



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



Oral History Interview

with

Lois Kebe and Allison Silberberg

Interviewer: Francesco De Salvatore

Narrator: Lois Kebe and Allison Silberberg

Location of Interview:

Lloyd House, 220 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314

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Transcriber: *Louisa Caldrony*

Summary:

Lois Kebe and Allison Silberberg discuss the pilgrimage they took to Montgomery, Alabama as part of the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project and how the city can address its past and intentions moving forward.

Notes:

For this interview, Allison Silberberg and Lois Kebe were in conversation with one another. They asked one another questions that they had decided upon before the interview. The interviewer was present to ask any additional questions if needed and to operate the recording equipment.

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General	Equal Justice Initiative; pilgrimage; affordable housing; retribution; slavery; racism,
People	Bryan Stevenson; Mr. McCoy; Mr. Thomas; Joann and Linda Bland; John Lewis; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; Deacon Alton Wallace
Places	Montgomery, Alabama; Selma, Alabama; Market Square; Edmund Pettus Bridge; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Del Ray; King Street; Chinquapin; Fort Ward Park

Introduction

Lois Kebe [00:00:00] Good afternoon, Francesco. My name is Lois Kebe. I'm 75 years of age. Today is November the eighth, 2022. And I'm at the Lloyd House getting ready for my oral presentation.

Allison Silberberg [00:00:21] I'm Allison Silberberg. Nice to join you, Lois, and to see you again. I'm 59 and it's great to be here in Lloyd House on November 8th, 2022.

Initial interest and involvement in the pilgrimage

Lois Kebe [00:00:36] I think this is an amazing opportunity and I think it's great that we can talk about our experiences with the pilgrimage that we went on in early October. Allison, I've seen you on several political at several political events and around town. I know that you are our former mayor. How did you get interested first in the pilgrimage or how did you first get introduced?

Allison Silberberg [00:01:03] Right. Well, that's a great question. While I was mayor, I received a letter from the Equal Justice Initiative. It was either 2016 or early 2017. It was either from EJI [Equal Justice Initiative] in general or from Bryan Stevenson. I'm not sure now, but in the letter, it described the two lynchings and in the late 1890s, right near City Hall, and I didn't know anything about it. I love history. I, I constantly read about history, especially in our city, and I didn't know about it. And I brought it to the attention of the city manager and city attorney and senior staff, and no one in the room knew about this unthinkable tragedy, double tragedy. So, we I said, Well, we need to find out if this is true. At this point, EJI [Equal Justice Initiative] did not really exist in terms of the buildings that we now have seen in the National Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama. So, I just have to say, being part of the pilgrimage with you and everyone over 160 Alexandrians, it's so moving to see how things have come full circle now, because when I was mayor, we began the process. We committed to the Equal Justice Initiative that we would work with them and do whatever it was that was that we could do not only to acknowledge the unthinkable, horrific tragedies, but lynchings, but in addition to honor the lives of Mr. McCoy and Mr. Thomas, to build community support for this effort, but also look at ways that we can engage the public moving forward, which we'll discuss. And so, I was honored to be part of it. And and it was a life changing experience to go to Montgomery. And I will never forget it. And but tell me about for you, Lois, what led you to.

Lois Kebe [00:02:55] Absolutely.

Allison Silberberg [00:02:56]. And so, I was honored to be part of it. And and it was a life changing experience to go to Montgomery. And I will never forget it. And but tell me about for you, Lois, what led you to.

Lois Kebe [00:03:18] As for me, I think that I first heard through social media, I think maybe on Facebook or something, I might have seen some kind of advertisement about what they were going to have at Market Square, because they did have a couple of commemoratives about the lives of Mr. McCoy and Mr. Thomas. So, I attended those and was very impressed. They were very moving. There was a lot of dignitaries there. There were people from the clergy and there were also witnesses from actually people that portrayed some of the awful events that happened to these two men. So, it

started at Market Square and I just followed the events and eventually found out that there was going to be a pilgrimage to Montgomery. Basically, Montgomery wasn't on my bucket list of places to go. I never wanted to go there, but I am so happy that I went there and the E.J.A, when we were at the Legacy Annex, our first just going in and seeing the signs about slavery and poverty and then talking to some of the dignitaries and having the speakers and the people from Alexandria, the mayor making the proclamation and the transfer of the soil. I found that very moving. Very moving. And I just want to make sure and I've asked several people that it's not just symbolic, that, you know, we're not just going through the motions, that there's really some intent that there is there's an objective. There's going to be something positive to come out of this. And that's like a hope that I have. But yeah, I got I got in touch through social media, which is our great medium.

