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Column: The development and recovery of North Omaha

Preston Love Jr.

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COMMUNITY COLUMNIST

Column: The development and recovery of North Omaha

Preston Love Jr. Community Columnist

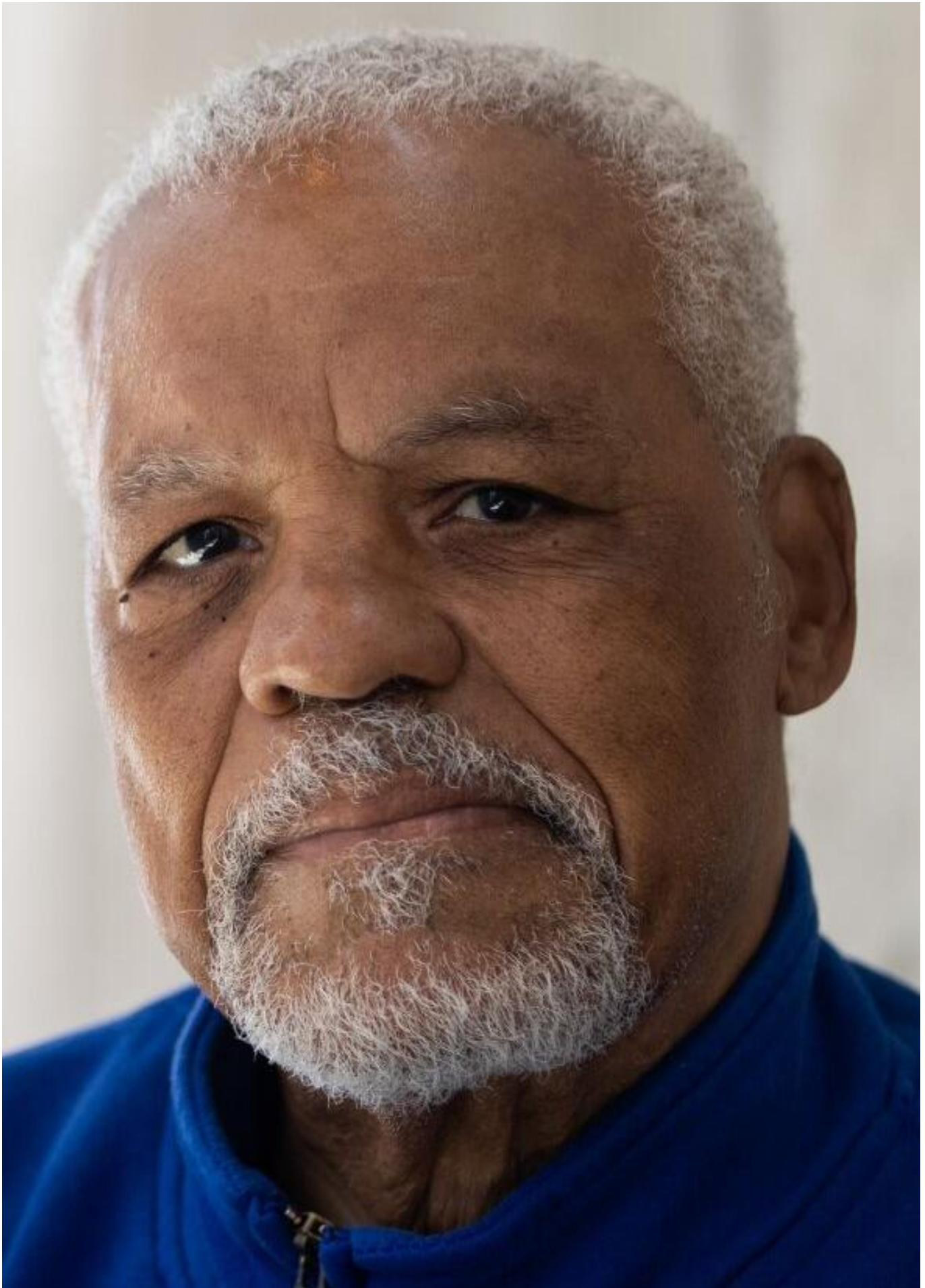
Aug 27, 2023

To understand the long-term lack of development and economic devastation of the North Omaha community, one must understand the history. That history includes the growth of an African American community, during and after the turn of the 20th century, during a period of mass migration from the racist South. Despite the Nebraska Legislature's passage of its Economic Recovery Act, I submit that without the understanding of these historical elements, an attempt to lead or create a plan to develop and recover North Omaha will struggle.

Blacks primarily came to Omaha to fill the void for workers in the packinghouse industry. We came in mass numbers, but we were not welcomed and we were redlined into the area we now call "North Omaha." Redlining was detrimental in most every aspect for the community and people — with one big exception. The corralling of African Americans into the redlined area of North Omaha had an unintended, wonderful consequence: that our community thrived internally. We found unity with credible and supported leadership, wonderful social networks, great African American churches, vibrant arts, cultural music, and most relevant to this column, tremendous commerce within. It's not a stretch to say that North Omaha created its own Black Wall Street: 24th Street.

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Love Jr.

We created masterful commerce, but little wealth. We did not have enough time to develop wealth. Our wealth growth was interrupted by the tumultuous time of the 1960's and the unfortunate killing of 14-year-old, Vivian Strong, in 1969, by a white policeman. That event caused immediate, devastating community rage and destruction. North Omaha has experienced no significant investment, development, or recovery since. There have been many studies, false starts and lip service given regarding the development in North Omaha, but in fact, nothing, for more than 50 years. That has brought the reduction of optimism, resentment, and the full circle of disparities.

Many current North Omaha business owners have endured the economics and should not be shoved aside now that new opportunities may occur. On the contrary, they should be affirmed and given a chance during any new potential phase of development, and the availability of new sources of funding.

Mandatory Things to Do

Conduct continued and consistent updates and education with the community, during each step and milestone through the processes.

Recognize that the development will be at high risk, if the process does not continually have the buy-in of both the community and our businesses. Methods could include a monthly newsletter, townhalls and use of community media sources.

Be aware that the development recovery of North Omaha will only succeed if the investments include a wide circle of small entrepreneurial businesses. Existing businesses, those seeking additional capacity or even newly created businesses should all be considered for funding to maximize this sector.

Involvement of North Omaha business means that every level, from construction to selling goods and services — and in all sectors — should be part of the overall recovery strategy. It is a missed opportunity to not see the value of growing our

contractors and our vendors in this process. It doesn't mean that they receive money for projects. It means that every project should have to commit to using the North Omaha businesses in their funded projects.

There should be a clear and communicated structure of project management from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and the processes should be clearly transparent and communicated.

Mandatory Things Not to Do

Don't make the mistake of heavily funding projects of businesses or organizations that already have existing multiple and large sources of funding. Their funding should be tempered by the fact that they have, and have had, other financial options not available to 90% of the other viable projects. Additionally, heavy funding to these few will not receive the buy-in of the community or other businesses.

Consider that the businesses who have toiled and struggled and kept North Omaha afloat economically should not be ignored or overlooked in this new opportunity. They should be rewarded for their stamina, and what they have meant for survival to date and provided a baseline for development. They have earned the right to be included. Don't omit this group.

Don't reconfigure North Omaha. The 24th Street corridor has been and always will be the historical corridor, our Black Wall Street. Maximize the cultural, economic history, continuity, and importance of 24th Street. Develop and recover but don't invent a new North Omaha. This point is amplified by the massive development of Carmen Tapio's at the corner of 24th and Lake. That development should be considered as the anchor and the major hub for the recovery and development of North Omaha.

