

Transcript of Interview with Alexis Tardy by Shonda Nicole Gladden

Interviewee: Alexis Tardy

Interviewer: Shonda Nicole Gladden

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Location (Interviewee): Indianapolis, Indiana

Location (Interviewer): Indianapolis, Indiana

Transcriber: Lily Crigler

Abstract: In this interview, Alexis Tardy discusses her personal life, faith, and activism for Black Lives Matter in respect to the COVID-19 pandemic. Alexis is the director of faith formation at her church and is also the co-chair of the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance. She talks about how being a Christian and fighting for the justice of black lives are intertwined. In the future, Alexis hopes to be ordained and possibly obtain a PhD.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:00

Okay, so do you see that we're recording?

Alexis Tardy 00:04

I do.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:05

Outstanding. Thank you so much. Today is Monday, October 12th 2020. The time is approximately 10:40am Eastern Daylight Savings Time. I am Shonda Nicole Gladden, and I am here with, please state your name for the recording.

Alexis Tardy 00:23

Alexis tardy.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:24

I'm here with Alexis Tardy, and Alexis, where are you located?

Alexis Tardy 00:30

I am in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:32

Outstanding. So this interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project which is associated with the Journal of the plague year: a COVID-19 Archive. And the COVID-19 history project, Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID 19 epidemic. During this phase of the project, our research group is focusing energy on collecting oral histories that speak to the experience of racial justice and racial justice movements in the context of COVID-19. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open source database. And we're also doing direct interviews with individuals that one of the researchers from any of the institutes that are participating in this project will convey, convene with volunteer interviewees across the country. So this study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us to better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time, and so the recordings, the demographic information that

you share, and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited into the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive, and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer at this time?

Alexis Tardy 02:08

No, I do not.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 02:10

Outstanding, so taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or you may leave the study and the interviewer at any time. Leaving this interview will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with the Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. If you don't mind muting yourself when you're not answering the question, I want to see if we can cut back on some of the feedback I'm getting on the recording, and so let's try muting yourself briefly and see if it comes across. Perfect. And so when you add to unmute and remute, so participating in this project means that your interviews will be recorded in digital video and audio format and will be transcribed. The recordings and possible transcriptions of our interviews, copies of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you may wish to share, and the informed consent and deed of gift that you have signed already will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive and the Indiana University Library System and will be available to both researchers and the general public. The... your name and other means of identifying information will not be confidential. Do you have any questions about what I've just shared?

Alexis Tardy 03:45

No, I do not.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 03:47

So in addition to your signed document, would you please offer verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms? I'm also asking that you verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available under the following licenses, Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike 4.0 International as well as the COVID-19 Oral History Project The Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive and the trustees of Indiana University IU acting through its agents employees or representatives having an unlimited right to reproduce, use, exhibit display, perform, broadcast, create derivative works from, and distribute the oral history materials in any manner or media now existing or hereafter developed in perpetuity throughout the world. You agree that the oral history materials may be used by the COVID-19 Oral History Project and IU including its assigns and transferees for any purpose, including but not limited to marketing, advertising, publicit, or other promotional purposes. You agree that IU will have final editorial authority over the use of the oral history of materials, and you waive any right to inspect or approve of any future use of the oral history materials. Moreover, you agree that the public has the right to use the materials under the terms of the Fair Use US Copyright law, Section 107 of the US Copyright Act. Could you please confirm that you agree to allowing us to share your interview under these licenses?

Alexis Tardy 05:31

Yes, I agree.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:33

Finally, I want to ask for your verbal confirmation that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately.

Alexis Tardy 05:46

Yes.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:48

All right. So... let's see. Tell me a little bit about yourself. What are, let's see the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis, for example, your job, your extracurricular activities, anything else that you'd like to share about what you do on a day-to-day basis?

Alexis Tardy 06:16

Sure. Well, my primary job, I am the director of faith formation at Zionsville Christian Church in Zionsville. I'm the co-chair of the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance, and those are kind of my two primary things that I do day-to-day is both church and ministry work and also community and justice work.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 06:41

And how have your activities, your daily activities changed since the beginning of COVID-19?

Alexis Tardy 06:48

Um, well, I guess obviously, when things got shut down, churches were shut down as well, so I was just starting my job at Zionsville Christian Church, like end of February, I think it was March, when everything got shut down, and so it's been interesting, like starting a new job and not being able to get to know the congregation, in my case in person. So everything having to switch online, having to adjust to like virtual services, virtual coffee hours, virtual Bible studies, has been an adjustment and definitely kind of a learning curve to have to deal with in the midst of a pandemic.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:34

Yeah, let's look a little deeper. Can you talk to me about the ways that church and faith-life has looked for you as a staff person, at a local church, doing ministry through a pandemic?