Visiting the EJI [Equal Justice Initiative] Legacy Museum

Allison Silberberg [00:05:12] Right. And you're wearing I just noticed the sweatshirt. I didn't notice this before. You were wearing the E.J.I. sweatshirt.

Lois Kebe [00:05:18] This is from the museum. This is from the legacy museum. And this is their symbol. It's a broken chain.

Allison Silberberg [00:05:24] That's right.

Lois Kebe [00:05:24] It's a broken chain. So, yeah, I got this in the in their store. So, I took a little piece of them back with me. That museum. I don't know. I don't know. We're kind of jumping the gun but that museum. Was, it was, it was sad. It was impressive. It was overpowering. When you first go in and you see the two, three story display of just just the ocean, the ocean waves, it it you're automatically sucked in, taken in. You become a part of the experience. Then you walk and see the skulls and and it's almost like you're on a slave ship and and you see the half bodies, and and it just reminds you of how terrible it must have been for a group of people to be transported and taken from their land to a place where they don't even know they're going. Some of them didn't make it. But that journey from Africa to the United States, you almost went on it by going through that museum. As a matter of fact, I could not go through the whole thing. It was just too overwhelming. It was too big. It was too in your face. It was much too sad for me. But back to the Legacy Annex where we were.

Allison Silberberg [00:06:47] Well, if I just let me say, I think that that room with the ocean in the beginning where they say 12 million were transported by ship, they were transported in the most horrific way. And so those waves, you're automatically thrust, as you said so eloquently, you're thrust into the moment where you, any person, you are, you are these folks who, through no fault of their own, are enslaved and put in chains and locked into the bottom of a ship. And tons of them did not survive the voyage. It's an enormous number. This was really legalized mass murder, is what it was from the time that they were taken on to the ship, to the point where they were in America, to the point where they were the lynchings from 18. And of course, the statistic that they use is so shocking, that for over 4000 men, women and children who were lynched between 1870 and 1950. Well, we know that young Emmett Till at age 15 at most, that was in the mid-fifties. So even if we say over 4000 between 1870 and 1950, that doesn't include the thousands of unknowns. That doesn't include the Emmett Tills and the unknowns in the fifties and even the early sixties. And, it was overwhelming and upsetting, the Legacy Museum. I had to go back the next day.

Lois Kebe [00:08:28] I couldn't finish. You went back?

Allison Silberberg [00:08:30] I went back the next day.

Lois Kebe [00:08:31] Did you? Yeah.

Allison Silberberg [00:08:33] Because it was.

Lois Kebe [00:08:34] It was moving.

Intent going forward after the pilgrimage

Allison Silberberg [00:08:34] It was beyond words, right? It's. And it. You asked, I think, one of if not the most important question, I think you asked one of the most important questions is like, what is the intent going forward?

Lois Kebe [00:08:48] Right.

Allison Silberberg [00:08:48] And one thing that I would suggest is that it's the phrase never again. That we have to make sure that.

Lois Kebe [00:08:57] But it comes in other forms. I think that, you know, they don't lynch anymore. I remember as a child going to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and I saw the signs, colored signs, you know, there actually was signs where colored people could drink water from this fountain, not from that fountain. You could go in this door. You couldn't go out that door. And some people were saying to me, that is a lynching tree. So, in my, in my lifetime, there's been lynchings. You know, so, and now there's no no longer lynchings, but there's killings, you know, the police brutality, and there's other ways that they still get black lives. Black lives do matter. But I think it's important and I acknowledge and thank the city for the fact that they have come to grips with and acknowledge that it even happened because for so long they swept it under the rug or they didn't acknowledge that it happened. Just just to say, yes, it did happen and we're sorry. I think that's a step in the right direction. And the pilgrimage was too. But, I'm just not sure where we go from here.

Allison Silberberg [00:10:18] What would you like to see if you could wave a magic wand? How do you feel that Alexandria is telling this narrative, but also in general the narrative of the African American experience in terms of our city? How could we do better but also going forward? How would it's sort of a two part question, but.

Lois Kebe [00:10:42] You know

Allison Silberberg [00:10:42] How we're doing, but how in general could we do even better, in your opinion?