Can the State of Nebraska, the City of Omaha and the Greater Omaha Chamber perceive the value, economically or otherwise, of what the potential of a vibrant North Omaha will mean? We will have to see. \$300 million dollars is not much money in a macro sense. It should just be the catalyst for many more millions coming from many

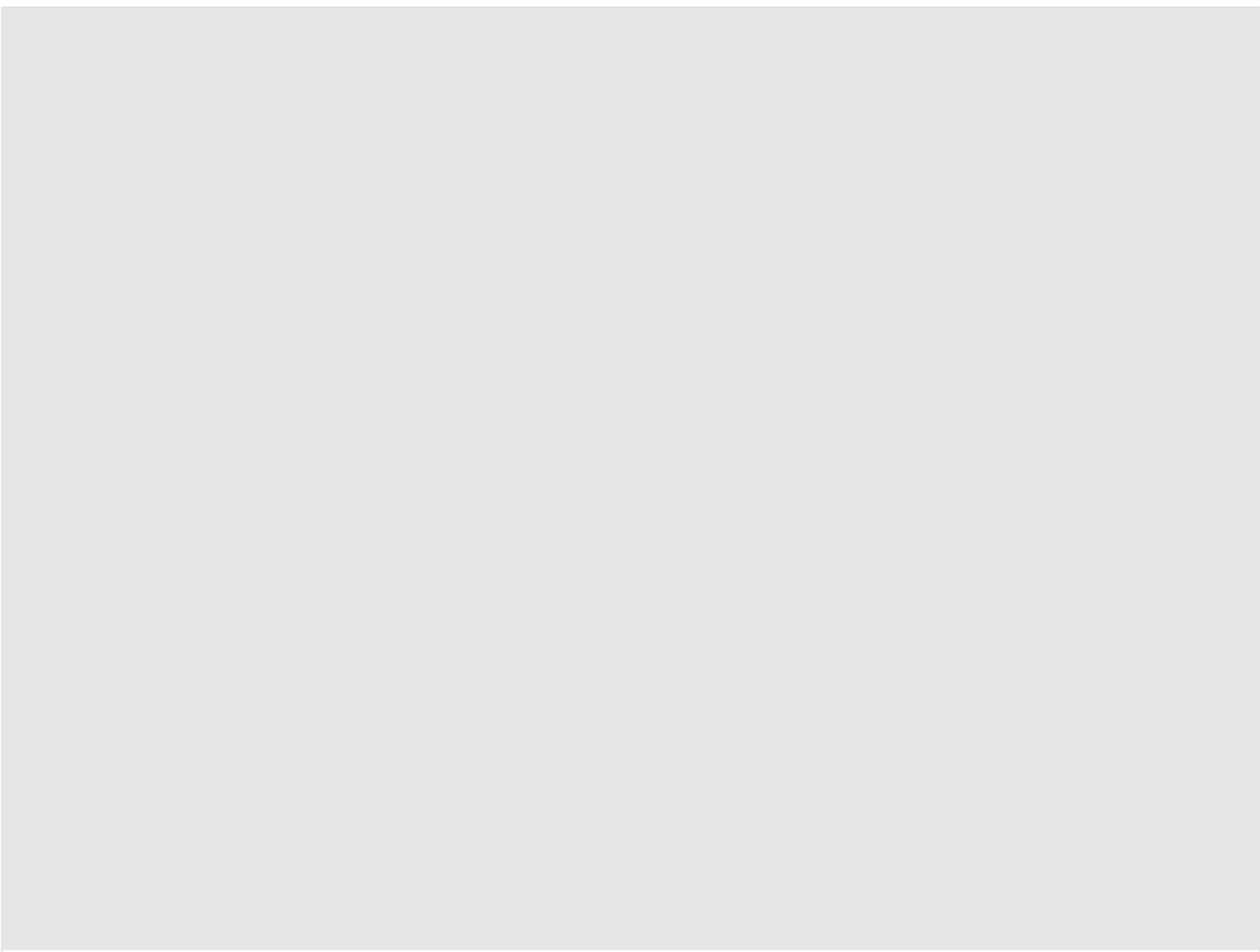
different angles, but it only will come if our state, city and development sectors properly align and not do the same ol' thing of talking without backing up what we are speaking about.