Alexis Tardy 07:54

Sure, I think, um, I think when we think about church, church is such a primary place for a fellowship. And so to not have a space for folks to come and gather together really affects your... it affects the way that you do church. I think that it's having to have an adjustment of what does it mean to worship? When we think about Christianity, sometimes you hear like, well, the church is not a building. Well, I think this is really testing that, in a, in a Christian sense, like, what does it mean to be the body of Christ? What does it mean that we call ourselves Christ followers, but we literally cannot gather together safely, like in a place, and so I think this pushes, at least Christ followers of like, what does it mean to be the body of Christ outside of a building? Like, really what does it mean to live that out? What does it mean, when you go out and you say that you're a Christian? How does that affect your own personal life, your own personal walk with God, when you're not able to gather in a in a place, and I think when we, not to get too deep into this, but when we think about Jesus's ministry, which was outside of, you know, in his case, the synagogue, Jesus went from place to place healing and talking with people, and that was

Jesus's ministry, was outside of, outside of a building. And so I think that pushes us as Christ followers of like, what does it actually mean to have ministry that's not connected to a physical space, not to mention everything else that's going on within the pandemic, right, like racism, and all these other things that are not new, but just being revealed to us like how are we going to respond to that in a time when we're not like gathering in a physical space?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 09:50

Thank you for that. Now, I'm curious as we've talked in the pre-interview, about your demographic categories, so when you think about the cat to voice of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, social economic status and other common demographics, how do you describe yourself? Again, age, race, gender, sexual orientation, social economic status, and any other common demographic categories, please self described.

Alexis Tardy 10:22

Sure, I am a black heterosexual woman, I'm 27 years old, and my socio-economic status right now would be situated probably middle class, or lower middle class, and those are probably my most salient identities.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 10:46

And where do you live? Give me your neighborhood, your city, what you call it? What people around you call it?

Alexis Tardy 10:54

Sure. Um, I live in Indianapolis, Indiana. I'm currently staying with my parents, I just moved back from St. Louis, and I live in the neighborhood, Meridian Hills is what this neighborhood's called.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 11:08

And what do you see happening around you in your neighborhood?

Alexis Tardy 11:15

Well, this neighborhood is pretty self-isolated, I guess might be the word, most people keep to themselves, I guess is the best way to say it, and so it can be a little bit set apart from other things that are going on in the city. So I don't have too much interaction with the neighbors here, maybe a little bit more because of the pandemic, and so we're seeing each other a little bit more, but other than that most folks just kind of keep to themselves.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 11:46

So if there's nothing else that you care to share about your background, I'd like to shift into a conversation about your personal and community context... so what issues... what issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Alexis Tardy 12:10

I think, I think what most concerns me is what has been exasperated because of the pandemic, so food insecurity, domestic violence, the ways that education has been affected, and so all of these issues that we know have already been there, but the disparities in those issues are just becoming more and more widened, and I'm not really seeing like systemic responses that are good enough that are, to respond to these issues that are being exasperated. And so for those who are already struggling with food insecurity, you're really struggling with food insecurity now because of the pandemic, same thing with education, as you know, I know teachers are trying their best to kind of

hold that together and parents and students and things like that. Ways in which you're almost trapped, if you're in like a domestic violence situation or child abuse situation, all of these things are getting more and more exasperated because of the pandemic. And then of course, healthcare like this is really exposing our healthcare system and the disparities with our healthcare system, when it comes to the pandemic, and how, you know, black folks are two, three times the rate of others in terms of, you know, death or getting sick with the, with COVID-19, and so I'm most concerned with things that have always been there, for some people, it's just getting revealed, but you know, for I think the entire country, it's just showing the holes in all of our systems and how much our systems are not working for those who are the most marginalized.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 13:57

And have you seen the people around you change their opinions or their day-to-day activities or relationships in response to the pandemic?

Alexis Tardy 14:11

That's a good question. Um, I'm gonna say yes, because I think it's required an adjustment for all of us, I think, I think in some ways, and on the positive tip, it's requiring folks to reach out more to their family members, to their friends, wanting to stay more in touch with one another, virtually, of course. It shifted our relationships in terms of you can't hang out in person. I know my family loves to gather together and so to not be able to have those like family gatherings are really affecting folks. For you know, maybe some of my like single friends, it's just kind of hard if they're alone or when it's just them and their child. It's having to adjust those relationships since we can't safely gather in this place anymore. I do think that it's also requiring all of us to see exactly what's going on, though; it's making, in a sense, it's making us a little bit more localized, like, what is going on around us, what's going on in the city, what's going on in the state, what's going on in the country. And I know, some of my friends are wanting to get more involved, just because we kind of have, you know, they've kind of had time to just sit and look like the rest of the country has. So I've seen just more, at least, if not engagement, at least more interest in how to get involved with the community.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 15:38

So you say you are 27. How does this pandemic compare to other big events that have happened in your lifetime?