Lois Kebe [00:10:47] I know in the late I think early 2000s, I was a board member for the Affordable Housing. And I was so interested in affordable housing for the city. I know for a fact

that most black people have moved out of the city or been moved out of the city. You take Delray, which is a beautiful community, that used to be black. All around Metro right here, King Street. That was a black area. You talk about the Burke, even the commons where Giant is. That was a black enclave. Thousands of black people have been moved out of the city, and I don't know. I was on the Affordable Housing Committee. I sat on that board for five years, and eventually I realized that Alexandria is not really interested in affordable housing. And as a matter of fact, rather than build more, they've taken more away. They've actually demolished affordable housing.

Allison Silberberg [00:11:49] Well, we. I hear what you're saying.

Lois Kebe [00:11:52] So, yeah, you know, from the perspective as being a mayor, but you know, for a fact that it has, it is they're, they're really not interested. And now what they're moving it to is they say, well, we want affordable housing for police and for fire, you know, the people that work for the fire department stuff. But that's just making rich people richer. Those people. I mean, what about the people that have been dismissed and and that have been taken, their houses have been taken away from. What about them? I don't, I just don't understand it, but. I think we're a little off topic.

Allison Silberberg [00:12:27] That's okay. That's okay. So housing, though. To your point, I think you raise a really great point because throughout the country, one of the ways and Bryan Stevenson tries to talk about this not only in the museum but in his book, etc., and the narrative, which is that slavery ended at the end, officially ended at the end of the Civil War in 1865, but.

Lois Kebe [00:12:55] It still exists today in a different form.

Allison Silberberg [00:12:58] It morphed. I always say it morphed.

Lois Kebe [00:13:00] Right.

Allison Silberberg [00:13:01] It changed. But it, but one thing that happened is that our country tragically created banking laws so that African-Americans couldn't get access to capital.

Lois Kebe [00:13:15] Buy the homes that they owned.

Allison Silberberg [00:13:15] They couldn't get access to capital. To start a business their interest rate would be higher.

Lois Kebe [00:13:21] Right. Well, they redlined them too.

Allison Silberberg [00:13:22] Too, but also the redlining. Those things have officially ended as of, whatever the sixties and seventies. But, but still we have to your point, I think we've come a long way, but we have a long way to go.

Lois Kebe [00:13:38] Well, the point that I'm trying to make is slavery and and lynchings and all of these things that they have done towards the black man and woman in this society still exists, it's just changed. And look, it's a different it's a different type of slavery. It's a different you know, instead of lynching people and and putting them on trees, they they kill them, they stifle them, they they still do that in one way or another. And that's the sad truth. And now they're you know, I don't

know if there's ever going to be a retribution and how do you pay back and who do you pay back? Do you pay back the descendants of the slaves or do you just pay back every brown person in the world, you know, who really didn't have anything to do with it and didn't really you know, they didn't really go through it. I every day because of the color of my skin. I mean, to this day, I might go to the store and be treated differently. Well, come on. You know that. I mean, you know, it's just a fact of life, and it's just it's never going to change, I don't think. I don't see it changing in my lifetime. But we have to keep hope alive.

Allison Silberberg [00:14:48] Did you? Well, speaking of hope, did you feel that the the president winning, President Obama when he won? I mean, didn't you feel great? I felt a great deal of hope.

Lois Kebe [00:15:01] Oh that was great.

Allison Silberberg [00:15:01] That was I felt.

Lois Kebe [00:15:02] That was great.

Allison Silberberg [00:15:03] That inauguration. I thought that was tremendous.

Lois Kebe [00:15:06] Yeah. Who would have thought in our lifetime that we would have a black president.

Allison Silberberg [00:15:10] And he and Mrs. Obama were so perfect in their roles, I felt.

Lois Kebe [00:15:13] Yeah, eloquent.

Allison Silberberg [00:15:14] Right? And they got so much accomplished. But, but I think I share your concern that it seems that I mean, we've lived through this period and we're living through it now, but there seems to be clearly an increase of hate groups and political extremism, sort of a backlash, not just racism, obviously, but also, you know, a rise of anti-Semitism, a rise of hate across the board in our country. And we saw that where but a lot of us went and marched at the height of the COVID pandemic after the murder of Mr. Floyd.

Racism in the present

Lois Kebe [00:15:58] Absolutely. And that, that turned the whole world around. And I was so glad that people came together for that one, cause they saw the brutality. How do you just murder a man for no reason and to see that right in? I mean, I think the whole world at one point came together. But as far as racism, racism does exist. And people that say it doesn't, they're just they're living in a, I don't know, fog. As far as this pilgrimage goes, is concerned. Three times I was confronted with racism.

