

Mat Davis Oral History Interview

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SPEAKERS

Mat Davis, Shonda Nicole Gladden

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:01

Good morning, you see that we are recording this red button there? And do I have your permission to continue recording?

Mat Davis 00:09

Absolutely and written consent.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:11

Thank you so much. We're going to talk through a number of consent items. But before we get there, first, my name is Shonda, Nicole Gladden and I am the interviewer I am here with please state your first and last name.

Mat Davis 00:26

Mat Davis.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:28

I'm here with Mat Davis. And we are recording from where where are you located?

Mat Davis 00:34

I'm here in my living room

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:36

Which city and state, Sir?

Mat Davis 00:38

Indianapolis, Indiana,

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:40

Indianapolis, Indiana, but specifically in his living room. If you can, if you don't mind if you can clarify where that living room is situated, not in the position of the house, but a neighborhood kind of near you. Which side?

Mat Davis 00:56

Near East Side.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:57

Near East Side of Indianapolis. Outstanding. So, I want to briefly review the informed consent and the deed of gift that you signed. And I'm going to move this camera right there so that I'm not looking away. Um, the interview, this interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year, or a COVID-19 Archive. This project, the COVID-19 Oral History Project, is a rapid response, Oral History focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemics. And during this phase of our project, our research group that is led up at IUPUI at the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute, is led by Dr. Jason Kelly. It's focusing its energies 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 own oral histories to our open access and open source database. However, I am a professional researcher at the IUPUI and the American Studies program in the Ph. D program there. And so part of my work is to ensure that working through this study, we're collecting narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as to help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recordings, your demographic information, and the verbatim transcripts that we, we are currently collecting, as we're doing the interview, they will all be deposited in 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 what I've shared about the project that I can answer so far?

Mat Davis 02:54

Nope.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 02:56

Okay, so taking part in this study is voluntary, you may choose not to take part or you may leave the study in the interview at any time, leaving the study 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 Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that as I said, your interview will be recorded in digital video and or audio format. And it will be transcribed the recordings and the transcriptions of our interviews, copies of supplementary documents or additional photos that you may wish to share, and the informed consent and deed of gift will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 Archive and the Indiana University Library System. And it will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

Mat Davis 04:00

How much other information other than my name?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:03

Whatever you disclose in the video.

Mat Davis 04:07

Oh. Okay.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:08

Okay, as well as the demographic information and that is what we've discussed in the pre interview questions in terms of your gender, your racial ethnic identity, and your social economic status. If you care to share any of the three of those.

Mat Davis 04:25

Yep.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:26

So what is your gender?

Mat Davis 04:28

Okay, so gender male, cisgender male.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:31

Cisgendered. Male. What is your racial ethnic identity?

Mat Davis 04:35

Black

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:36

And any social economic status that you care to disclose.

Mat Davis 04:39

I'd say, working class, if you're gonna go on with other terms, maybe low income?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:46

I mean, whatever terms you give. They're your demographic. So I'm going to articulate exactly what you give. I won't add or take away and assume anything.

Mat Davis 04:57

Yeah, that's that's, that's what I would say.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:00

Working Class or low income?

Mat Davis 05:03

Yeah, I would say yeah, I would say working class before, before anything.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:08

Okay. So in addition to your signed document, would you please offer verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Mat Davis 05:19

Yes, I do.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:20

I'm also asking that you verbally confirmed that you have agreed that your interview will be made available under the Creative Commons Attribution non commercial license 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, acting through its agents, employees or representatives have an unlimited right to reproduce, use, exhibit display, perform broadcast, create derivative works from, and/or distribute the oral history materials in any manner or media now existing or hereafter developed in perpetuity throughout the world. That you agree that the oral history materials may be used by the COVID-19 oral history project, and Indiana University, including its assigns and transferees for any purpose, including, but not limited to marketing, advertising, publicity, or other promotional purposes. You agree that Indiana University will have final editorial authority over the use of the oral history materials, and you waive any right to inspect or approve 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 fair use as articulated in the US copyright law section one through seven of the US Copyright Act. Could you please confirm that you agree to allowing us to share your interview under this License?

Mat Davis 06:47

I agree to share this interview under those terms.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 06:50

Thank you. And finally, this is the last one. I asked that you verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately.

Mat Davis 07:01

Yep. Yes.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:03

All right. That's it for all of the technical, legal confirmation and verbal agreements. So thank you for bearing with me for that. Again, the purpose of this interview,

Mat Davis 07:16

Can you hear me well? I'm kinda..

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:18

I can. Can you hear me well? Okay, I don't need to move my microphone closer. You were low. Okay. So the key question that will frame this or the key questions that will frame our conversation are how have protests for racial justice, shaped your experience during the covid 19 pandemic? How has the pandemic shaped protest? And have these experiences changed the way you view the community and the nation? Those are the three overarching framing questions. But to get us there, I'm going to ask you some very specific questions.

Mat Davis 07:56

Is it ok if I'm kind of just taking notes to myself while we're talking?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:59

Absolutely. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

Mat Davis 08:02

I'm listening. Go 'head.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 08:03

So I'm going to ask you some background questions about yourself.

Mat Davis 08:08

Okay.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 08:11

So what are the primary things that you do on a day to day basis? For example, what is your job? What are your extracurricular activities?

Mat Davis 08:18

So mainly, I work in local food, for employment. So I either work at a restaurant or work at the farm, or I work at a place that does gardening or landscaping or something like that, that's usually what I do. My last place of like, full time employment was a gardening like a school gardening organization. So when COVID hit, and all the schools closed, they were saying, you know, we won't be doing gardening till you know, 2021. So I left, I left there, doing quite a bit of COVID response since early March, just before the shelter in place. So I was doing that part time while still working, you know, at the place I was working at. So I left there in April ended up leaving them in April, and just doing response work full time, pretty much just to just to, you know, just make sure that it was happening, honestly. So that's the last place I was employed on a day to day basis. I also have a, like a my own group that I lead, it's a human rights group, pretty low profile is not a public brand. It's called the Axiom Collective. And we do like neighborhood work and services. And so working with community centers and, you know, development corporations, different people, neighborhood associations and stuff like that. So that has been a stream of income of late, but that, you know, between COVID and cops, it's just been so much crisis this year. hasn't been like a regular nine to five schedule since since April. So that's what I do on a regular basis is activism this year, this year anyway, is activism, some type of service work, and then an odd job, or some type of contract for services through the group that I lead. So that's what day to day looks like this year, usually is like, some type of part time or full time, gig in food, and then community work. That's

what my usual looks like. So it's a little scattered this year. I have to follow up questions, you say COVID response, can you clarify what that looks like? And what that means? Well, it meant a lot of things at first, because we didn't know anything, and we were just kept in the dark for so long watching Korea go, you know, surge and flatten. Before we are even talking about it. They're they're surging and flattening as we are even considered, you know what I mean? So it was just so wild to be trying to read and watch news from, from other places to even get a scope of what, what could be happening. While not getting tested, about not knowing about testing. Same way we don't quite know about vaccines, we don't even know about testing yet. So, is this, can this thing really take you out if you're out here doing different things and trying to help the community? Are you putting people in danger? Are you? You know, so it looked like a lot of things, but mainly food, prescription runs, I've had to put it down into essential services, that's pretty much what we were doing was essential services trying to use, you know, social service approach, and this is the Axiom group I was telling you about. So, you know, we just took a social service approach to it as essential service. It was more, you know, food distribution, and kind of using facilities, churches, small grocery stores, you know, don't whatever we whatever made sense, in the places that would get hit the hardest, it meant setting up a dispatch for essential services, whether that's food, or prescription runs, or whatever. And there were other people who were doing it well, too, but there were very few people who were trying to figure it out. So I would say, the catch all term, COVID response pretty much just meant that. IT's how can you you safely, ethically, and, and, and, you know, reasonably, you know, what I mean? Like, also just like not pushing it too far, you know, reasonably respond to a pandemic, that you don't know, this, the virus could have mutated, and it could have started taking out people 40, you know, 40 and above. And then it's like, well, you know, we didn't know what was gonna happen. So, I will say that the response really looked like essential service done well. Good partnerships. And then that was kind of developed over a span of two months. So, not everybody was ready to react. And I think some people did well though. Thank you for that. Um, I am recalling that I failed to ask them. One other demographic question in terms of what is your age? I'm 29.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 13:21