Alexis Tardy 15:49

Yeah, that's a great question. Um, when I think about the probably two biggest events, I think about, I think about 9/11, and I think about President Obama's election, two totally different things, but those are the two kind of major events that I think about in my lifetime that I can look back on. You know, I think this reminds me of 9/11, in the sense of like, the world stops, or the country stops, maybe not the world, but the country stops for a moment, and it's just like a... it's something that hits all of us collectively, I don't think there's a lot of moments like that in history where the whole country has to just stop and look, and you're affected by it as a collective nation. I think what was interesting is the difference. I think that 911 really brought us together for you know, for a variety of reasons. This pandemic, ...of an election year, has more like splintered a lot of, it's splintered us in a lot of ways, right. It's exasperated those divisions, instead of bringing us together, and it's cost us lives to like it's had these fatal consequences of not being able to respond in an effective way. And in terms of, you know, President Obama's election is I mean, it was just, it was more of a positive event that I think affected us collectively, as a country, and again. I think it's just interesting all these things colliding in 2020 and all of it colliding in the midst of an election year, and an election that is so incredibly clear, I think, like the choices and

the decisions that you have to make are so incredibly clear. And so I think it reminds me of those big events in my life in terms of just the weight and those like pinpoint moments, right? Like where were you when 9/11 happened, where were you when President Obama was elected? I think the 2020 pandemic is just, it's going to be one of those moments.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 18:01

Thank you. I want to shift and have a brief conversation about racial justice movements. Would you please share any thoughts you have about current movements focused on racial justice, such as Black Lives Matter?

Alexis Tardy 18:19

Sure, yeah, the movement for black lives is so incredibly important and always will be. I think that we, as, as one of my mentors will say, we go through these times of like racialized flashpoints, unfortunately, so it's hard to have a sustained movement, right. It's hard to have a sustained movement, because we just had these moments of like, oh, Ahmaud Arbery, or Breonna Taylor, or George Floyd, or, you know, further back Trayvon Martin, or you know, like the issues racialized flashpoints, that kind of last for a while, and then it ends. I think, after George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, this feels more like a sustained movement, and I think as Angela Davis says, like, that's because it's... a movement is a movement when it's organized, and I think that we're getting to a place where we're getting more organized and not just focused on activism, as important as activism is to amplify the message, I think it's incredibly important to be organized. And I'm getting that sense this time, because it, you know, this is like, the largest civil rights movement of our time, it's hit every single state, it's gone international, and it feels like it'll be more sustained, because people are kind of working underground a little bit more like how do we do the work of keeping this sustainable? And in a sense back to, I mean, in a sense, that's kind of because of COVID, too, right? Like it's kind of causing us to kind of go underground and do that work as well, especially if we can't gather like you usually would during these kinds of movement or protests and things like that. We still gather and protest, in terms of organizing, you may not be able to gather as much as you needed to, but because everything is so virtual, you're able to kind of do more of that work under the, under the radar. So, yeah, I mean, this. I mean, this time, it feels like it'll be more sustainable, and I think that is going to be a long standing movement as folks, as folks really focus on organizing the movement and keeping it long term.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 20:30

I'd love to hear you reflect on and unpack the words that you've used here, "activism", "protests", "organized", that you've used in ways that, perhaps can you unpack how each of these words relate to the other, the ways that you are envisioning what it means to have an organized movement for Black Lives Matter, what it means to have sustained activism, and what it means to have protests, these three words, if you can unpack the layers of how they're connected?

Alexis Tardy 21:14

Sure, um, so in activism, I think about amplifying the message, right? What is the message? How do we amplify it, black lives matter? How do we create, how do we create these, these public moments that garner people's attention. So as an activist, I will, you know, do a protest around Black Lives Matter, so the protests in the sense of gathering of pushing back of resistance right to what the larger system is trying to put onto us. I think about that in terms of like protest. Organizers, I think about like campaigns, who may do the campaign around like Black Lives Matter, right, or do the work around what it means to organize folks to bring folks to the protests. They do more of the campaigning, the planning the the issue based kind of campaigns, and to me, kind of having