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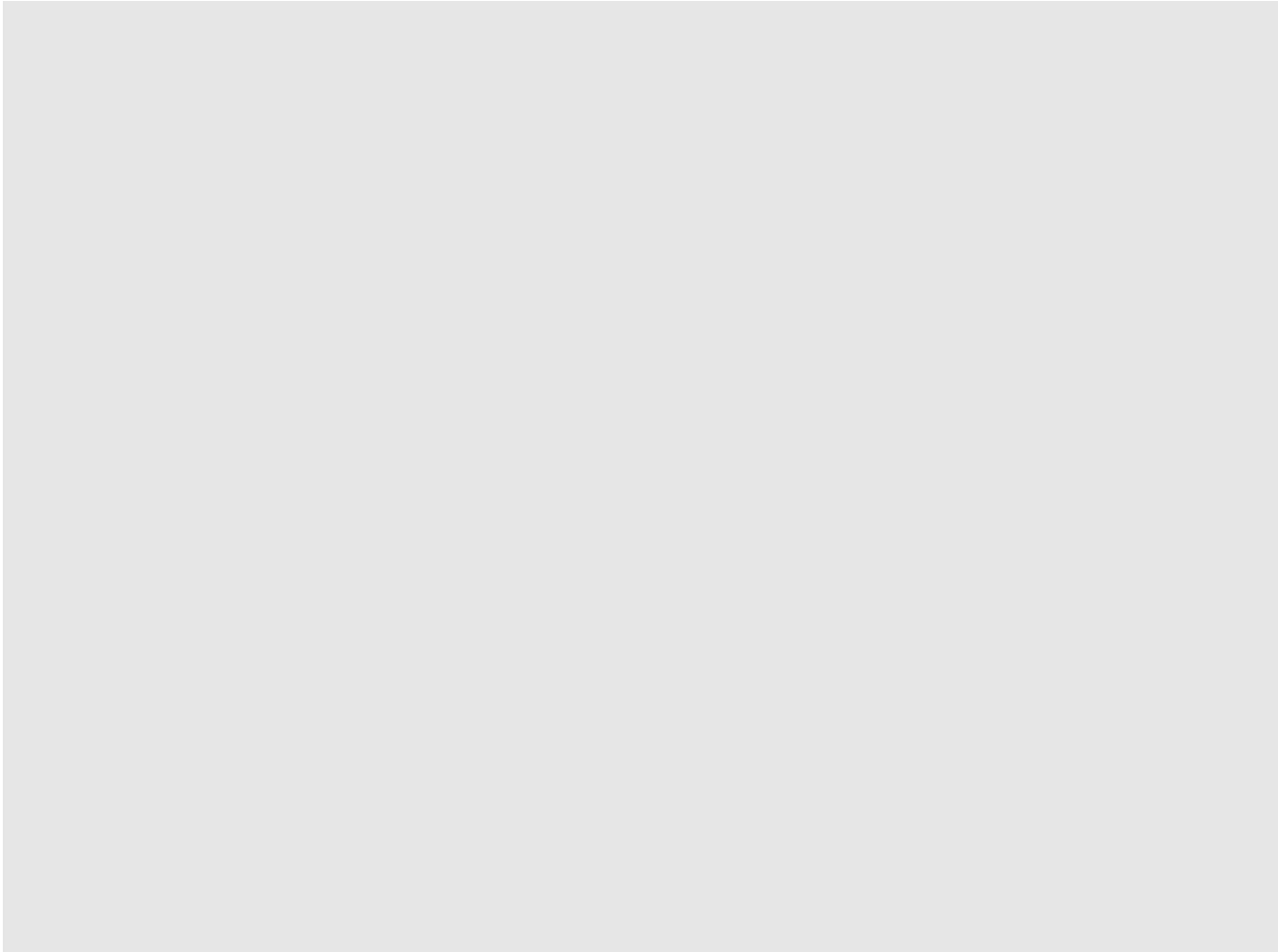
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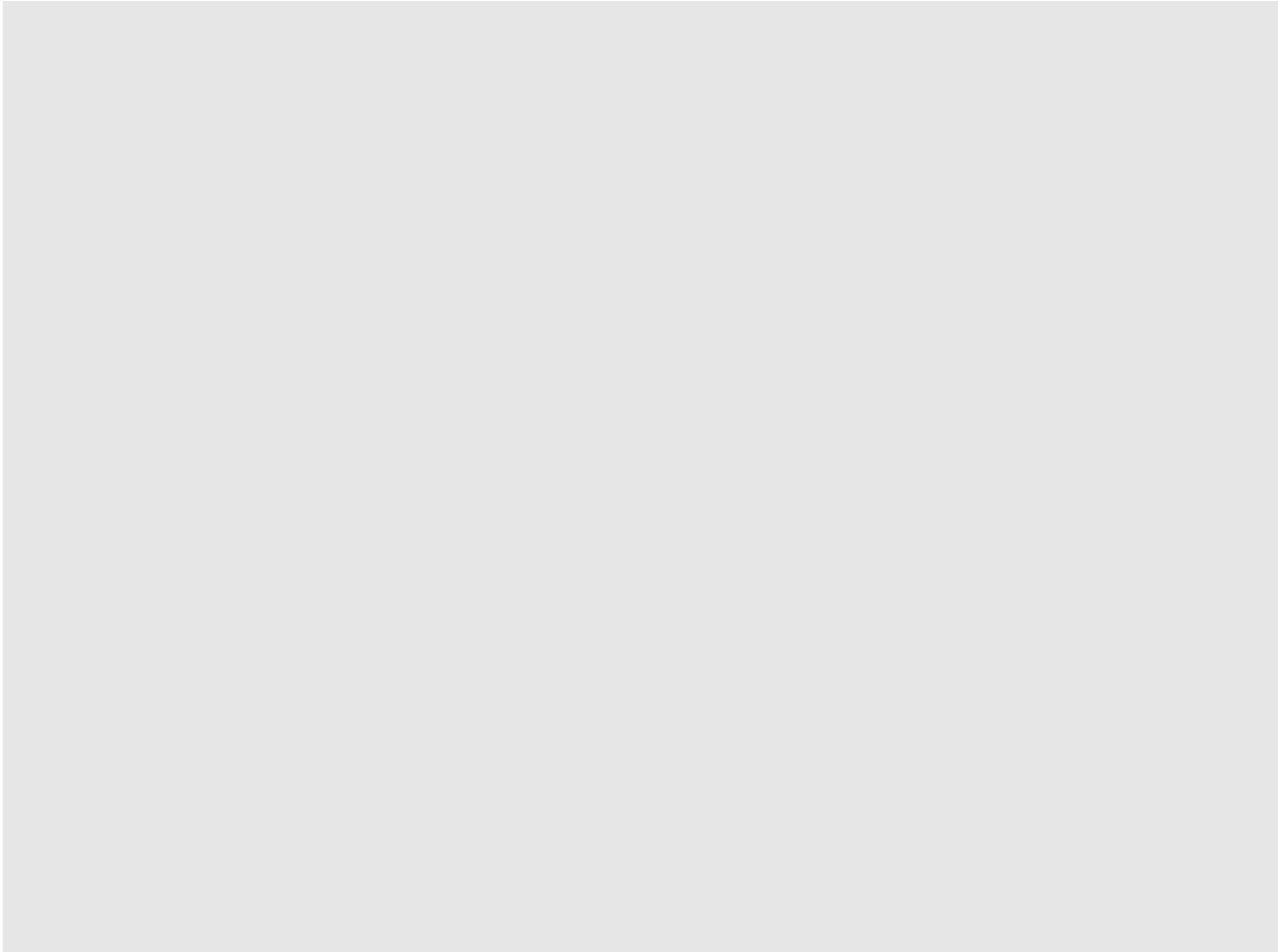