Twenty-Nine. Okay. So you've talked about the primary things that you do on a day to day basis now? Can you speak to how those things have changed since the beginning of COVID-19? Like what were you doing before COVID-19 that is different than what you are doing now.

Mat Davis 13:38

I worked for a garden org company that did school garden. So I was in and out of 20 IPS schools in the spring, planting carrots and radishes and lettuce and you know, all the spring crop and just trying to make it makes sense with the students and trying to care about racial equity, and trying to, you know, make a really white organization not so white about, you know, doing work with IPS. Students talk about demographics, those students needed gardening in a different way. And they needed to receive in a different way. So that's what we were focused on. And we were trying to change this, you know, attitude and bias towards gardening programs as some kind of it had a little paternalism in it. So we were working through that. And by February, it was kind of like, Huh, huh. Started with the international travel. It was like, I can't go there. No more, huh. Wow, I can't go to Italy. Okay, okay. I cannot Okay. Okay. Can I go to Korea? Okay, so but now I can go to Greece. Oh, wait, you know me. So it was it was a lot of that going on. And then we started to say like, Oh, you know, this could mean you start getting

rescheduled like it started with just kind of like mundane stuff started to not be as accessible, or like, had to stop and like life doesn't stop in America ever. So it was kind of like "Stuff is stopping?" And then more and more more and more and more stuff stopped. And then the NBA stuff and everybody was like what's going on? That's pretty bad. I feel like that was that people were like, sports money. Is that what? So that was kind of like when the first kind of billion dollar industry I guess, they stopped and then entertainment stopped and it was people know it was on because they love celebrities and their celebrities were like, yeah, we can't work. So they were like, shit, I guess I guess I can't work either. So I felt like that was kind of the what was happening. And then, because for me, COVID started with shelter in place. That's kind of a distinguishing threshold for me. So, because then people would be like, oh, wow, okay. Okay, like my civil liberties might be impeded? Well, well, in the name of public health. I don't even care about health that much. Or do I? Or do I? Am I gonna die? Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, you couldn't just hashtag it away. You couldn't just tweet about he couldn't just, you know, have a Twitter beef. And, you know, let it trend and let it die down. You know me over a couple of news cycles. COVID wasn't going nowhere, and you didn't know whether you were going to die or not, right? Whether you were going to get sick or not. And what that really meant, right? You know, is this virus going to mutate This is an RNA, you know, virus. I mean, there's a flu vaccine every year, because the flu is different every year. Like it's how these viruses adapt, and live. And, and, and change us, you and me. So we didn't know how we were going to be changed by it. And so that's that kind of like on the advent of everything. That's what we're looking at. Right. And so how do you then care about public health enough? In a country that, you know, the people with all the money that should be paying taxes that have a public health care system, are putting it in the foundation's trying to do it through this Health Initiative, that health initiative? We don't have a public health system? I You know what mean? We don't have public health, maybe the VA is, you see how the VA got smacked? Because who's homeless? who's experiencing homelessness? Who's who's who's addicted? Who's recovering? Who's is veterans that who's out on the street, who's man, somebody who did two tours, somebody who did you know, I mean, somebody who got forgot. You what I mean? But that's our best public health resource. And mind you this is while the executives and the officials and the managerial staff of health and hospital is being actively exposed in the IndyStar, you know, about its treatment of senior living facilities. You see what I mean? That was a whole six story expose, a ithe IndyStar, uprooting your army, these inequities that already existed in public health, so it was just a perfect storm for Indy. You're here, you know, if you really look at it's like, we got all these hospitals, but yet we have no capacity. How do you got all this infrastructure, but you have no capacity for decent public service? decent public service. So you know, why, why are we watching, you know, Cuomo webinars, you know, from New York and be like, I wish I lived there, because I probably might not die, but yet they're spiking like him. It was just a Bizarro world. So before shelter in place, these are all the layers that we were dealing with. And that's what life was like before COVID. For us, you know, for me, whatever. Thank you very much for that very rich context. What issues have concerned you most about the pandemic about COVID-19? Um, the lack of public health, um, advocacy, and again, infrastructure. I would say that we have a lot of like for-profit health industry, very hospital-centered, health resources in Indianapolis; we are definitely a hospital town. But that's because we're in big pharma town, right. We're a health, like a for-profit health kind of haven, to be honest, right? You know, not just pharmaceuticals, even though that's a juggernaut in the health industry. We got Lilly and so on and so on. So many, so many, so many people, Pfizer, I mean, so many people are doing business here. Because, again, it's tax friendly, its corporate friendly, in very specific ways, you know, and that's why we have the, the, the, the amassed wealth and corporate

power we have in in the health industry is is because of the way we you know, look at it and so I feel like that is a... can you see me, uh, did I freeze up?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 20:21

You froze, but I think you're back.

Mat Davis 20:23

Am I back

Shonda Nicole Gladden 20:23

You're back. Okay.

Mat Davis 20:24

Good. My Internet's good. Okay, sorry about that it kind of froze. Can you, am I good? Yes, sir, you're great. Um, I think some of that can be a little bit of a mirage, right? Where it's like, well, if everybody gets sick, you know, Indianapolis got five hospitals? Do we? How do we how do you have five hospitals? And no ventilators? How do you have five hospitals? Isn't it? You know, I don't even I'm sure that there's more than five. But I'm just, you know, what is it? The public... do you get the same data around death? Do you get the same data around actual confirmed cases? Do you get the same data around outpatient care from a public hospital that you do a private one? These questions are so important. And there's no way to tease that out. And, and I say all that. Because we watch what happened with AIDS. I was not even alive. You know, me, I'm 29, I was 1991. You know, but let's look back and see what happened with AIDS, how little people cared, and how it got politicized once they figured out who was dying. And that's where we are. They have figured out, they knew that we would die. They knew how we would die. That's why we have died. That's why we have died the way we have. And I'm saying we as black people, as brown people, undocumented people, indigenous people, you see what I mean? We are dying. And so then it's like, also desensitizing people to 200,000 people dying. De-sen, like just drop your guard, drop your guard, like uh, we're going to only keep it to 80,000 people dying. Pearl Harbor was 45, 50, peop... You know, and we, every year, you know what I mean, every year, people got a whole saga movie about Pearl Harbor. You know, it's time to get patriotic when you talk about Pearl Harbor, but not COVID. Right? You know, that's why these projects are so important. Because this is the stuff you need to be saluting later. It's like, man, these are the people who are trying to tell stories, who were trying to do the work when we were having Pearl Harbor right here and in the house next to us when people are dying, because they're, I don't know, just here, right? You know. So because we don't have public health, we end up reinforcing all the racial inequities, all of the class disparities, all of these other social, you know, ways that we're stratified, just get exhausted and exaggerated. And, you know, they're doing hysterectomies on, you know, undocumented people. Because we're also just just traumatized and kind of shocked and not really able to respond to time. So I know these are long answers. So sorry about that. Absolutely no reason to be sorry. I am grateful for the length of your answer. I'm grateful for your answers. So please, don't feel the need to apologize. You said something that I want to revisit and that is the house next door. Can you speak a little about your neighbors? About your community? About what you are seeing happening around you in your neighborhood during COVID-19? Yeah, um, the Near East Side has not stopped gentrifying the Near East Side has not stopped doing developments, they have not stopped, they have still not stopped