an eye and an ear to what the community is pushing for as well, and then organizing the community around these issues. So that's kind of how I see the different layers like organizing is organizing the community. Kind of doing issue based, like campaign activism is okay, what does that message so that we can amplify it? And perhaps the ways that we amplify it is through protesting or boycotting, or, you know, these kinds of ways of pushing back against the system. And I think, for me, my first entry into Black Lives Matter was more activism, wo when I went to St. Louis, it was more like being involved with protests and like, what does it mean to be involved with protests and to push back and to be a part of like, those kinds of things. And then being part of the Racial Justice Alliance here, I've learned more around like organizing, like, what does it mean to kind of keep these messages sustained and that was something that I was interested in coming back to Indianapolis, it's like, well, not that activism isn't important, but kind of like, well, I've done the activism before, I kind of like, how do I do more of that like, organized part? And so that's what I've kind of been learning, being with the Racial Justice Alliance, because the organized part is also incredibly important, like I said, in order for it to be sustainable, and in order for it to even be a movement, otherwise, this is just going to become another kind of racialized flashpoint, and it's going to leave people's, you know, minds like, oh, well, that was unfortunate, you know, but then we just kind of keep going. So you need those organizers to keep in those, yeah, those organizers to kind of keep the message going, but also continuing the movement as well.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 23:51

Thank you for saying the word that you used again, or the phrase that you used again, which is "racialized flashpoints." What changes have you seen since the death of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, or others as you are calling them racialized flashpoints in this current era of Black Lives Matter and movements for racial justice?

Alexis Tardy 24:18

Yeah, I think some of the changes we've seen is more, a push for more accountability for police. And so we've heard, you know, calls for defunding the police. Even if, even if folks are... hh, I'm not gonna say defund, there's at least been a call for accountability, and so we've seen in Minnesota, for example, wanting to have, you know, these accountable bodies, so whether it's a board or something like that, that is over the police in order to hold them accountable. We've been seeing more of a push for that throughout the country, it's like how do we hold these police officers accountable? I think it's also caused a more, um, it has caused, it has caused us to self reflect on what public safety is, I think that we inherently take the police and our criminal justice system as a given. It's just like, well, of course, we have police and of course we have prisons and of course, we have jails, but it's caused people to actually think critically of like, well, why? And like are police officers doing their job, and why do we have prisons? And why do we have jails? And do we need them? Or can we invest in some of these, you know, public services that serve our community, and actually address these root causes, right? Like, if we just think about police officers, it's like, well, are they just arresting people? Are they actually solving crime? And so I think it's kind of caused, I think it's, it has caused these deeper conversations that I think will help get past these just flashpoints, right of just like, oh, that's unfortunate, right? Like, I think that George Floyd, what's happening to George Floyd and Breonna Taylor's like, what is wrong with our system? Like, there's something inherently wrong with this when you know, a woman can be murdered in her sleep, right? Like, there's something wrong when you have your knee on his neck for over eight minutes, why? You know, like, for those who are supposed to serve and protect, I think it has forced us as a country, right. There are folks who have been talking about this for decades and centuries, and you know, but as a collective, we as a country it's like, okay, wait a minute, like something is not right. And so I think that gets us past the flashpoints because it's forcing us to think about like, the systems, right, and things that we just kind of inherently take for granted. Like, it's causing us to kind of

critique those things and look further, and you can even see it in the media, right? They're doing these investigations. They're like, okay, let me look about what's going on in these, in our actual local police departments, and is it serving the community? So that's some of the changes I've seen, even throughout the country, and I think that, you know, I think activists and organizers are looking at other states like, oh, well what is Portland doing? And what is Minnesota doing? You know, like, what are they doing with their city council that's kind of popping up in our city council? So I think it's kind of had this effect around the country as well even if we're in different states, we can kind of see like, what's the word going on in Chicago, right, and kind of seeing how that might work in our own local space, so that's kind of what I've seen, and I think that's what's pushing us beyond it just being a moment.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 27:31

So thank you. Um, you mentioned that there are these changes that you've seen since George Floyd's death, since the death of Breonna Taylor, you've talked about racial flashpoints. Have you, uh, I'm curious about how you've also articulated, defund the police? Can you talk about what that means for researchers who may reflect on this sometime in the future, who may not have a context of what defund the police means, what it means to you, what it means in Indianapolis, what it means across the country as you can best unpack that?