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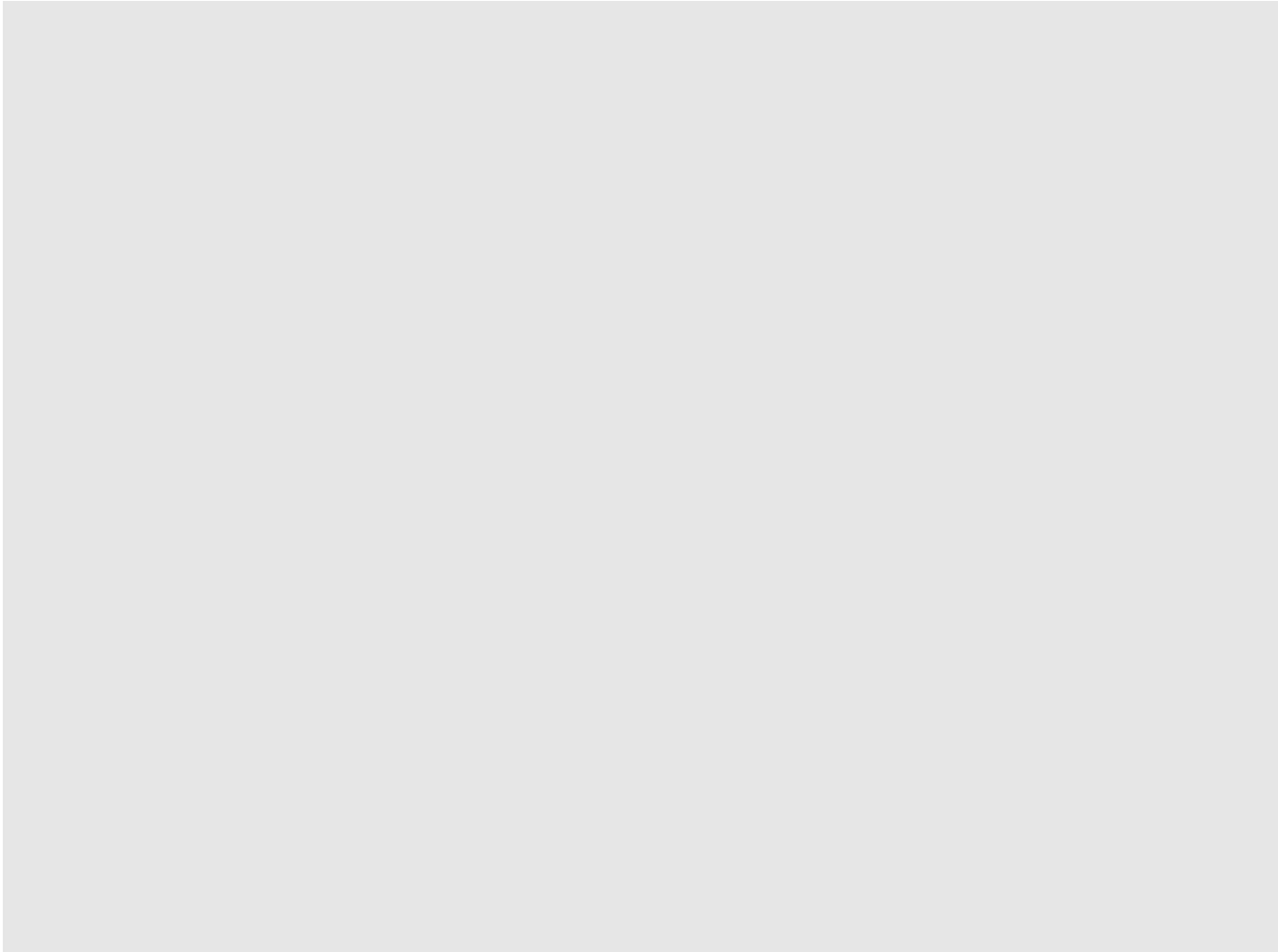
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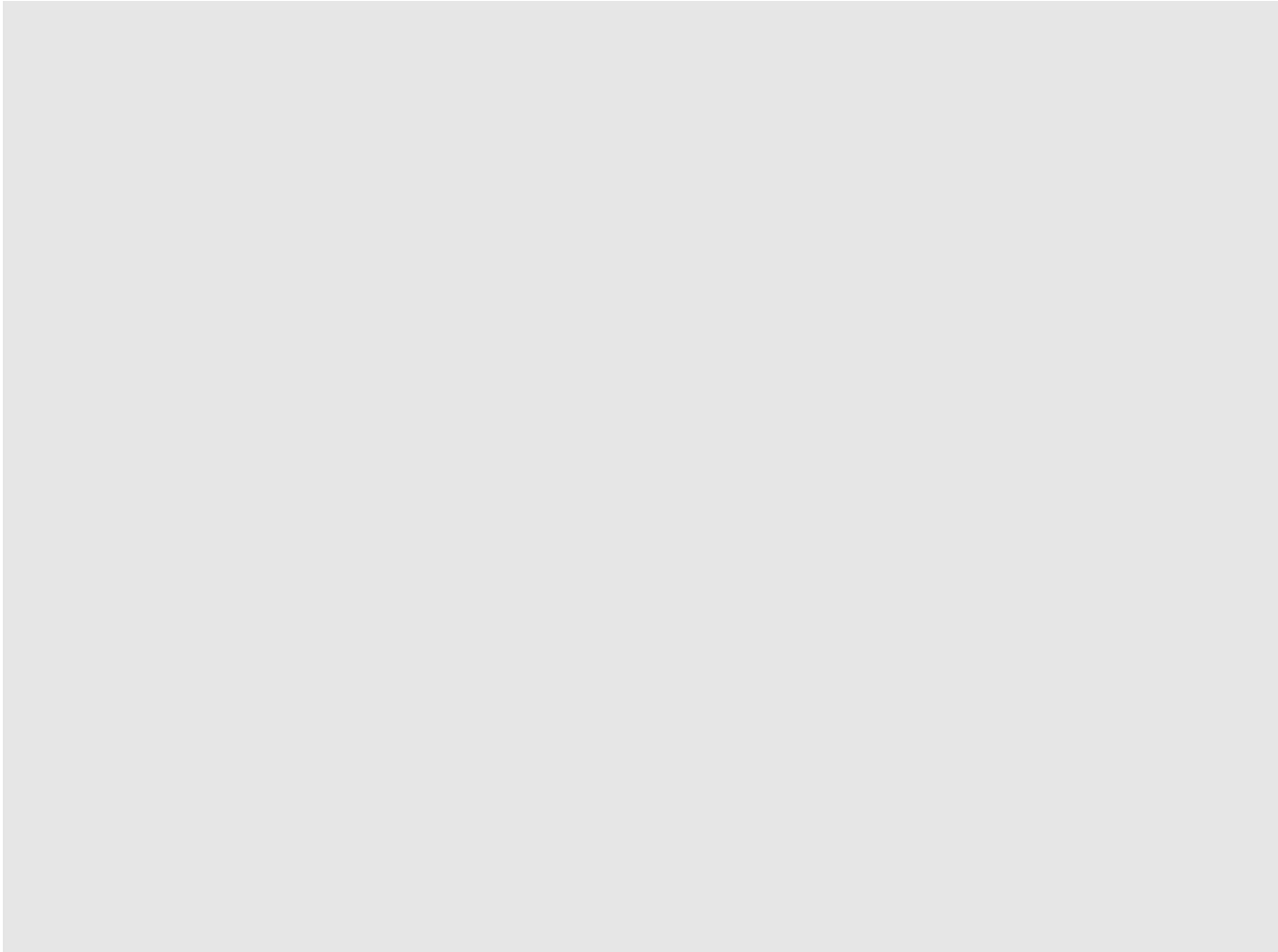
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