building prefab houses that look like they're made of Legos, with all kinds of colors. And they're gaudy. And over the top and exaggerated, and not even marketed the same, but just built to keep making the point that we don't want you here. The people who exist here, we don't want you here. And it's also really a slap in the face because it's just like we're also dying in these low income communities, as they are continuing to take a property tax up, you know, people's homes as they're dying. People are dying, and they're like, finally, now we can get that house. You see what I mean is still business as usual hasn't stopped. I just think that's really amazing to me. That even in a time like this, the publicly funded I mean, this is the most public time that we've ever had to really reconcile with. This is one of those situations where, you know, even libertarians are like, Hmm, I do need some public health, right? You know, I don't, I don't want the government to control my bla bla bla bla bla, until there's a pandemic, right? So everybody's having to lean on the public. Because, imagine if the government wasn't there, then you'd be like, is Coca Cola gonna take care of me? is Lilly gonna take care of me? No, they're not. They're not gonna take care of you. Right? No one else is more accountable to you than who you're paying taxes to? Who you who should be, you know, you don't pay taxes to Coca Cola, you buy Coca Cola. And so Coca Cola will use you if you end up working for Coca Cola before Coca Cola takes care of you, you see what I mean? So there's no entity that can resolve this conflict? And who's more responsible to do so than your local government? You know, and so I feel like the local government, and HUD, and you know, we know who's running HUD, don't get me, your local development, Community Development Corporation, should stop. Should stop and have a moratorium on new development, a moratorium on the city, the Department of Metropolitan development should have a moratorium. You know what I mean? Like, this is why so much of that federal legislation that could have gotten passed, should have gotten passed. So that we didn't have to have this over exaggerated excuses about welfare, right? Where it's like, oh, people are going to have to pay this back. And, you know, these, like really tired tropes about American individualism and bootstrap pulling, and all this other stuff, where it's just like, some folks, they can't do anything with that 1200 bucks, and so many other countries, really got people through, really, genuinely got people through 2000, 3000, more, you know, I mean, more dollars than they would have had right 1200 dollars is just enough to be frustrated on what to do with it. That's just like, I can't do this. I can't do that. So what do I want to do with, you know, just enough to be frustrated, and so, but even that, that got some folks around, maybe not through, but around some stuff. So if you don't have a way to offset these, these things, with federal legislation, state stuff, it becomes even harder. So if your local government can't stop, if your city can't stop, if your city councilor can't stop, and take a stand, and say, let's have a pause to charter schools. Let's have a pause. Because if that's all coming out of the public pot, let's just take a minute, right? If this is coming out of, you know, the Department of Metropolitan development, let's take a minute if this is coming from the city, let's take a minute, right? We're not taking a minute, that's what I'm seeing in my neighborhood is, it's okay if these people die, and we're not stopping.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 28:16

So I'm taking a breath. I'm acknowledging that you have shared a lot in a short amount of time. So thank you. As you think about this pandemic, and other events that have happened in your lifetime, other big events, how does this pandemic compare? Is there another life event or a global phenomenon that you can speak to that compares to this pandemic in your lifetime?

Mat Davis 28:51

Hum. Uh, I feel like, it definitely feels like early 2000s right. It feels like you got the It feels like you gotta have a Gore-Bush election scandal thing coming, right? We're gonna have some super, way, messier, Florida, recount, cheat thing is gonna gonna happen. Y2K kind of mania. And then, you know, kind of 911 if I had to pinch them all together, I feel like that's the closest parallel, 2000 to 2001, is 99 to 2001, is if I had to pinch all three of those years together, that would be how March felt, is how, and then now is the worst thing I've ever experienced on any level, um, comparatively to anything. But I would say the way that this spring felt felt like Y2K hysteria that you don't really know why there's anything to uh, duh, duh, duh. But then there's also definitely a new world norms, new world, social, kind of order happened in the 2000s, right? Globalization and corporate power took on an entirely different stance, an entirely different posture, influence, reach, repression. Everywhere. You know what I mean? So, no, it's not Y2K, but there was definitely a shift. And Bush being president was a part of that shift towards that direction. Um, Dick Cheney was the Vice President, think about that. Dick Cheney was the Vice President. We think we think Mike Pence is bad, you know, and he's terrible. I mean, he's one of the worst vice presidents ever. Think about Dick Cheney, though, wow. You know, so, I mean, he was running Halliburton, he was destroying companies, uh, countries, excuse me. He was destroying countries, occupying them, not even going to war, occupying countries, destroying them. And then the same company was rebuilding the countries. And so that's who the vice president was, you know. So year 2000 was scary. And they cheated to get in. It was scary. It was scary. And then 2001, again, they shocked the hell out of us. You know. It was shocking. You know, terrorists from somewhere else. Those are acts of terror. Definitely, you know, in the name of retaliation and, and, now, you know, this forced, patriotism and all of this other restriction of people's civil, civil liberties, and all of this other kind of paranoia and conspiracy theories. I mean, think about it. When's the last time you heard people like, really hardline conspiracy theories? It was like 9/11. Right? When people were like, if you look at how the building is blowing up, you can tell it's an inside job. What? "The plandemic..." Like, I have not heard, you know what I mean. Like, that's the last time I heard like a conspiracy theory, like, explained at length, and like, really like documentaries behind it. And like, the last time I saw that right, was 2001. So if I had to pinch those three years together, especially 2000/2001, that's the closest to this. And I think that that was just the spring. What we seeing now, I've never know. And I hope we never do. I hope this is a turning point. Did I hear you say the plan-demic? Yeah, that's Yeah, yeah. And you unpack that, that word for researchers in the future? Yeah, sure. Uh, it's a, it's a phrase, just kind of like a colloquial phrase, you know, like a phrase that people putting in their conspiracy theory, docs, documentaries, you know, that they were spreading on Facebook and social media, we didn't have that in 2000. It's definitely not to the same degree that we do now. We have message boards, maybe, I mean, still spreading lies and stuff. But now it's just exaggerated. And it was on YouTube and Facebook. And it was just a little documentary called Plandemic, and I think people are already saying it. But basically it's like that the US government, it's an inside job. This is what the, you know, again, they were saying the same thing about 9/11. So and so they have these elaborate, really unfounded, and unwarranted, the critiques aren't unwarranted, that's fine, right? You know, critiques of institutions and their response is what we should be doing. But, the reasoning and the logic trains that they hitch themselves to and try to give, you know, easy, simple answers to really complex systems and questions. It ends up not helping people because it keeps us uninformed. And it keeps us talking about lies and mistruths and, you know, misinformation, and fake news and all these other things. While we are really trying to figure out what to do with our public health system, and what to do with our communities, and our loved ones. Are we having funerals in the front yard? Or are we going to, you

know, a funeral home like that's, that's those are conversations that we're, we're having. How are we going to build new norms and value systems after this, you know, crises? Because whether you think is a "pandemic" or not, it's still a crises. And so, I think that that's why it latched on because it was like, Oh, these are the easy answers, and this feeds my paranoia this feeds my anxiety, this feeds my depression, this feeds my fear. And so it's a, it's a, word to help people feed their fear behind, stuff that we really need to take a whole nother level of responsibility. And people in power need to take a whole nother level of accountability for. So, yeah, it's just a term to keep a conspiracy theory set of ideas going. Thank you for that, um, I want us to shift away from your personal and community context, unless there's anything else that you care to share. No.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 35:38