Alexis Tardy 28:20

Sure, um, so I'll use the example of Indianapolis, which is probably getting, you know, past the \$261 million budget, and over a \$7 million increase for our police departments. And so we, as a city, as a state, as a country invest so much money into our police departments, into our criminal justice system. We invest millions and millions and millions of dollars into that, and we have been for years. And so when we talk about defunding the police and police departments, we are talking about stop investing in the systems that is causing murders, and death, disparities that we've been seeing throughout the country. And so one of our Racial Justice Alliance demands is to defund a percentage of the police departments to refund public services and public programs. So it's how do we literally, yes, literally take away money, people asking, like, if that's what defund means. It's like, yes, I literally mean like to take away money from these police departments that are not serving and protecting, and they're also not getting to the root issues of poverty; they're not getting to the root issues of mental health; they're not getting to the root issues of behavioral health, right. And they don't know how, right, like we've seen that over and over and over again. There have been too many instances of those who are struggling with mental health issues, and a police officer doesn't know how to handle it, so they just get killed, or they get arrested, or they get injured, right. And so this idea that we have to invest in more surveillance, right, and more surveillance for the police in order to protect this, we already know that does not work. So we're talking about taking money away from their millions of dollars that could go into education, and public transportation, and mental health services. Take, defunding means to take the money away from the police and investing that instead, in these public services and programs, so the millions of dollars that could be going towards food insecurity, right, all of these issues that we see in our community, and I think we have this myth of scarcity, like we don't have the money, like, oh, where's this gonna come from? It's gonna come from here, because like, it's obviously not working. This, you know, this mindset of policing can, even community policing is not the answer, and so we're talking about taking away that money to actually get to the root causes of food insecurity, of education, and public transportation, and things like that, that are devastating our neighborhoods, but we have the money to address those issues.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 31:03

So have you attended any of the protests?

Alexis Tardy 31:08

Yes, I have.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 31:10

Can you tell me a little bit about what protests has looked like in this season?

Alexis Tardy 31:17

Yeah, um, I think the protests have still been, you know, massive. I think it's been massive, but it's still been masked. I think they've, you know, obviously, it had to be safe, and it looked different in a pandemic. But even the largest of the protests that I've been to in Indianapolis, everyone still, you know, had a mask on, was as safe as possible. I think we're seeing throughout the country that even though they're, they are large gatherings, ...take of COVID-19 cases, and so, yeah, I mean, in terms of the pandemic, I would say, that's what's different, and I think there is a different sense of urgency as well.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 32:05

And what motivated you to attend them? And did you attend them, or did you organize them? Or did you do a little bit of both?

Alexis Tardy 32:14

Um, yeah, my early ones I attended. So the first protest I was attending earlier this summer was around Dreasjon Reed and what happened to Dreasjon Reed in Indianapolis, and so mostly, mostly attending. Some of the protests that the Alliance have hosted, I was, you know, a part of helping to plan those, but yeah, either attending or organizing kind of a little bit of both.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 32:45

Were you concerned about exposure to COVID-19?

Alexis Tardy 32:51

I was, and that's what, I didn't go out as soon as I usually would to protest. I did wait a little while because I was concerned about that. I was mostly concerned about that because I'm living with my parents who are older and have underlying conditions. If I lived alone, I probably would have gone a lot sooner, but that gave me pause, I didn't want to bring anything back to them. I didn't want it to spread, so I waited a little bit longer than usual to go out, but once I went out, I also made a plan of who I would stay with in case I needed to quarantine.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 33:32

And you say older, can you give us a context for your parents, their ages or their generation?

Alexis Tardy 33:42

Sure, um, my parents are 12 years apart, so they're almost two different generations, so my mom is 60. And my dad is 72.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 33:52

Wow, and when you think about not bringing things home to your parents, did any of the other protesters that you were in the streets with, say anything about exposure to COVID-19? Or express any of the similar concerns?

Alexis Tardy 34:18

Um, I don't think I outwardly heard that from anyone, although I'm sure the concern was there. I also know the concern was there from the organizers because for a while there was COVID-19 testing that you could receive, like on site when you went to different protests. And so I don't know if I ever heard someone say it out loud, but I think that we all were aware, and I could tell because everyone had masks on, so we weren't just, you know, out there. So I think folks were aware of that, concerned about that, and we're so concerned that some of the organizers would have like a COVID-19 testing out there for folks if they needed it.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 34:56

So are you a member of an organized Black Lives Matter movement chapter?

Alexis Tardy 35:03

Not no, not the Black Lives Matter organization, not a chapter of theirs.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 35:10

How would you describe your relationship to, with the Black Lives Matter movement then?

Alexis Tardy 35:18

Um, I would say, though I'm not a part of a organized chapter of the National Black Lives Matter organization, I think I'm adjacent to it, so I think a lot of there organizations that are kind of adjacent, or maybe I should say, are fighting for black liberation. And so we're all kind of fighting for black liberation, fighting for black lives, even if we're not apart of that movement. So I will say being a co-chair of the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance is in the fight for black liberation and the fight for black lives, but not in the like Black Lives Matter organizational movement. I think we still definitely follow, especially like the movement for black lives, like the policy kind of things that they have, that's something that we definitely look to and draw from sometimes, especially their federal vision, like the Breathe Act and things like that.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 36:20

So you've mentioned being the co-chair of the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance, can you tell us a little bit about the origins of that organization, and what the demands look like for researchers who may be unfamiliar?