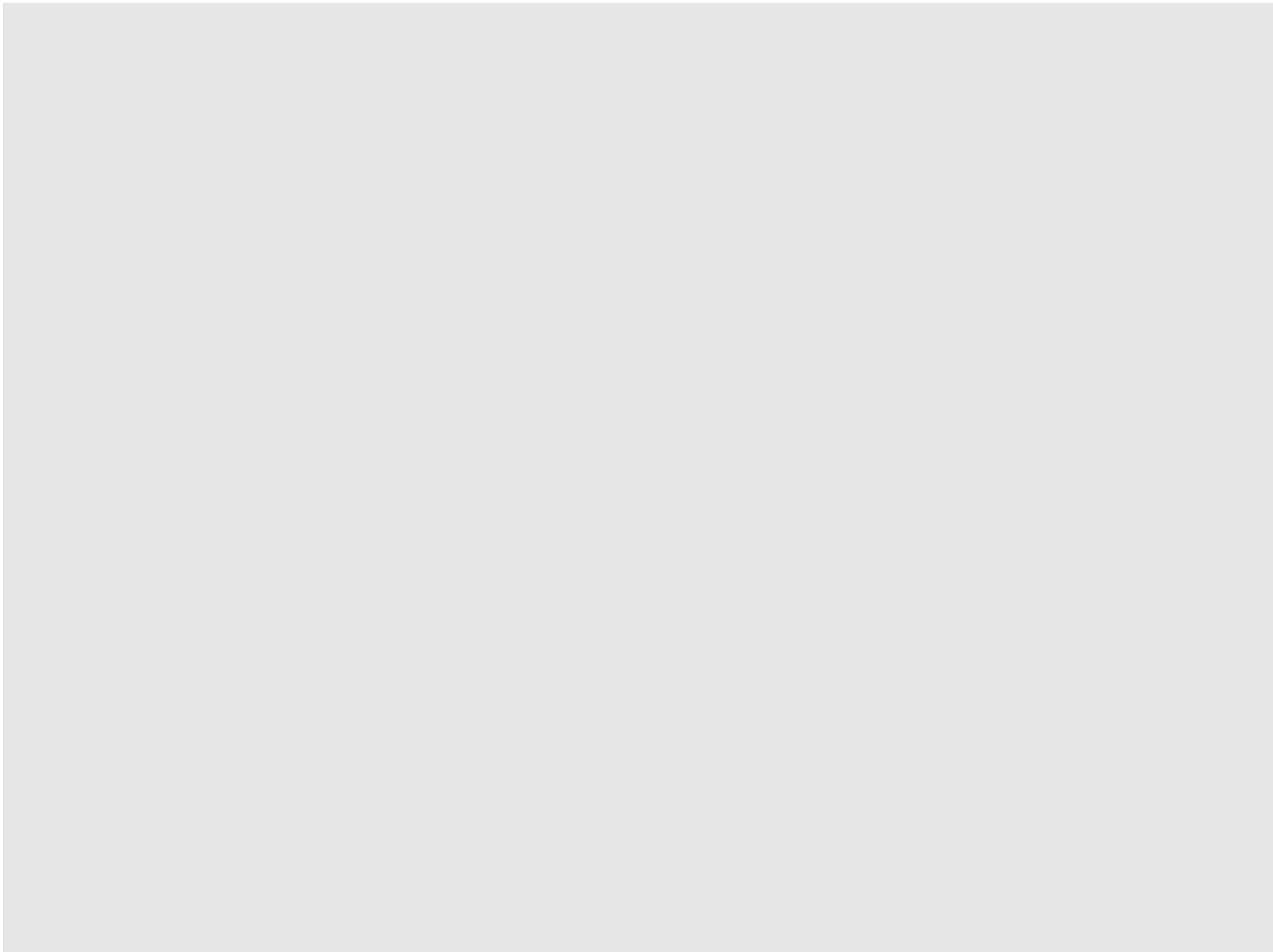
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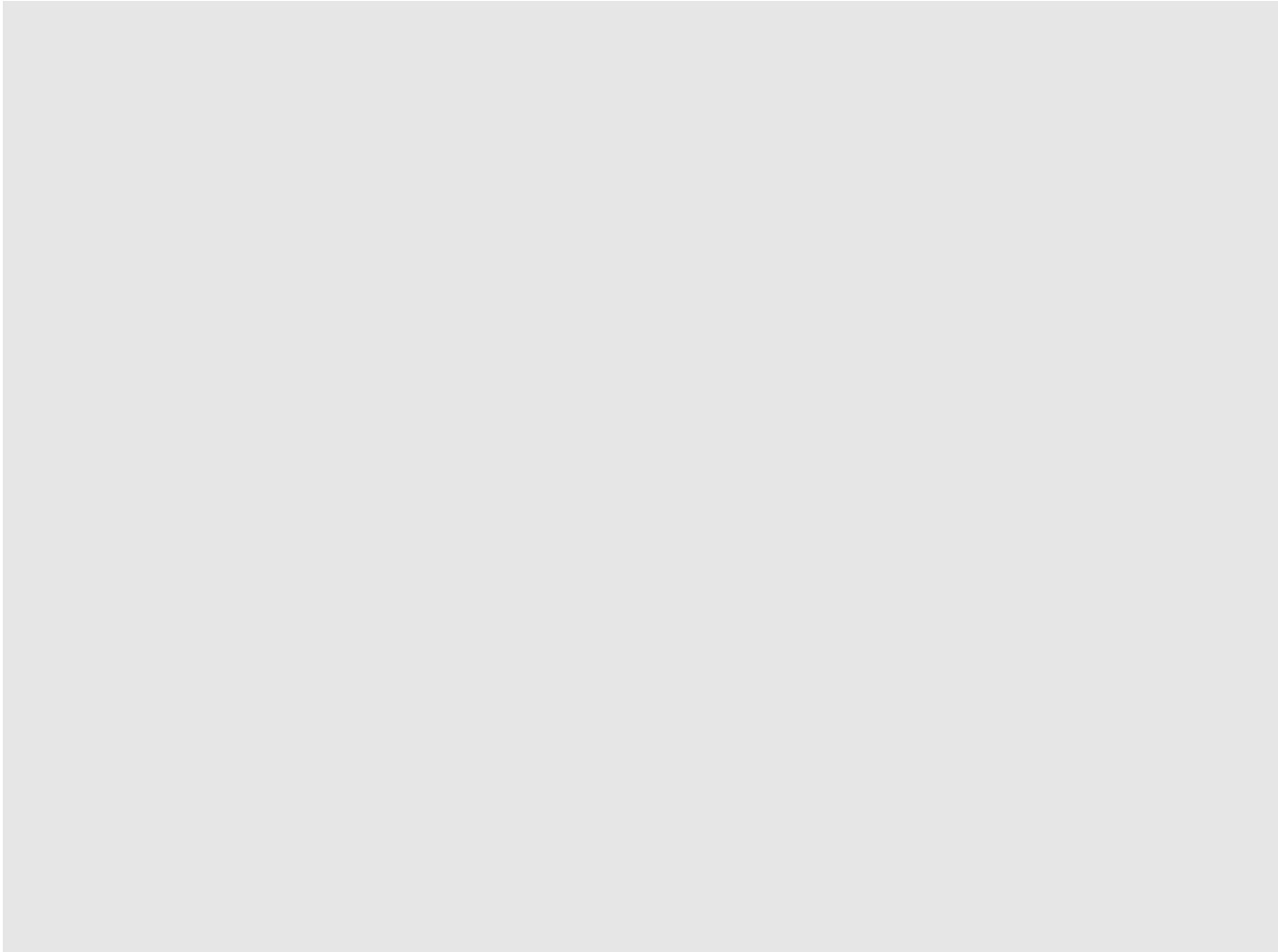
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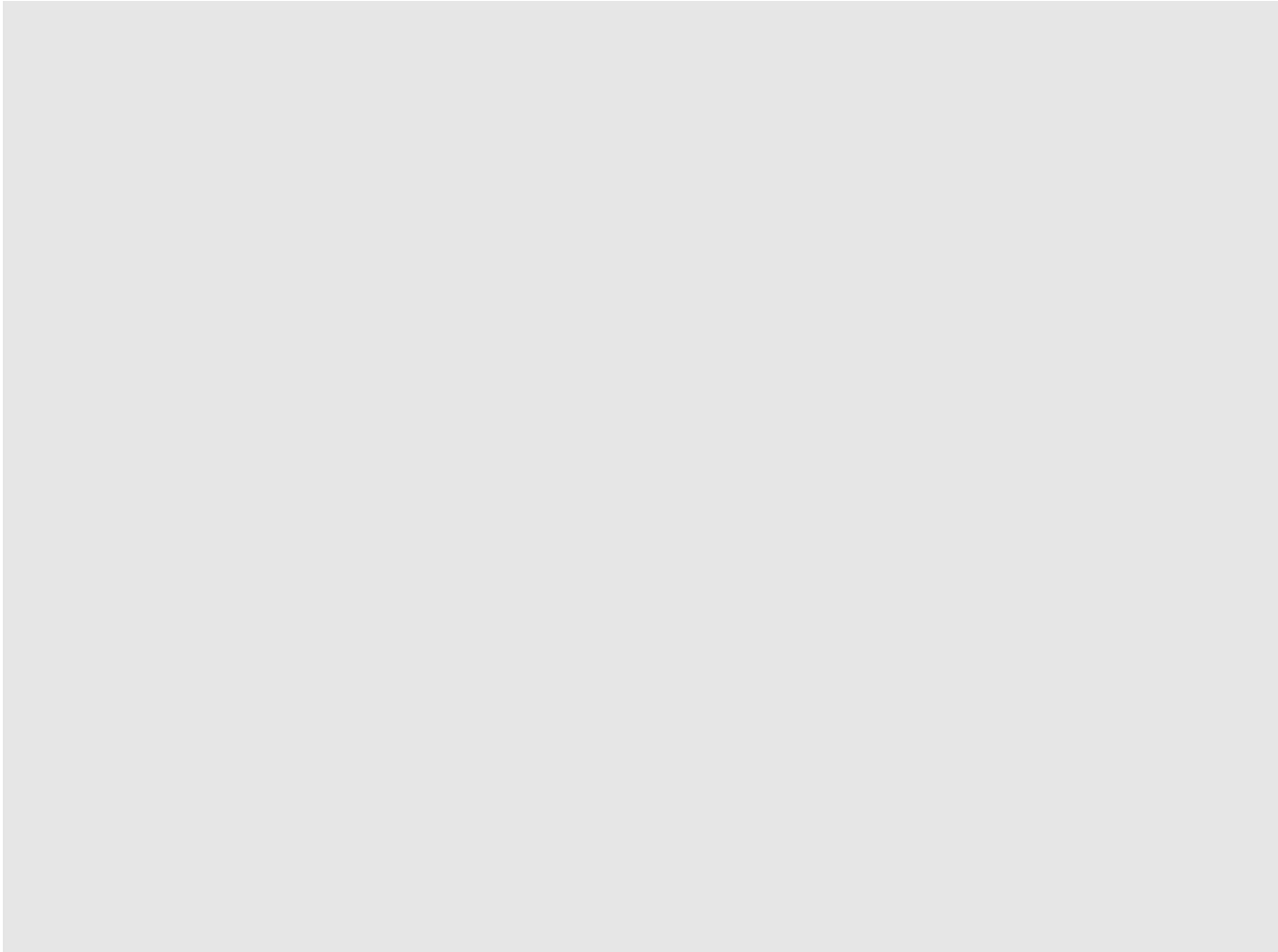
