

[School bell, sounds of passing period]

Hello, and welcome back to the Student and Youth Activism and Memorializing Working Group's Activism Beyond the Classroom Podcast. In our last episode, Sanah and Maya guided you through West Philadelphia High School, its current status as luxury lofts, and what this means for its former students, now housed in a new building a few blocks away.

I'm Marissa [and I'm Rachel], and in today's installment, we will introduce you to our second high school, Bok Technical High School, its background, and the conditions of its closure in 2013.

In 2013, the city of Philadelphia voted to close 23 schools for the 2013-14 school year. The schools ranged from elementary schools to high schools and were located across the city. The city cited under enrollment and budgetary restrictions as the reasons for these closures. As a result, thousands of students and teachers around the city were displaced, the buildings left abandoned, their fates unknown.

On this audio tour, we will explore the fate of Edward. W Bok Technical High School. We will reflect on the history of this space and think about the broader theme of what we choose to memorialize. In a few moments, we will begin the audio tour. Make sure you are at the 9th street entrance. You will need to sign in with a security guard at this entrance. Feel free to pick up any of the information available at this desk. You may now pause the podcast until you have finished checking in.

Now that you've arrived, step into the hallway and take a moment to reflect. Be present with both your mind and body. Ask yourself some questions as you look around and take in your setting:

Who was this space made for? Who occupies it now? What communities were most affected by the school closure?

What might the building have looked like when it was first built?

What were the uses of this building, and how is it being used now?

Pay attention to the physicality of the space. What does it look like? Smell like? Sound like?

Close your eyes. Think about the history of this space and the communities that interacted with it. As you complete this tour, imagine what it would be like to be a student in this space. Reflect on your memories of high school, thinking about your personal experiences as a student. (a few moments of school sounds)

You may now open your eyes. The audio tour will begin shortly.

On this tour, you will have the opportunity to explore much of the first floor of the former Bok High School. If its open, Irwin's on the 8th floor is also open and available to the public. As you walk down the hallway, pay attention to what has changed, what was probably the same, and how, if at all, the space acknowledges its history. Walk forward towards the end of the hallway, taking note of the things you see. After a few paces, notice the Boy's Gymnasium on your left, the Boy's bathroom on you right. What does the floor look like? What is the lighting? How might it have felt to be a student walking down this hallway? A teacher? A receptionist or nurse?

Continue walking. You will pass the elevator area up to Bok Bar and Irwin's, an optional stop at the end of this tour. Continue walking down the hallway, you will pass a Girls' Bathroom on the right and water fountains. Note the "Welcome to Bok" sign in blue above. Turn left to see the girls' gymnasium. Pause the audio until you have found an entrance that is not locked (note that several may be chained closed). This will be our first stop on this tour.

When you've found an unlocked door, crack it open and peek in. Think about what you see here that might appear in a gym in any other high school. How has this space changed? How is it the same? How much access does the public currently have to this space? Is it more or less than when it served its purpose as a high school? What should this space become? An empty property? Something entirely new? [BLANK SPACE FOR THINK TIME]

As you examine the gymnasium and think about these questions, we will situate you in the history of the school. The Bok building was constructed between 1935-1938 by the Public Works Administration, designed by Owen Katharine and named for Edward William Bok, a Dutch-American editor and author. Because it was a vocational space, many of the classrooms were designed to accommodate particular trades and technical trainings. In 1986, the school was added to the National Registry of Historic places, ensuring that the design aesthetics of the building would be largely preserved and offering tax benefits. The school had both academic and vocational courses, as well as 'specialized' courses, including technology & computer assisted design, construction trades, culinary arts, computer networking, health-related sciences, process technology and welding. Bok also offered a number of interscholastic sports, ranging from football to badminton to weight training. Between 2005-2010, just prior to its closure, Bok achieved 'adequate yearly progress' according to No Child Left Behind, a metric based on their standardized test scores. This means that on average, the students at Bok were improving from year to year on their scores.

When you're ready, close the door to the girls' gymnasium and move onto our second stop: the mural. Instead of returning to the main hallway, continue walking down the little hallway where the girls' gymnasium is. Notice the auditorium on your left.

This space is still in use for public events, so feel free to take a peek. As you continue towards the end of this small hallway, look for the lockers on your right: notice their size, the tags

covering the original number labels, their condition. When you reach the end of the small hallway, you will find the mural. Pause this podcast until you have reached the mural.

When you get to the mural, take a few moments to look around. Notice the Mohandas Gandhi quote painted along the walls: "Human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social political and religious. All act and react upon one another." As you admire the mural, think about what you notice in the image. Who is in the mural? How are they depicted? How does this mural make you feel? Why? [PAUSE FOR THINK TIME]

Take your time examining the mural while we provide some context. In 2011, the Anti-Defamation League's "No Place For Hate" initiative adopted Bok High School as a "No Place For Hate High School." The program worked to combat bullying and intolerance while establishing a community grounded in inclusion and cultural acceptance. As a No Place For Hate High School, in January 2012, Bok partnered with the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program to do a service learning day and paint a mural in the high school, in the very spot you stand now. Students worked with volunteers to devise and plan this mural to illustrate the ethos of the No Place For Hate program. The design was inspired by the building's art deco designed, and fused this design with Buddhist and Hindu art traditions, meant to inspire peace with the mural. In June of 2012, the mural was unveiled to the public in a ceremony that celebrated Bok's future as a site of harmony and acceptance for many years to come. As we know, this was not to be the case; the school was closed only one year after the completion of the mural.