Alexis Tardy 36:35

Sure, um, the Alliance was really born soon after the Dreasjon Reed murder, so earlier this summer, right, early, mid-part of summer. Matt Davis and I talked about co-chairing the Alliance, and that's kind of how it started. And then since then, we have like built a team around the alliance and what that looks like, and also a vision, so we have been focused on, we have three different areas that we're focused on. Public safety is one of our forerunning, forerunning committees, and so our three demands for that was one I mentioned before about the funding a percentage of the police departments to refund public services and programs. And then our other two include directly elected citizen council, which is similar to what I was saying in other cities that are trying that, is having like a board over the police for accountability, and so tonight, actually, city council will be voting on that here in Indianapolis, and it will be the first in the country, a general orders board to kind of hope to hold the police

accountable. But we're calling for a directly elected citizen council. Right now the citizens on the board will be appointed by the mayor and by city council, so we're calling for actual directly elected citizens from the community. And then lastly, we're calling for an end to cash bail. As some folks may or may not know, a lot of poor black folks are targeted for jail and are still sitting in jail right now, just because they can't pay bail, not because they are proven guilty or anything like that, it's just because they can't pay bail, so we're calling for an end to cash bail and to an end for that targeting of black communities. We also have voters rights. The main one we're pushing right now, ahead of the election, especially is election day voter registration so, basically, same day voter registration. If in like in different states, purging of the rolls is like, rampant, going rampant in different states, and that one... a case is in file where that is not the case in Indiana, I believe Common Cause fought a case so that the purging of the rolls wouldn't happen ahead of the election in Indiana, which is good because purging of the rolls is really suppressing the vote. And so we are calling for like same day voter registration, so if your address changes, you can just say that right there and still vote. That is a major reason why people get purged from the rolls and then just can't vote, so that disenfranchises a lot of voters. So those are some of our main demands right now that we are pushing for, and we see these as like longterm goals basically.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 39:36

Well, I'd like to shift to talk a little bit about the role of art and the movement for black lives and racial, the movement for racial liberation, racial justice movements. How do you see the role of art in the movement?

Alexis Tardy 39:58

Yeah, I think, I think art is incredibly important. I think about, when you were talking I was thinking about Nina Simone's quote about, I believe she said, like "artists reflecting the times, like who are you, if you're not reflecting the times", and I think I think artists are incredibly important. I think poets are incredibly important. I think music is incredibly important. And I say that partially because I think that's so, that's so in the fabric of who we are as black people, anyway, is that expression. And so I think part of the ways that we have found joy, in the midst of this struggle, in the midst of these continuous fights, is art, is music, is dance, is poetry. I think that's always been incredibly important, and that's something that, that's something that we need. In fact, I, I, you know, even in terms of protests, some of the most powerful protests I've been to, are ones that are led with like drummers, right? Like just music, like you need a rhythm. I think that that is so incredibly important as we, as we stay in this struggle, but also as artists articulate for us what's actually going on, right, I think that artists have so much freedom, in actually articulating what's going on, and they're often at the forefront of that. And so I think that that remains true, and I think that we have, you know, we have to and we should make room for artists, because really, artists are the ones that are leading this movement, and can actually express like what's going on, even when some of, the rest of us can't see it, like artists can see it first.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 41:45

Have you participated in any artistic expressions in your activism?

Alexis Tardy 41:52

Um, I have supported, I'm hesitant to participating because I don't know if I necessarily identify as an artist per se, per se, but I would say, Nigel, who was a part of the Alliance, has these First Friday grapevine events, which is very cool, has music, food, vendors, artists who are showing their paintings and things like that. And so I think those have been very life giving spaces that folks need, and I have enjoyed being a part of that, and you know,

buying art and hearing different music, it's just a so giving space that you need in the midst of everything that's going on.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 42:40

Well, thank you. Do you have anything else that you'd like to say as it pertains to movements for racial justice, Black Lives Matter movement, and/or protest movements before we shift to our next set of questions?

Alexis Tardy 42:56

Um, no, I don't believe so.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 42:57

So then, let's talk a little bit about leadership and future. We have about 15 minutes remaining in our interview, and so I want to thank you for taking the time. But let's talk, has your experience transformed how you think about your family, your friends, your community and society? And if so, in what ways?