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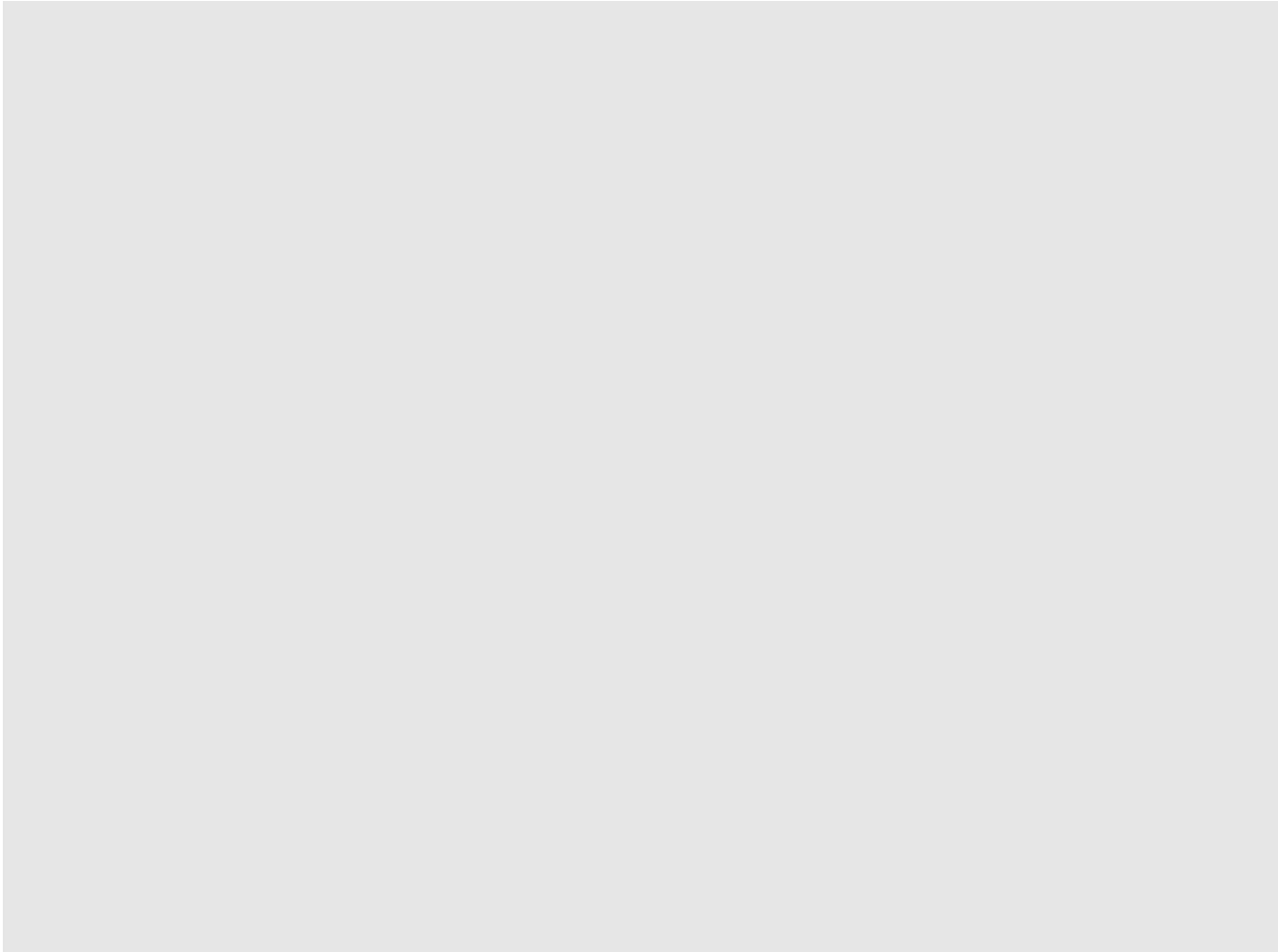
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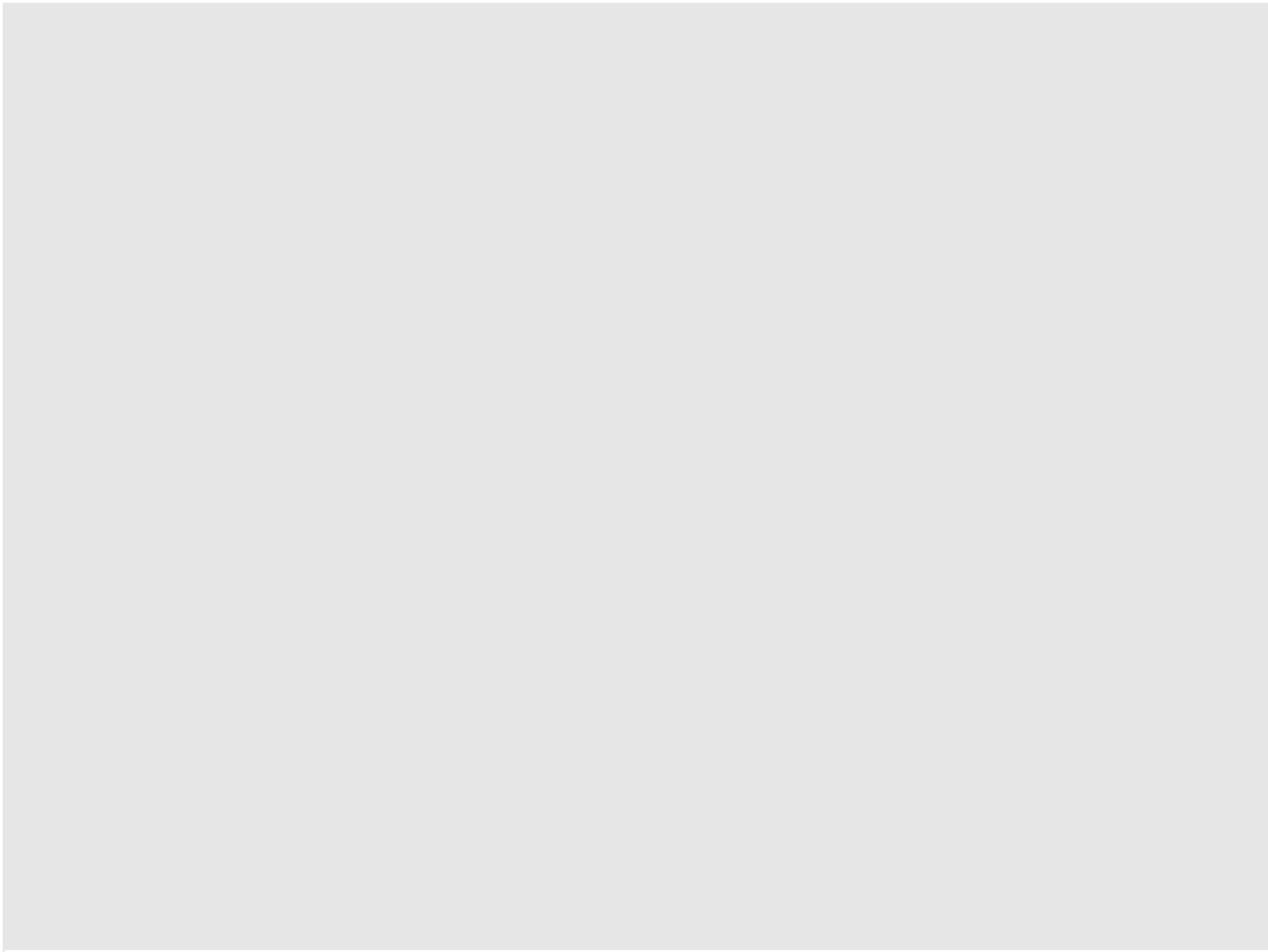