Okay. Well, let's, let's turn the corner and talk about racial justice movements, and Black Lives Matter. Could you share any thoughts you have about current movements focused on racial justice, such as black lives matter? And name any others that you care to name? Or would like to clarify at this time?

Mat Davis 36:04

Um, so so what are my views about the kind of current state of this movement for black lives? So named the movements? What are the movements? What are your thoughts on the movements focused on racial justice? I got you, um, I would say, I'd like to just kind of focus on the crises part. First, I think what's really interesting here is different. You know, we're calling this a civil rights movement. And I think if you look at the civil rights era, we kind of keep that fixed in time between the late 50s to early 70s, if you just kind of like budget into something in era, you know, they were fighting and getting certain things that were more about, that didn't really cost America much. It didn't really, it didn't cost them anything to let black people go, it didn't cost them anything to let black people shop at the mall. It didn't cost them anything to do anything with that. And, and then in the 70s, you know, they were people were more like, I don't even want to be a part of your system. We need whole new systems, we need whole new options. We need alternatives. We want liberation, we want, you know, these broader, bigger political aims. And then now I feel like, there's more of like a question behind Black Lives Matter, like, do we matter? There's a moral and, you know, conscience, you know, like a, an appeal. There's an moral and emotional appeal to America to say, do we matter? And I in this because we don't, right. And so then, and so we struggle, right. And I think that that's important for people to remember that we've kind of gone through different iterations. And it's good to compare and contrast, right? Because we also have to be aware that we're not the only ones who have ever tried to, to advocate for a black freedom struggle of some sort or another. I think what's really interesting about this one is meaning Black Lives Matter movement, or movement for Black Lives, you can phrase that those are the kind of the two definitive ways that I would phrase what's going on. Over the past eight to 10 years, it started to get branded into a hashtag by specific people. I don't always call those people, the leaders, I would definitely say that black women started and are the main advocates of this movement. For Black Lives, for sure. Ferguson was a particularly important moment, a lot of leaders from the Ferguson rebellion are what I would consider to be a lot of the folks who were important leaders. And so Trayvon Mike Brown, these were pivotal moments, Alton Sterling, another pivotal moment, you know, several moments to help us build towards this movement part. And so I think it's important that we remember what the aims are, and what the outcomes are. So sometimes I think we kind of get lost. And I and I don't attribute this to social media. I just think that this is an oversight on our part of how we're using

social media to do the hashtag activism. Right? Because, you know, BLM is also kind of a braided into this occupy approach, like a post occupy, again, like there's so many things, there's so many currents here, right, of how we get to this place in doing things this way, that, the mic check, bullhorn protests posted on social media, like there's a certain There's norms and there's a rhyme and a reason around how things are done. And it's, it's strange of that occupy, fight for 15 there's so many other kind of concurrent things happening that also influence, you know, be limbs approach to things. As a group, and as the hashtag spread. Ferguson was a big part of that, because then it was like, Okay, what does it mean to do this discipline? to resist state violence? I think then, then, it became a little bit more than just, can we fire the cops? Let's lift up this name. Right? let's fire cop, and kind of wet on the next person to die. Right? That's, there's kind of a disconnect there for everyday black people to jump in beside from kind of the college educated, and in white ally, type of folks who you normally see at our characteristic, you know, for being involved with BLM. I feel like, you know, Ferguson really say, Okay, this is it. This is about state violence, and what are we going to do to wrestle with state violence as a country? You know, I think a lot about you know, Nina Simone, and so many other people who talked about Mississippi, goddamn, you know what I mean, but it's like, Ferguson got down. Louisville got down right now, you know, there's so many got dams, you know, and those goddamn moments are so important. Ferguson was our first one. And I say, our first one, because I feel like it was for the country to understand that this is about state violence. So I feel like it's it's gotten, it's gotten more brand oriented as we've gone. And I think that now that there's a serious uprising, I think now we're having to wrestle with, how are we going to get organized? Right around a set of demands? I mean, I think that there's been a rebuke of the top down traditional leadership structure, black men in suits, taking a picture with Lyndon B. Johnson. And that being the movement, right, like, in fact, y'all aren't even wholesale united until it's time to take a picture with Lyndon B. Johnson is seen. So, you know, like, definitely reject that. Right? That's fine. But then what, what does this mean, is what 2020 is right? I feel like before this moment, especially Alton Sterling, and so many other moments between Mike Brown and now have said, This is what we are not. This is what we are not doing as a generation, as you know, people under 50 people outside of the baby boomer civil rights that, you know, this, this is what we're not doing. And I think that 2020 has now for so many activists, organizers, advocates, you know, so many other people to say, what does our organizations for the future look like? Right? What How does it function, because now you have, you know, different types of federal agents, infiltrating organizations trying to disrupt what's happening, because they are hearing demands about, you know, the appropriate defunding of the police. And then that being put back into public might be talking about public. Again, like we weren't giving so much to public safety, maybe we will have a public health care system. Maybe if they weren't Riot ready with tear gas that they shouldn't be using against citizens, maybe we would have that public health care system that we need. So that these recordings that you're doing on so tragic. And so that's what we're experiencing, that's what the movement looks like, to me. I feel like racial justice work means anti racism for white people, not just reading books, not just posting on social media. And then it looks like interpersonal, and institutional racial equity work for black and brown people and indigenous folks, and then we're gonna meet in the middle, because it's not enough to really explain we've gotten so social media is hashtag oriented, that we can't really critically think anymore. So things become real flat as a phrase. And so even when we listen to Malcolm and so many other, you know, a timeless political, politically clear voices in our tradition that people of color, right who say, black and people of color cannot be racist, right? That used to be a thing that we could generally accept, right? But now we hear that and it just falls flat. Even if people hear it just flat. They're like, Oh,