Alexis Tardy 43:28

Um, yes, yes, yes, and yes. I think it has made me for lack of a better word, it has made me want to be more grassroots and ever. It has made me think about community in ways that I hadn't thought about before, and I think it has made everyone else around me think in the same way. And so I've heard much more like, "Alexis, how do I get involved? How do I tap in? How do I join?" I think it has made us, and I mean, it's in a cliché way, but it's made us more aware of our shared humanity. Like I think that this is just this experience has made us all more aware of our shared humanity. It has, I think, revealed, excuse me, the holes but also like, the possibilities but also like the work like, okay, it should be like this. Oh, okay, but it takes work to get there though. Oh, okay, well, then what does that look like? You know, like it, it, it has shown so much of what shouldn't be but also what ought to be. And I think going back to, you know, being someone who identifies as a Christian, I think that has been a challenge because if we're not, if we're not at least res... then what are we doing? Like if we're not, at least, as Christians, responding with love, then what are we doing? If we're not talking about George Floyd or Breanna Taylor being murdered, then what are we doing? Like we're not even talking about, like the "isness" of life, right? Like, we're not even talking, truly going on, and so when we talk about millennials leaving the church, sorry, this is turning into a rant, millennials leaving the church, it's like, well, why are they leaving the church? You're not talking about what's actually going on, and so, um, so that I mean, yeah, so that has made me reflect on every level, to be honest, my family and my friends, my faith life, my faith walk, what does it mean to be the church? Because I honestly think that's something that we should be leading in, you know, that's what I said, at least responding to, but that's something that we also should be leading in is providing a vision for like what ought to be, so that's kind of the, that's kind of the changes that I've been saying, but also just my own personal observations of what's around me.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 46:18

And have, how have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

Alexis Tardy 46:30

Um, well, you know, the governor has, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, was giving daily press conferences. I don't know if those are happening daily anymore. But um, yeah, I mean, I think they have been consistent in giving their responses. I think that it has been irresponsible, I remember when, when everything else

was closed, but then worship spaces were allowed to open, um, whatever, with whatever rules that they wanted to open with. And I also think that now, interestingly enough, it seems more quiet leading up to the election. I believe Indiana is at stage five, but we just, we broke the highest record on Friday on the virus cases, and then we broke that record, I think, a day or two ago. So we're worse than we were before the pandemic started to the point that like Chicago, saying, like, telling their residents to not traveled to Indiana. And so I think right now, at probably the worst moment that we have ever been in, I don't hear our leaders, having leadership or speaking about those things, or even really wanting to protect us as citizens, and I think that does have something to do with it being an election year.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 47:48

Yeah, thank you for saying that election year. So we're, as an organizer, how many days are we before the election today?

Alexis Tardy 47:58

I feel like I should have a clock. I don't have the exact... we're like, less than a month.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 48:05

Yeah. And so how do you feel in the midst of COVID-19 being 20 some odd days out from the election? Have your thoughts about how your local state and federal leaders are responding to the crisis, have these thoughts shifted since the beginning of the pandemic? Where are you now?

Alexis Tardy 48:32

Um, I think, I think I mean my impression is that like, our leaders are woefully unprepared, now I have, I understand this is something, this is new, we never went through Coronavirus, I get it, but I mean, I think this is just revealed that like they are just woefully unprepared, even in some of the local meetings that I have been to. And so I don't know if I've, like changed my mind, but I think that it has shored up some things for sure. Like, it's confirmed some things, I guess you could say. But like I said before, I think this is a clear decision, not just, not just nationally, I think even locally and like looking at our own... I think it's a clear decision across the board about, about... I think it's a clear decision, whatever side you're on, it's just clear.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 49:25

And so what specifically would you have liked to see from or would you like to see going forward from your leaders?

Alexis Tardy 49:38

Yeah, that's a good question. Um, you know, I would like to see our leaders putting the people in a community first. Many of the decisions are based off of calculations, are based off of popularity, or based off of how do I posture myself to get back in here? What, what looks best for me? I think, I think when you put people first and community first, that completely changes your decision. And so I would like to see more preparation. I would like to see that, a more care for people over the economy. I think a lot of our reopenings was just based off of the... economy. I mean, they said that, right, so regardless loss of life. It was just mostly around the economy, and I think that also revealed if we're so dependent on the economy, then that says something about capitalism, not surprisingly, right, and so like, kind of responding again, to those root causes, rather than sacrificing people's lives

in order to keep the economy going. I think, you know, within that is a lot of different specific decisions, but I think just as an ethic, that's what I would have liked to see from our leaders.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 50:52

You say, sacrificing people's lives, do you know anyone directly who has succumbed to the virus or who has contracted COVID-19?