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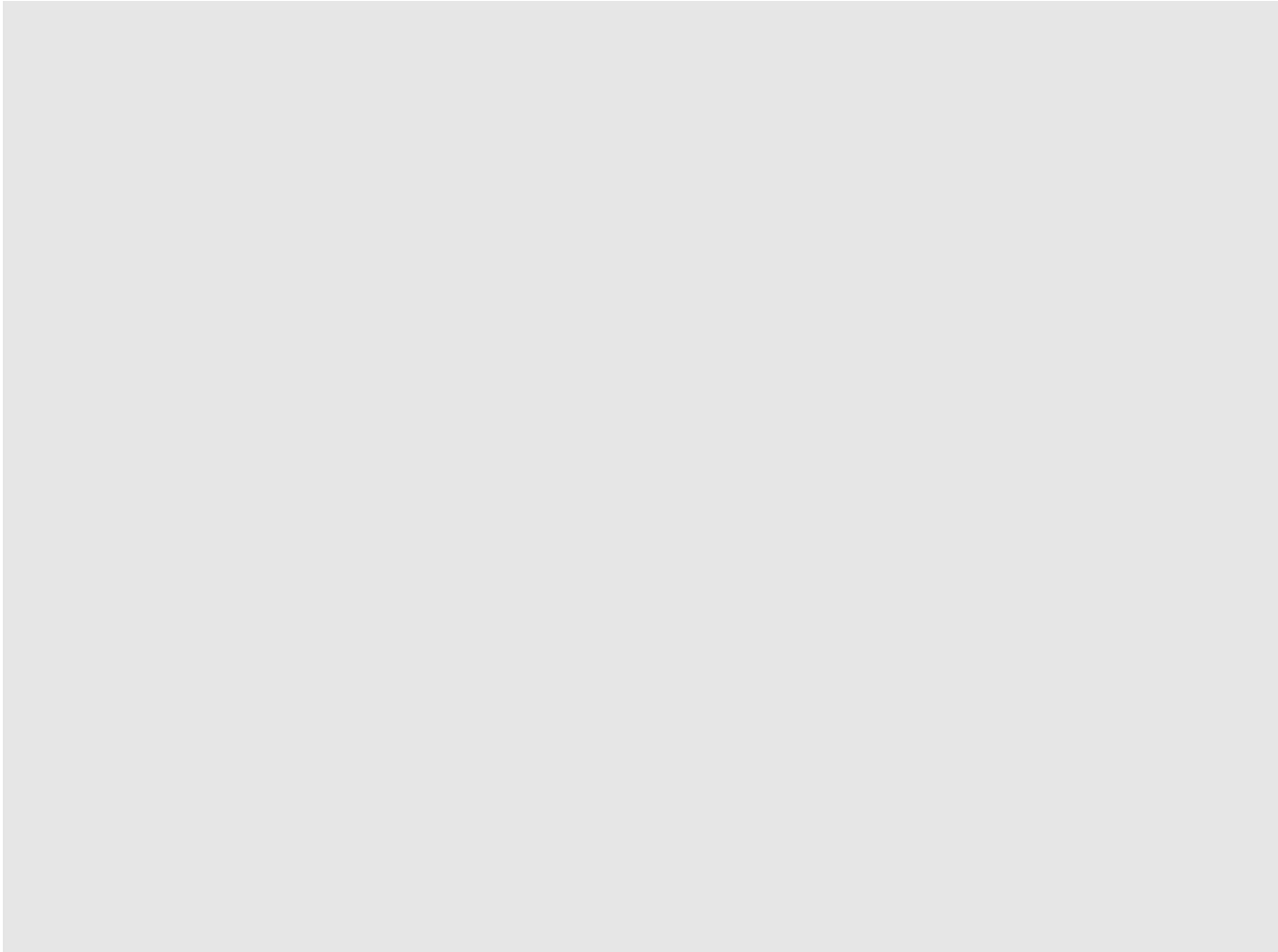
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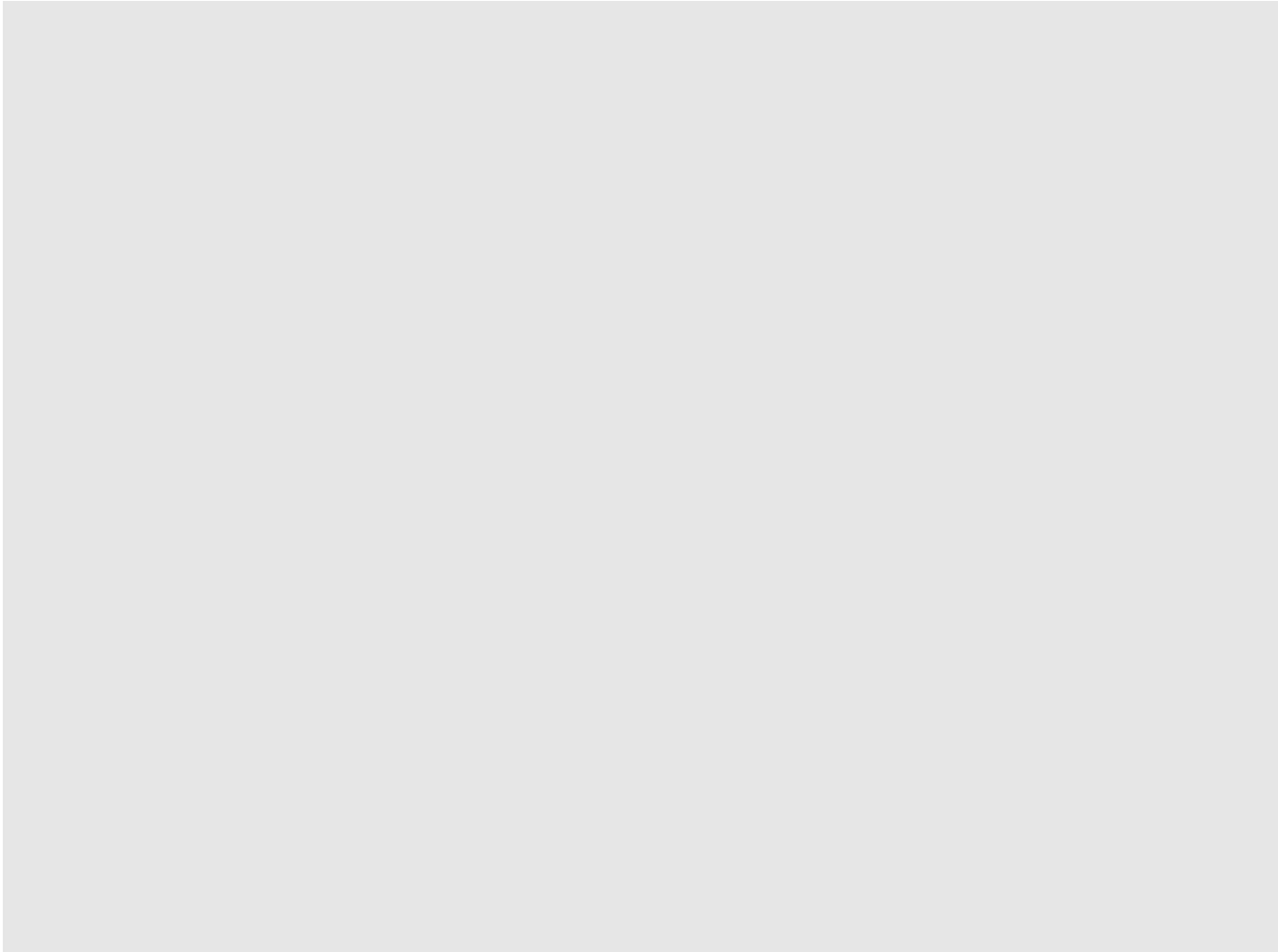
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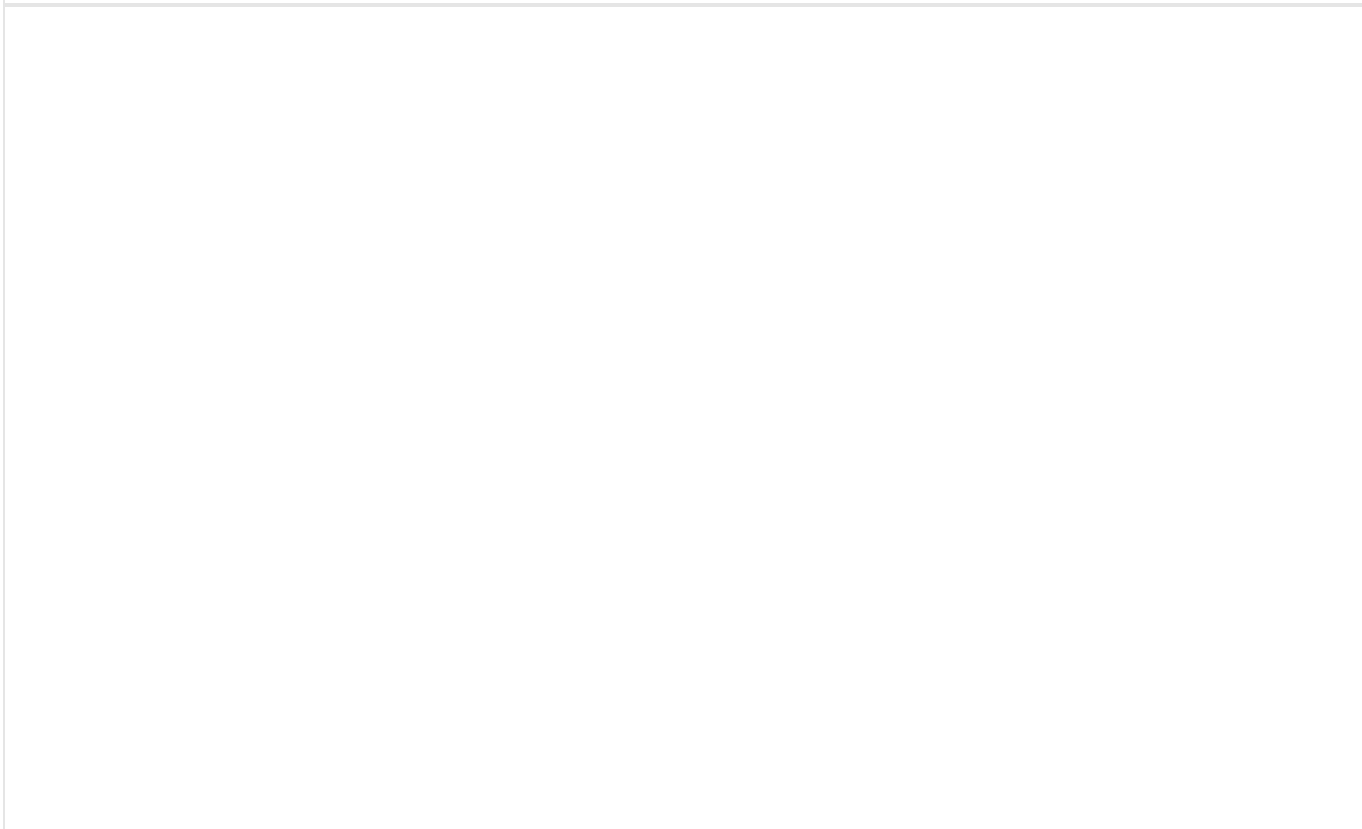
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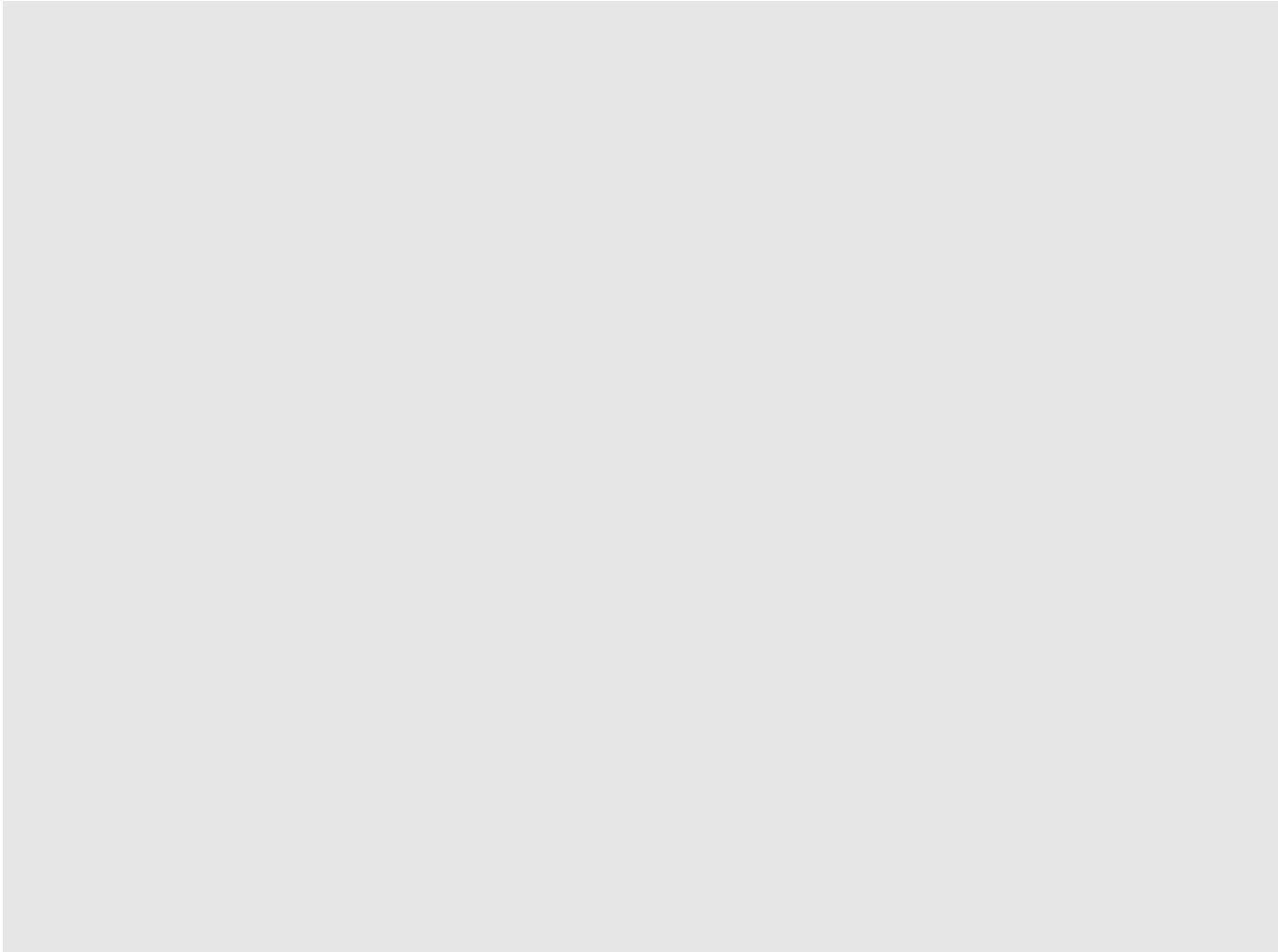
