gender--that "allow us to discriminate, allow us to deprive." He has confronted the effects of the 1921 Tulsa Massacre on the Black community of Greenwood in Oklahoma. And he has probed the Jamaican concept of "sufferation," the experience of living with poverty that shapes so many people's lives.

Dr. Lewis uses this knowledge to fight on behalf of people who have been left behind because of the categories they're born to and the systems and beliefs that keep them deprived. "Reparations will always be in my work, because you can't just leave it there [at the study of poverty]," Lewis says. "You have to talk to people not just about the hardships that they face, but also what are the ideas, what are the principles by which they feel those hardships can be responded to."

He is encouraged by his students, because they don't take existing systems and frameworks for granted. They believe in reimagining how institutions interact. This generation seeks ways to uplift vulnerable members of society, he says. And he sees that they won't settle for small answers:

"We must not simply upset the applecart...rather we must ask the fundamental question of what an apple is, and why it is in the cart at all."



Read our full member profile of Jovan Scott Lewis at <https://bit.ly/3jLC3vL>

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Discussion Activity Questions

1. Jovan Lewis has studied "sufferation," the experience of living in poverty. How do you think this can connect with his work in geography, studying places?
2. The Tulsa Massacre in 1921 had a profound impact on the previously prosperous African American Greenwood neighborhood. Thirty years later, the neighborhood was divided by an Interstate highway, I-244. Can you describe how the geography of a highway project might impact a neighborhood like Greenwood? (may be assigned for outside study)

Jovan Scott Lewis has studied how Highway 244 in Tulsa has divided and overshadowed the Black community of Greenwood.

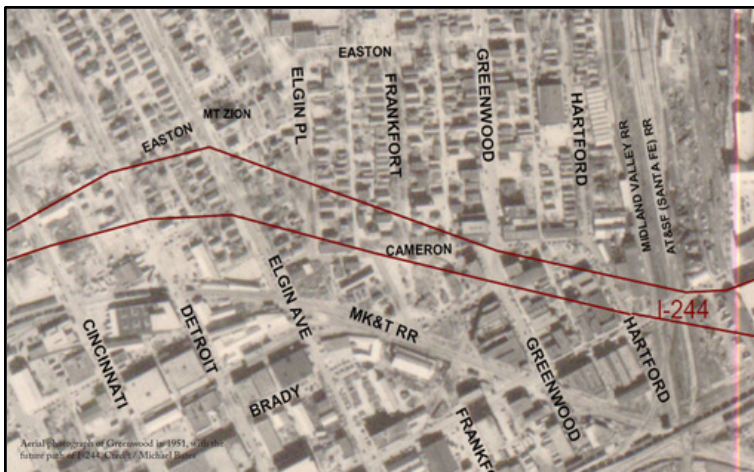


Image 1: This aerial photograph of Tulsa's Greenwood neighborhood in 1951 shows the future path of Interstate 244. Credit: Michael Bates for Congress for the New Urbanism.

Image 2: Tulsa's historic Greenwood, nicknamed "Black Wall Street," recovered from a devastating race massacre in 1921, only to be challenged repeatedly by inequities in resource and infrastructure decisions, such as the running of Interstate 244 through the heart of the historic business district. Credit: Daniel Jeffries for Congress for the New Urbanism.

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The American Association of Geographers (AAG) brings together members of the global geographic community. As a non-profit organization, we provide students, educators, practitioners, and partners with the resources they need to enter the field, develop their careers, and form professional friendships that can last a lifetime.

Through annual and ongoing programs, events, and meetings, we aim to create a space in which all geographers—wherever they come from—will know they are valued, heard, and welcomed.



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