well, now I'm gonna kind of social media combat you in the comments about that, right? Or even if we're not online, that's just how people want to engage now. So the clap back, makes it hard to have dialogue around things that used to be assumptions right? Even if it was hard to hear, it would be like I get it. It's about power. You can be prejudiced, you can even be bigoted, but you don't have power. So maybe you're not a racist. So now we have to say stuff like, well, racism is white people's problem, because y'all benefit from it. So how about you do some anti racism? And I'll make sure that we keep this equitable and won't be in the middle. Right. And so that's what real sincere racial equity work looks like. I think the BLM has its limits. I think we have learning what the limits of BLM are from chapter to chapter, if they have chapters. How does this shape you know, now you're having to wrestle with like, why did the n double acp live so long? Yes. It's much more conservative. Yes. It's dated? Yes. It's Windows XP of social justice. Yes, we got it. But it still works. You can still click on the icons, you can still get on the internet. You could you see what I mean? Like, they had Ella Baker. Yes. She had problems. Yes, she left. They had Thurgood Marshall. They have, you know, I mean, you know, I mean, they had infrastructure. And so if we don't have like, organizations that prioritize us with infrastructure, not just hash tags, not just donations, not just bail funds, not just, you know, because we're doing a whole lot more than getting locked up. Right. So I need more than just a bill flat. And I think that people are pushing there. I think that people are understand it's not just about bad apples, and cops. And I think that we're getting I think we're getting further. I think this has been a great year, full of paint, but we're getting further. Thank you. And would you name these changes? No, I'm going to rephrase this question. So that I actually asked the question, How has the death of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor impacted the current movement moment in which we find ourselves? I think is, again, again, it just kind of shaped the the bad apples narrative once and for all, in a way that was really sobering. It just undeniable examples of you can't just fire the cops. You can't just charge the cops, we have to change the whole tree, we got to change the whole orchard got to reconstruct the whole thing. Because a lot of these murderers and officers are murderers, and then they call themselves officers are taking orders. Three officers 32 shots, didn't care who they was hitting. Those were the orders. wanton endangerment, you almost shot other people in other apartments. I'm gonna charge you for not putting them into her and putting them into him. Why is Kenneth Walker still alive? You should kill Kenneth Walker, because you missed him. I'm gonna charge you because you didn't shoot. That's literally what happened. Right? So if you if you say, let's go on a national campaign, and and create the most powerful hashtag ever. Let's put on the cover of Oprah Magazine. Let's put her in every single rap song. Let's put on a cover a Coca Cola. Let's put on the car. I don't know if you will. But you get I'm saying like, let's put her face and name everywhere. Everywhere, everywhere. And that hashtag is gonna do it. That one, that hashtag is gonna do it because we're putting all the celebrity power and influence in the Democratic Party behind it. That's what happened. That's what happened. All the king's horses and all the king's men for that's what happened in the in the local police, and one municipality said Nah. Wow. Wow. Wow. That's amazing. So it has its limits to try to fire the cops. George Floyd. That's probably the most just heartbreaking, complete uprising. And that's why I think is distinct between just a rebellion, right? Like the 100 day rebellion was incredibly inspiring for anybody who wants change in 2014. That was incredible. And 2015. I mean, like Ferguson was just a very important time in American history. It just, it just is, you know, and I think we're gonna look back on that and have to really reconcile with what we didn't learn and what we didn't, you know, some other things while to catch up to that we should learn in but I think that this now is the uprising because white people are ready. Right. So now it's like, there's a citizens rebellion with white people. They're ready to tear stuff up. They're ready to burn stuff

down. They're ready. You know what I mean? Over black lives and black bodies, being killed by the state. Okay. All right. All right. Let's go on rebellions. This is not new for us, maybe the rebellion downtown. You know what I mean? Like that was a very distinct characteristic, like, let's do it where white people are, right? That was very distinct. And so that with this kind of citizen, you know, white ally, anti racist, rebellion energy, kind of created this uprising that then inspired uprisings everywhere, right. And similar behavior and aims and demands everywhere. Very important. And that's why it's being called the civil rights movement. Because it's like, man, when's the last time something like this happened? The civil rights era, kind of that chunk of time we were talking about? So I mean, yeah, I felt like that's, that's. Yeah. I mean, that's, that's pretty much what we're getting from George Floyd is enough is enough, we will push this to a limit we haven't we haven't taken to, you know, places we haven't taken. And so then we see Let's burn down the whole Police Department symbolically, like just what that meant. And what that meant to see is like, man, are we gonna really change the police, when we saw the pictures of minion offices, you know, Fire Department on fire, on fire in flames done like they cannot go back in that building. They push out the window, that building is not, you can't go back in until they literally burnt it down. And then they abolish the police, the City Council, super progressive. Now a blue state just got a blue governor. Still, you abolish the police. You literally burn down the building, and cops are still getting off on bail? Cops are still fighting in court. Cops are still the bad apples. So what is our actual political aim? And we saw through trying to make sure all four cops got fired. But do we see through what it really meant to abolish one of the police departments? If that is the sincere demand that we have? Why didn't everybody around the country latch on to that part too? Right? I think we were kind of like, they charged them. That's cool. Let's keep protesting everywhere where there's not a cop charged, right. I felt like that was kind of that became the aim. As opposed to rest. Let's wrestle with the fact that their city council just got rid of their really need. I mean, because as opposed to just going to try to fire, fire some other cops or charge some other cops? What if the country would have really rallied around now? What about our city council? Now? What about our reconstruction, or abolition, or whatever that community is ready for? Right? You know, that's not what happened. I think that that's what we learned from Brianna. And that's what we learn from George, hopefully. So let's shift now to talk about the protests themselves. We talked about the protest movement and the precipitating events for the protests. But let's talk about the protests specifically. Have you attended any protest? Yeah, I work with an organization called the Racial Justice Alliance. And I'm really glad to be a part of it. And we are we're a criminal justice committee, that has been sharing demands since June, early June, with the community and we've been doing consistent protests, and will continue to into the fall. Since June, and I've also been a volunteer with the local BLM. groups and chapters have also worked a lot with the faith based community in their efforts to do different protests and shake demands, negotiate with City Council, some different things. So those are the things I've kind of done with the faith community. There are some things that have helped out with BLM directly. And then also, yeah, just just also, even aside from any organizations just trying to be responsible voice for people to talk to about the work of social change as they're trying to figure out what they're trying to do to support the movement or live up to their values or do more than post on Facebook or, you know, whatever they want to do. I just kind of like, try to be there here, especially here in Indianapolis. I just feel like there's not a lot of senior organizers or experience organizers to talk to and there's a lot of Petty activism that really just looks like online disputes about people's identity and other stuff. So you've mentioned that you are a member of an organized Black Lives lives matter movement chapter. Is that what I heard you saying? No, no, I'm not connected to an official chapter of

Black Lives Matter. They only have 14 across the state, or excuse me across the country. Gary is an official BLM chapter. I know them I've worked with them when they've helped out with John Reese stuff down here, Indy. So no, I'm not. But I've volunteered to help out. Like, we just did a Breanna Taylor rally and, you know, people from BLM were out there. And so yeah, we just try to create space for all groups to feel supported and, and make sure everybody is staying safe and clear about what the goals are.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 56:03

So in Indianapolis, there is not an organized Black Lives Matter movement chapter,