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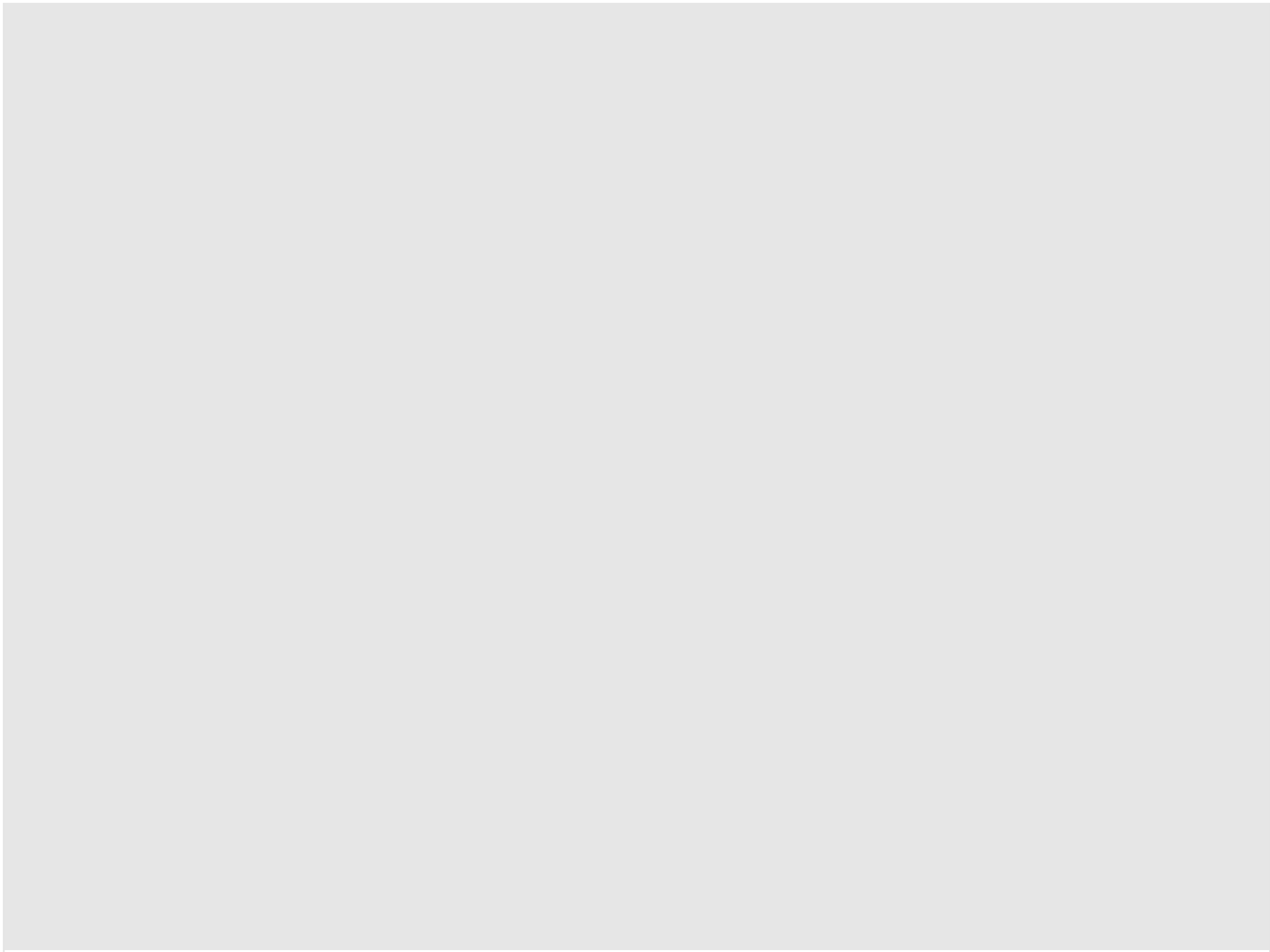




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Preston Love Jr. is a longtime Omaha civic engagement activist who also teaches black studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. These views do not represent those of UNO.