When you are ready, turn around and walk back toward the main hallway. Walk straight toward the elevator directly across the hallway, where you will see a sign for "Irwin's" and "Bok Bar." As you walk towards the elevator, stop and take a look at the bulletin board to its left. Pause the podcast until you have reached the bulletin board. Take a look at the variety of services being

offered on this board; yoga and fitness classes, child care, dog walking, to name a few. How accessible, financially and otherwise, are these programs to the South Philly community? To what extent are these listings similar to those you might see at a regular high school? These listings are mostly adults offering goods and services, rather than fourteen to eighteen year olds organizing clubs or activities. Take a moment to ponder the posters. Do any of them appeal to you? Based on what you've noticed so far, to what extent has the Bok space explicitly acknowledged the building's history? [PAUSE]

The city of Philadelphia closed the school in 2013, citing increasing backlogs of necessary maintenance and decreasing enrollment numbers. The school had fewer than 1,000 students enrolled when it closed its doors. In 2014, the property was then acquired by Scout, a design company known for light-touch renovations and creatively repurposing vacant spaces, for 2.1 million dollars. In 2016, the site received the 2016 Young Friends of the Preservation Alliance Award, amounting to 1 million dollars, for the creative adaptation and preservation of the space. Since then, many of the original rooms and contents of the high school have been repurposed, in ways often congruent with their former uses.

While we're near the elevators, notice the gender-neutral bathroom here, and think about how that contrasts with the gendered Boy's and Girl's locker rooms and gymnasiums you've already seen.

Proceed towards the coffee shop, continuing forward past the elevators and pushing through the doors. As you walk down the ramp, think about how some of the renovations to this space have made it more accessible for certain groups of people, and less accessible for others. Who used to be welcome here? Who is made to feel welcome here now? Who *should* be included in this space? Pause the podcast, if you need, until you're in the coffee shop.

This space was the auto shop and the tool library. Instead of being open to serve drinks, students repaired vehicles and learned their trades. What evidence is still visible of the students' work? Oil stains, graffiti, the bare, concrete floors? [PAUSE]

The former Le Bok Fin training kitchen is now home to a catering company. In rooms outfitted with high-capacity electrical flow, for machining and welding, are tenants whose art or work means they have the same needs. The rooftop bar and cafe repurpose the school's chairs and the blacktop science tables. The designers intentionally, perhaps on some level out of obligation to the National Historic Preservation Society, left obvious clues to current visitors to this space of what it used to be. There are now over 150 different entrepreneurs working from this space, some local, renting additional workspace because their businesses outgrew their homes. Many of these spaces are not open to the public, but as you can see there is still public access to the school. Every so often, the new owners host an open studio night to allow people to see the work done in these former classroom spaces.

What are the potential futures of this space? Imagine yourself as a resident of South Philadelphia who had to change school buildings in the middle of your high school career. What kinds of feelings might you have about the way the space is being used now?

Can you envision a version of this space that is truly a community center, accessible to more than just the business owners?

If Irwin's is open, and if you can, return to the elevator by the bulletin board you examined a few moments ago. Ride the elevator up to the eighth floor. Look around the elevator as you ride up. Is this the original design of the elevator? Who would have taken this elevator? Students? Teachers? When you arrive, you'll notice Bok Bar, a trendy Philly rooftop bar, to your right. If it is summer, it may be crowded with people from across Philly, having a drink. Otherwise, Bok

Bar is closed until better weather returns. On your left is Irwin's, open year round. Ask the host if you can have a look around. Pause until you have entered Irwin's. Once inside the restaurant, look around. Notice the bar on your left: the bar is a repurposed chemistry lab. The filing cabinet by the host was found in the building, as well.

The restaurant's chairs used to be in classrooms or in the cafeteria. The graffiti on the walls was done by students. In 1979, a city ordinance on building heights forced the seventh and eighth floors of the high school to close. These floors would have hosted the school's nursing program. As a result of the closure, students would sneak up to the seventh and eighth floors during the school and paint the very graffiti that you see. Once you've finished exploring the interior, take a walk outside, if you'd like. From the balcony, you can see the sports stadiums, where the Eagles and the Phillies play. You can see the Walt Whitman bridge to Camden, New Jersey. You can also see South Philly High School.

When you're ready, return inside. As you wait for the elevator, notice the fluorescent sign that reads "If these walls could talk." As you take the elevator back down to exit the building, ponder: If these walls could indeed talk, what would they say?

Before completing this walking tour, take a moment to reflect on your visit to this space. Think about the things you've seen and learned, and ask yourself:

- How should we memorialize this space?
- How, if at all, is this space a memorial?
- What do we choose to memorialize?
- Who should decide what we memorialize?
- What constitutes a memorial?
 - Can we use our bodies? Our actions?

[a few seconds of silence for thinking, maybe quiet school sounds again?]

Now, walk out.