Mat Davis 56:10

I would say that there's a group named Indy 10. They've been coordinating things for six years, it was two black women who went to Ferguson for a couple days and came back. And we're excited and wanted to, you know, kind of keep things moving after Mike Brown. And they've done a good job of staying consistent on protests and putting pressure on police accountability. And so they've had some leadership struggles over the years, many organizations that are activists like kind of grassroots, it can be hard for a lot of reasons. And so, yeah, but I think that they're still they're still doing stuff here. And, yeah, we supported them in the past. And I think that they'll continue to, to do different things as they figure out what they're their, you know, role will be in the future. I want to probe just briefly a little bit deeper into in terms of what is your relationship then, with the Black Lives Matter movement. I would say I'm definitely a supporter advocate for all of the aims that you hear from the National Black Lives Matter movement, completely aligned with the organization, the movement for black lives. Also, a major proponent and the Racial Justice Alliance, the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance is one of the main advocates in Indianapolis for what's called the breathe act. Many people have not heard of the breathe act. And that is pretty much the kind of Civil Rights Act of our time, is the real way to deal with policing, the real way to deal with incarceration, the real way to deal with cash bail, the real way to deal with mass incarceration, the way to deal with, you know, surveillance and all these other criminal justice system issues that seriously needed not just be reformed, but reconstructed. And so we definitely support that national legislation. Because that's what the movement looks like for us is, with the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance, anyway, it's collective action. So if we aren't actually coming together, taking appropriate political action, in ways that make sense, and actually put pressure on gatekeepers and power brokers and elected officials, and also if you're not doing more equitable, you know, direct action, civil disobedience, nonviolent real protests, with real demands for institutions that you're doing political action on, so all of that's got to align. And a lot of times, you don't see that with, you know, kind of your, you know, smaller, you know, BLM groups. But I think that there are some national voices that help clarify that for people and we're certainly aligning with them. And we support the local BLM activity. But again, we are trying to change the entire department. And also, we care about the families of victims and trying to make sure that we can do things to make sure that the city has things in place other than just settlements.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 59:45

So thank you for that clarification. When you talk about participating in protest, for racial justice, with Black Lives Matter opportunities in the city, what can Tell me about what the protests look like,

Mat Davis 1:00:04

Ah, it varies, it varies. I feel like if again, if you just go to a BLM protest here, you're gonna see a lot of white kids. A lot of white college age people are going to show it. And I think that that's really unique to Indianapolis to. And, again, the groups that are behind the leadership of black lives matter here are that is, again, a distinct characteristic of the activity that you see here. It's a lot of Yeah, it's, it's uniquely white. And, yeah, and I think that you're going to hear a lot about good critiques of the police. And you will be able to, you know, you'll be able to exercise and, and your your rights and, and get out your frustrations and anger around police accountability. I think we go to Black Lives Matter protests here, with a with the Black Lives Matter group here. Because that's normally how they happen is like this group, or that group does one. So that's where I was kind of working between the faith based community who had a different set of aims had a different set of objectives. Along with labor, you know, labor unions had a role they wanted to play, but where do we stand? How did what did that mean for black and brown workers? You know, so there was all these different kind of groups, stakeholders trying to trying to create change. And so, you know, with the Racial Justice Alliance, we started hosting protests, and with the same demands and aims, that we've come up with together for criminal justice, but with all these different groups, right, people from BLM, people from labor, people from the faith based community, people from the legal side of life, people from, you know, the public sector. And let's all advocate together, so we try to make our protest look like the way the city looks. Thank you. So were you concerned about exposure to COVID-19, when you were participating in the protest? Because all of that COVID response work that we were doing with the central service, I was less worried I was a little bit more prepared, always had a mask. Especially as you I was continuing to kind of watch the research, masks became even more important. I didn't stop caring hand sanitizer, but, you know, that stopped being the main thing. I want to get everybody in the crowd to get hand sanitizers, like, please bring your own, but put on a mask. More than anything, please put on the mask, keeping mask in the car keeping mask, not just a bullhorn, but make sure you have those masks to know. So. Yeah, and just reminders. Having rallies like that really definitely changed the nature of how we did rallies, right, you had to have more of a park setting. To have people sitting around listening to a political message or a call to action or, you know, the facts about a case or the someone's personal story, you know, these are the things that are usually on the agenda for a rally, at least any one that's worth going to and you're just gonna be, you know, standing, standing next to somebody breathing on you talking about Yeah, yeah, you chanting on people. And that's not that's not a good look, right. And so, it just disrupts the whole way. You have to think about building morale to in a space. You know, it affects who you who you ask to come speak, it affects how you, you know, if you're trying to adapt, right, you can just kind of do your thing. But if you're really trying to be intentional and receptive to what people are wanting in, and being a good listener, hopefully as organizers, we're being good listeners and trying to speak to people's issues. So we had to do that more of a park setting in order to accomplish that. I think my computer's slowing down. No, don't let that happen. Do you need to plug in or anything before we continue? Yeah, give me one second. Okay. We're back? I'm here, Are you good? Yeah. I'm good. Okay, outstanding. So, um, we just talked a little bit about how exposure to COVID-19. And any concerns about COVID-19 exposure impacted how you did protests and rallies, and how you do protests and rallies. I'm going to shift a little bit more and talk about the the role of art and the movement for racial justice and our black lives matter. Are there artistic expressions that have been part of your activism and activism that you've participated in? And if so, can you tell us about those expressions? Yeah, I had an um, how can I put it, a really foreshadowing kind of experience earlier this year. I was a part of a production that was highlighting the life and work of Nina Simone. And it was

called Nina Simone, high priestess of soul. It was at the Phoenix theatre. Rest in peace, talk about archiving, you know, history and art and stuff. Brian Fonseca, you know, one of the founders of Phoenix and Fonseca theater recently passed, like last week, you know. So I just wanted to mention that for the record, because I'm doing this for an oral history thing. For the record, if you don't mind, since you did mention him, can you give some context? I know you said he's the founder. I heard you say that he passed away last week. Are there any other details relevant to the COVID-19? experience? Yeah. Yeah, I believe, I believe he did pass of COVID. And I think that it's just, it's just, it's just again, I think, you know, this is just showing us where our infrastructure is, you know, Ruth Bader Ginsburg just died. You know, RBG does die two's like, Whoa, that's a lot of political infrastructure gone. And I felt like when older people die in our communities, and we have the kind of institutions in and of themselves, or they are able to keep things going, in ways that we haven't learned how to do as a community yet we really suffer when they leave, you know, it was so the the the arts has really hurt when he's when he's gone. So, yeah, so he, um, he has been at the Phoenix center in a while, but it was just kind of like, you know, to have that production at the Phoenix to have to have that happen in the same year. Definitely. Yeah, just just had me thinking about it. So. But no, this this Nina production was was pretty heavy. For me, I'm just kind of speaking from my personal experience, I've seen a lot of powerful and profound art. And especially visual illustrations have been kind of, you know, mental health, little aids, as you're scrolling on Instagram or whatever is like, Man, look at the illustration, look at how it's drawn out the irony, look at how is, you know, showing us you know, how life is, you know, imitating art, you know, all this stuff. So, I've seen a lot of great stuff, videos, music, all kinds of great stuff has happened. But I think for me personally, this Nina production was particularly powerful because I've been organizer already. I've been a part of, you know, political and social movements already. But I just feel like mentally it just prepared me for this year in a way that I wasn't expecting it to. And her voice was so timely and uncanny and just spot on listening to her music, listening to her beliefs and her involvement in the movement and like, just the way she sacrificed so much commercial success, to be able to be who she was for black people, and I feel like, you know, she was a role model from a time about black liberation and black freedom struggle. And to be able to celebrate her life and tease that out in over a two hour production, you know, what I mean? Like this, like, saga of her life, you know, is like a real veneration of not only her work as an artist and her genius, but her views or values or struggle, or love or pain or joy, the full picture and also to be able to have collaboration with you know, Manon voice, who's a complete Maven, when it comes to Poetry prose form, it's so many things. So yeah, that was really powerful for me to be a part of that production. In this moment in this time, Justin Sears Watson has been a terrific, you know, doing terrific contemporary dance productions for a while and to be able to complement what he was doing with some short form theater myself, and, you know, her being the star, kind of the constant, numb kind of the compliment. That was really it was really profound, you know, it was really profound, to be able to work with them and be able to, to do that that way, and be black people who were creating black art that way, right? Because the 60s and 70s were complemented by the Black Arts Movement you had. Nikki Giovanni, you had, you know, Amiri Baraka, you had, you know, you had all these people who were giving you the, the, the, the compass, really right saying, like, I always talk about the poet see at first, right, you know, the the Baldwins, the witnesses, that people watching the people giving you the other way to say it other way to see it the other way to maybe do it, right. And they're putting in a poem that putting in a song and putting it in, you know, and it just makes it so it just softens all the parts that are hard to get about it and helps you check your ego a little bit to just do it. You know, and I think that like, what does it mean to just go do it this