Alexis Tardy 51:04

Yes, both. I have had family members who have contracted the virus, thankfully survived. I know someone who has passed from the virus that was not directly, and my family was kind of a friend of a friend, but there are several people in my family who have contracted the virus.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 51:26

But did I hear you say that all of your family members who contracted it actually recovered?

Alexis Tardy 51:31

Yes.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 51:34

And so the friend of a friend who passed away from COVID-19, do you have any insight in terms of the bereavement and grief process for them, funerals or anything as it relates to how their death was handled?

Alexis Tardy 51:51

Slightly, and I've heard this from other, like other people who aren't directly in my family, but say they, they had a family member, or they had a friend who was passed. The friend of the friend who passed was actually the second person to die in Indiana, it was very early on in the pandemic. And so I'm not sure, I'm not sure if I know the arrangements and things like that word, but I know a little later on when another family member's friend had passed, the funeral arrangement was so incredibly different. Obviously, it's limited to how many folks could come into, say, the wake or the actual funeral service. Or maybe you couldn't go there, you can only go to the gravesite because it was outside. I just heard really sad stories of not being able to gather like you usually would, which means you're not able to grieve, as you usually would. Now I heard more recently, that more folks are able to gather for funerals, but I know early on and kind of midway through the pandemic, it was very limited, like maybe 10 people or less could actually come.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 53:06

So what do you imagine your life will be like, a year from now?

Alexis Tardy 53:12

Yeah, that's a good question. Um, you know, I think I'll be ordained. That's one of my goals for being in ministry, is the ordination process. So yeah, I think ordination is a goal within that, and then also just continuing to push for these demands and, and hold our leaders accountable. And then, you know, I really hope that we have more people engaged in a political process, that would be incredibly important to me.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 53:53

And so, as it pertains to COVID-19, do you anticipate that a year from now we'll still be dealing with the actual alive, the virus being actually alive an issue? Or do you think we'll be dealing with the repercussions of COVID-19 or combination of both?

Alexis Tardy 54:18

Yeah, I think it could, I think it could be both. I mean, unfortunately, especially at the rate that we're going and the ways that it's being handled or mishandled, that's probably the better word. I think it's very likely that we're either still dealing with COVID, or we are still in the immediate after effects of COVID. And still in this kind of weird space that we're in now where people are trying to get back to normal while there's, you know, we it's not like it's gotten better. So I think it's going to be a combination of those three things, so the virus still being here, the immediate after effects, and folks still trying to like get back to normal in the midst of that.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 54:56

And what about five years from now, what do you imagine life will be like then?

Alexis Tardy 55:04

Um, you know, I think, I think there are possibilities for PhD work maybe after this. I've thought about it a few times. so maybe that will come into fruition. And, and yeah, I think wherever I land, whether I'm still in Indianapolis or somewhere else, um, just staying connected to, you know, the fight for black lives and organizing and landing myself and my voice and, you know, my gifts in the best way that I can in order to get to that fight.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 55:39

Just three more questions. Knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Alexis Tardy 55:53

Um, I think that, I think that governments and leaders need to be more connected to the community, I think that is just always a good ethic to have. I think, especially here, or particularly here in Indianapolis, like the disconnect is so clear between like our leaders and the community, and I will say for the community, we, being more proactive, like we should have what we want, and then we should push for it. I think we're often very responsive, like very responsive to what's going on, and so things get pushed on us. How can we be more proactive? How can we hold our leaders accountable? How do we understand what we need and say what we need? And how do we push back against things that are not serving us? I hope that that's what this moment is kind of teaching us.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 56:52

Well, is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

Alexis Tardy 56:59

I don't think so. I think that kind of covered everything.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 57:02

Okay, then last question. Who else should I be interviewing, any individuals, any groups, any organizations, now that you've sat through the COVID-19 Oral History Project interview? Anyone else that you think this historic experience needs to be documented for the future researchers?

Alexis Tardy 57:23

Gotcha. Um, I think you already interviewed Simone Marie. Nigel Long, I would say, Sarah Hindi from Exodus Refugee. Um yeah, I think those are the two names that come to mind.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 57:46

Well, thank you very much. If you have any additional pictures or videos or artifacts that you would like to have included as part of your oral history archive, please do send those my way, but if there's nothing else, I am going to stop the recording and end our interview. Is that okay?

Alexis Tardy 58:10

That is okay with me.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 58:11

Well, thank you. This is Monday, October the 12th, 2020. The time now is approximately 11:50am, and I have been Shonda Nicole Gladden here interviewing with Alexis Tardy for the COVID-19 Oral History Project. This concludes our interview.