

The first of many subprojects began last year, when Gates purchased an abandoned house next to his own. Since that time, and with the help of a library of glass slides from The University of Chicago, the purchase of the entire inventory of the closing Prairie Avenue Bookstore, truckloads of re-purposed building materials and plenty of labor, work has been underway to renovate the house into a combination soul food kitchen, library, slide archive and physical demonstration of Gate's arguments for cultural progress. Earlier this summer I sat down with Theaster Gates in the attic of the Dorchester house to talk about the work that was going on around us, what it meant, and where it was going.

**Jettison: Tell me a little about Dorchester Projects and the 6916 Dorchester house you're renovating.**

**Theaster Gates:** Right now everything here is working under the grand umbrella name of Dorchester Projects, which includes anything I do on the block related to institutions of knowledge and higher learning, the philanthropic community, cultural museums, and related to creating alternatives for cultural engagement and cultural space. The house itself will probably be known as 6916, its address. It'll have its own objects, its own narrative, its way of eating soul food and food that's grown in the empty lot next door. I think I want it to be a thing, like a full construction of a thing. It'll generate its own lore, it'll have merchandise; it'll have its own napkins. It'll exist for consumption, but not necessarily monetary consumption. People will hunger for it and it will fill them.

**Jettison: What kind of organization is Dorchester Projects? Is it a not-for-profit?**

**TG:** No. I started Dorchester Projects as a corporation in January with the idea that I didn't want to build a not for profit. I wanted to make smart decisions the same way other people make smart decisions, so its a small corporation. Part of this is about how Dorchester Projects might be a new kind of model, not like artist moves in, changes neighborhood, gets kicked out by gentrification. Man, I'm so tired of that fucking conversation, and I'm so tired of hearing that everyone knows artists are the first to start change in a neighborhood. Let's assume we all know that and let's assume that artists are tired of the victim stuff. So now what? I think the "now what" is the much more interesting thing.

The work that's happening right now was based off of the sale of two objects. All the floors, the windows getting put in, the skylights, the roof, the doors - all from two objects, two sinks that I didn't even make, they were made at Kohler. I've never really made objects available or money from objects before, so this is really unfamiliar to me. I'm older now, so my first inclination isn't to go buy a car; I'm old enough to know that there's a way you can take advantage of these moments that will benefit you in the future, and there's a way that you can fuck it off, and I know both models very well. I'm at least excited for now to be really concentrating my energy and effort to show the city that you don't have to be wealthy or a big institution to make significant impact. I think I'm in some kind of fight right now about who people think gets shit done.