year, it means to just go do a central service, it means that to lead racial justice groups, it means to leave here. I mean, it was more of a, an imperative for me. That wasn't like a moral thing, either. It was just like, No, you got to do this, because it's about to get extra political. So I felt like, it wasn't just like, celebrate this black woman's life. It was like, No, she sacrificed everything for black freedom. So you might have to, and your life can still be beautiful. Your life can still be full, and it could still be meaningful in one day, it could even still be celebrated. But make those sacrifices now. Or don't.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:12:37

Oh, and it looks like we're approaching the last 15 minutes of our interview. And I want to shift away from the conversation about protests and protesters unless there's anything else you'd like to share about protests, and the movement for racial justice during COVID-19.

Mat Davis 1:12:55

Nope.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:12:57

Okay, so I'm going to shift for the last 15 minutes or so to talk about your leadership and your future. How has your experience transformed how you think about your family, your friends, community, and society during COVID-19?

Mat Davis 1:13:21

Um, it makes me think about one weekend that was particularly painful. But it made it really clear and it's kind of like a lot of joy and a lot of pain at the same time. About a month ago, my Uncle Chuck, you know, well into his 80s you know, long life and you know, really accomplish still in kind of hospice in his own house, you know, bedridden in his own house, taken care of by his own children, because he took care of them, make sure they had a house, make sure it was actually passed down, you know, kind of like, did it right, you know, Grandview golden ghetto Purdue bread, when they did let negroes in kind of do you know, I mean, like, cut it, they hold that whole thing, you know, and it was like, there's him right. Um, and him passing. And then you got my cousin Alicia. He didn't pass a Colby passage, natural causes. And he went on sleeping. And I was like, dang, you know, my sister was the one who, who was over there taking care of him. She was just like, how am I gonna tell everybody it is it wasn't like, it was just more like, man, how am I gonna tell everybody? Uncle Chuck has actually gone right, you know? And so then, so there's there's him. And then there's my big cousin Alicia. Early 50s. Low blood pressure, you know, just a cool cucumber. You know what I mean? Never really. That's like, you know, like people have their different sides of their family. That's my mom sighs Mother chuchmah my dad Yeah, sighs, Alicia. And, you know, that's kind of the hood side, and this is the middle class side or whatever, you know. And so I grew up over here with my dad's family. And so I grew up with Alicia, I grew up, you know, I revere Uncle Chuck, and he, you know, was big on agriculture. I come from an ag family on, like, agrarian background, both of my family side, so they were dairy farmers. And so the fact that he stayed and Ag and landscaping and all that stuff, you know, that was kind of a big things always looked up to him, right. And then Alicia was just always just cool. You know what I mean? Just always cool. A loving cousin always looked out for us, you know, you know, put a little money in your pocket with some candy type it you know, I mean, like that cousin, you know? So, yeah, you know, and it was just heartbreaking to have her pass, you know, and she passed in her sleep, you know, I mean, and it

was just like them, we are developing new language, new norms around like, let's not talk about anymore. Like not, let's not give, let's give God the glory that's not talked about COVID kind of thing. And it's like, this, is that how we're going to continue to respond to this. When untimely death happens, for reasons that we know are related, like she had, it affected her heart or respiratory, like, it's all that we know what happened. We know when we didn't talk about it, though. She was in Atlanta. We didn't talk about it, because we knew, you know, just like, like, sometimes when you have people who are struggling with addiction in black families, it's like, well, you know, why pass? You know, why pass? It was out there. And we and then we, and then again, we come up with other Look, he's at rest now. I'm just glad he ain't out there in the streets. You know what I mean? We're developing that around COVID. Like, well, you know, you know, she didn't wake up. Boy, that's gonna be that's what we're doing. You know. So that's not judgment on my family. That's just an observation, because of your question. Um, and I have very, you know, typically black families on both sides. It's not, you know, we're not, we don't have like, super political views or anything like that. But, so, this weekend was about a month ago was pretty poignant, because she was in Atlanta, and they already had a funeral. But then they had the memorial for everybody in Annapolis to come to, and he passed earlier that week, and it all happened on the same weekend, his funeral. And, and her Memorial were in the same day, a couple Saturdays ago. So I went to both. And I just think it was really interesting to look at class. Mainly class, I guess you could say, I feel like that's really what's being exaggerated. It's racing class. Obviously, every gender abilities, color, size, everything is getting exaggerated 2020. But with the COVID thing, I'm just seeing, the way it's affecting my family is along the lines of class a little bit, and everybody's handling it well, and I feel really blessed about that. But, you know, my Uncle Chuck was able to have a beautiful funeral, at his own house, in his own front yard, with his whole family. City permitted. That's, that's amazing. You and me, my, my other side of my family, and you know, when we did that little bit more open mic style, a little bit more, you know, really well put, and well placed petty jokes about families, though. And you know what I mean, and it's just kind of like, I'm not sure if every family could do either one of those, right. And I felt really blessed to be a part of families who know how to handle ourselves, right? Where we don't have to be at a church in order to do that. And we can keep, we can hold ourselves together, hold our composure together, hold on, pull our resources together, you know, work cooperatively through grief, work cooperatively, through finance, the CO operative through you and me. And I just think that that that is how we need to start looking at our families. And this is how we're gonna get through this crisis, because it's gonna keep hitting us and our families more. But I'm not sure if everybody can have uncle Chuck's funeral. You know, I mean, in the front yard like that, whether you don't have the house, or you don't have the yard, or you don't have the relationships in your family to make sure nobody, you know, losing it, you know, at a funeral. you're less likely to do that in a church. You know, I mean, for a service that are paid, you know, you just lives less. There's so many more things that are different that we're going to have to learn how to do culturally, that I don't think that black Twitter is talking about yet. So so it looks like we're We're gonna have to just let the regular black people not on Twitter, figure that out and share it with everybody else. So. And that's how I see it affecting society to is like, what's happening with that small will happen across our cities and states and society to me.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:20:22

So let's think about them municipal leadership and government officials in your community. How have you seen them respond to the outbreak?

Mat Davis 1:20:38

I have seen them respond, you could say, with a lag. I think it was more in the beginning, it was more about what do we what do we do to be informed and keep people informed. And then from there, I think the lack of public service, because again, it's just a time where it shows you where your weak points are. It shows you where you don't have any infrastructure or don't have any capacity or whatever. And I think that Indianapolis, if you want it to be the city, that is trying to position itself as again, the way that they're just still developing neighborhoods, to get people to keep moving here. Or to keep business as usual rolling is disheartening when you don't have effective and improved or, you know, better support for public service. Not even just essential service, but just like making sure every trustee's office is supported with extra, you see what I mean, there's just so many other things that you can do other than, you know, helping people do prescription runs and food distribution, and through grants, and, you know, you know, things like that. You could also just make sure that again, like there are certain moratoriums, and there are certain things because what this real, we all realized is our mayor, and our governor are the most important people during a crisis. You can't handle all of this legislatively, because you got to make decisions. So who makes decisions, the executive branch of the local government makes the decision. So whatever the governor kind of lays out, the mayor within his jurisdiction is trying to make it make sense. Park said, specifically Joseph Hoggsett specifically could have made so much more make sense, especially in a town with so much health infrastructure to have way more capacity to actually do not only essential services, but more strategic initiatives from the city to make it make sense in a town that has a pretty small population, considering it's the size of the city. Now a lot of stuff is decided by the state legislator, understand that. But during the crisis, the executive, you know, aspects of our local government have way more influence. And that was abundantly clear that Joseph Hoggsett did not want to use it. In ways that would have been more substantial. It was just a lack of response, if you asked me.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:23:45

So you've answered the follow up question I have, which was what would you like to see from the leaders? And some of your response? Is there any additional clarification that you'd like to share in terms of what you would like to see from the leaders?

Mat Davis 1:24:01

Um, I would like to see a better, more concerted effort to have public resources and infrastructure be used for public service during a crisis like this, like you're not using everything that you have. You're not spending everything that you have. You're not using everything that you have. Spend everything you can use everything that you have, right. So axiom worked with Indigo through March and April, and then on into June and July, to do essential services using the open door coach buses that they were not able to use anymore because they couldn't transport talk about exposer like they couldn't transport seniors and disabled people to the same degree. In the same way, and so we were like we can use these busts, right? And then we're all in the news. And that's fine. That's fine. Please highlight great stories that are doing great stuff. That's awesome. And I think that we did quite a bit we can, I can show you the numbers on that we did quite a bit of great essential service, particularly during shelter in place that was COVID. Safe, following all the CDC guidelines, social different practices, and also just very disciplined about sterilization. I think that was the other thing that people were like, these young black

men over here are doing a really good job of adhering to these public health guidelines. So I think that that was what was distinctive about our North near Northwest efforts and initiatives that we were doing. But why did we have to come and do that? Why wasn't the city already doing this with public health professionals? Right, we had to become ad hoc public health professionals. And so you know, and synthesizing CDC guidelines in order to help other people across the state or across the city, do better response to because they were like, Oh, I saw you in the news. Can you help me out? Right. Same with the MLK center, and so many other people were just doing great work. And then we were sharing best practice. But we were left in the dark without the resources of the Public Health and Safety Department of Indianapolis. Right. Why is that the case? Why is that the case? Right? There's the Why isn't there like a, like, I've always imagined a city kind of up underneath the Public Health Department, with the City Office, having some type of liaison coordinator that works with volunteers who are trained in public response. And we have a collective handbook that we use to I mean, these are things that we've tried to explore and proposal axioms, I'm just kind of giving you a point of reference. But why don't we have that? Why don't we have that, you know, we have a emergency preparedness, you know, so there is no community emergency response team for public health, in a straight ahead, pandemic ready way. Right? That's alarming, that was alarming for us that we did not have professionals to reach out, we got to have that. So you so spend, what money that you forgot that you had or you that you know, that you have on supporting that person. So the community can have something because as we were doing that, I really would have wanted to reach out to kind of like a mayor's neighborhood advocate with the city that have been there in different parts of the city, they need a public health person that way.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:27:52

And so public health has emerged as an important concept throughout the conversation today. So thank you for landing there as part of that last conversation around leadership in the city and what you would like to see. And I last few minutes, we have it looks like maybe about three or five minutes remaining. What do you imagine your life being like in a year from now? Personally?

Mat Davis 1:28:26

I'm trying to do extensive research on on the vaccine, having good public dialogue about the vaccine. I hope in a year we are having good public dialogue about the vaccine, why other people have taken it or not? Or whether we have won or not. I just want there to be fruitful, non conspiracy theory, blah, blah, blah, about the vaccine. And hopefully, again, trying to wrestle with how can we reconstruct a, the way that we do policing and public safety in the country. That's where I want to be in a year and hopefully getting a little bit more sleep.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:29:17

Okay, then also five years from now?

Mat Davis 1:29:21

I'm looking back on five years from now, I want to be looking back on this year.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:29:31

And looking back on this year, what does that look like? What does that mean?

Mat Davis 1:29:35

I'm not gonna know what that means. Because hopefully five years from now we've tried to accomplish all these things that we're setting out now. And hopefully we're saying okay, here's where we are evaluating that and looking back and being like, you know, what led to this, you know, I tried to do that every five years. So that's kind of a cop out answer, but it's true.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:29:55

It's an answer. Ah, last three questions. Knowing what You know now what do you think that individuals communities or governments need to keep in mind for the future? Which you've just pretty much clarified in your previous answer.

Mat Davis 1:30:10

Executive leadership that strong and responsive and strong public health systems and response.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:30:19

Is there anything else that you would like us to talk about?

Mat Davis 1:30:23

Hmm, no, I really appreciate all that. Oh, the other thing with the leaders, to keep in mind those mayors and governors is also to get ready to start the political project of reconstructing the police. Fundamentally, you're not going to be able to align community and in law enforcement relationships, it will not happen. It will not happen until law enforcement is different. So until we have a police department that's view more like a school district, and has a board over it. We're not going to get where we need.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:31:10

And lastly, who else should I be interviewing?

Mat Davis 1:31:16

You should interview Alexis Tardy. She is the co chair of the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance. She's a faith based organizer from Indianapolis, who spent years in St. Louis and Ferguson after the rebellion. She was there for the rebellion. And we're lucky enough to have her back in Indianapolis as of like, last year, early this year. So I'm really glad to be able to lead the initiative with her. I will also say I'm just kind of naming people that I work with. I would also say talk to Nigel Long. He has a really interesting perspective on things. I work with some Oh, Nigel and Alexis, those are people that work with some kind of bias. Maybe Nigel long is who I was doing the North near Northwest, near Northwest COVID response with, he can give you a much more detailed explanation of everything we do. I'm just so tired between these double crisis, I can't even get into everything. But he's Yeah, he's a phenomenal young leader who has really just kind of come into his own when the community needed him. And that's very rare to to see. It's very rare to see in young leaders to say, now I'm needed by community. And this is when I'm stepping into my leadership that's very rare. So maybe him. Lastly, I always say, let me think of somebody else that I don't work with on something or some level. Oh, I would say he just left the city. I don't, I don't know him. I don't know him. But maybe Paul Babcock, he just left the city. He was with

the public health and safety. It's up to all the pressures. And he was the one who would be on the hook on calls and all this other stuff. So he really wanted to know who was dealing with how the sausage was getting made. I would definitely talk to him. Yeah, had a couple of emails back and forth who didn't do the thing. But you know, he was so busy, we couldn't even talk. So, I would say that and maybe, uh... no, that will be it.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:33:38

Well, I want to thank you for this interview. It is now 11:20am on Friday, September 25 2020. Again, I am Shonda Nicole Gladden I have been interviewing Matt Davis, based in Indianapolis, Indiana for the COVID-19 oral history project. I'm going to turn the recording off now. Thank you