Allison Silberberg [00:16:33] During the thing.

Lois Kebe [00:16:34] During these events. One.

Allison Silberberg [00:16:36] Oh, no.

Lois Kebe [00:16:37] The first one was at the annex. The Legacy Annex. I was sitting there, actually, I hadn't been seated yet. There was long tables, long tables. And the table that I was getting ready to sit at had a sign that was reserved. So, the, before the sign, the seats in front of the sign were reserved. The seats behind the sign were not reserved. So, I sat immediately behind the sign. I sat there and everybody came in. We were getting ready for the event and one of the event people said to me, "Do you mind moving down one seat?" And I said, "No, I do mind." And the reason that I minded is what that was saying to me is, now I was not sitting in a reserve seat. I was sitting in a open seat.

Allison Silberberg [00:17:33] Regular seat. Yeah, like I was.

Lois Kebe [00:17:33] So what that said to me is you aren't important enough. I want your seat. I want to give your seat to somebody else. So. So I felt some kind of way, you know, I just felt some kind of way. So that was the first, I don't think you know if I was white, or if I was a man, that anybody would ask me to move. And I don't think it was appropriate for anybody to ask me to move anyway, because I was not in a reserve seat.

Allison Silberberg [00:18:01] Right.

Lois Kebe [00:18:01] So I think that was some form of racism.

Allison Silberberg [00:18:04] I'm so sorry to hear that.

Lois Kebe [00:18:06] That's okay. And then. After what was the program, the dinner that we had?

Allison Silberberg [00:18:12] Oh, the telling?

Lois Kebe [00:18:13] The telling dinner, after the telling dinner.

Allison Silberberg [00:18:15] That was amazing.

Lois Kebe [00:18:16] It was beautiful. It was so beautiful. But after that dinner the next morning, three of the event staff sat me at a table and said to me, I was taking pictures because I love to take pictures. They said, "Lois, I don't want you to take pictures anymore, because during the event you told one of the the high school children that you could show them how to pick cotton." That doesn't even make sense to me in the first place. And first of all, I don't know how to pick cotton. I'm from the Midwest. I grew up in Ohio where corn is grown. I've never been in a cotton field. But I was yet accused. They came to me and they lied on me and said that I said. I never said that. I never told a child that I would show them how to pick cotton. But somehow that was the reason they didn't want me to take pictures anymore. So, to me, that was discrimination and it was a lie. And then the third one, I told you about it because I wanted a late check in. You know, we were, we were, I wanted a late checkout because that day, Monday, our flight doesn't leave till five. So, I wanted to go as late as I could, stay as late as I could in the hotel. So, I asked the hotel person, "can I get a late check out?" And she gave me one. So, then I was thinking, now I have a friend, Jean. Jean is white. I'm going to ask Jean to ask the hotel person the same question. Can she get a late checkout?

Allison Silberberg [00:19:50] But you did get one, right?

Lois Kebe [00:19:51] I got one, but Jean's late checkout was an hour later than mine.

Allison Silberberg [00:19:58] Oh.

Lois Kebe [00:20:00] So so the white person got, say she got 2:00. I got 1:00. Slight difference, but it's discriminatory. If you're going to give late checkout, give everybody the same time.

Allison Silberberg [00:20:12] That's right, fair treatment.

Lois Kebe [00:20:13] So. So, this is three examples of how I face racism every day. And, you know, it's just. It's just the card I'm dealt with. Um. It's just.

Allison Silberberg [00:20:25] I am so sorry.

Lois Kebe [00:20:26] You don't have to be sorry. It's not your fault. You don't have to take responsibility for it.

Allison Silberberg [00:20:31] Well no, but I didn't recall. Someone asked me about the late checkout thing, and I said, it's too late for me. You know, everybody took all the late checkouts. I just dropped my luggage with the desk and picked it up at the end of the day. But I didn't even know that was an option, frankly. So, I was completely oblivious to that. But I'm just. But regardless, I am sorry to hear that. I didn't know about the thing that happened at the telling. I thought your photographs are remarkably.

Lois Kebe [00:21:05] I put them on Facebook and I shared them. Thank you. And I'm going to share others with you and anybody that wants to see them. And, you know, and then the fact that I was asked to move, it's like, how do you ask somebody to move their chair? Why would you even do that? We're all guests. Everybody should be treated equally. That's the way I feel. And why would you even ask somebody to move? Things like that, I can't even comprehend. I don't even understand.

Allison Silberberg [00:21:33] I don't know.

Lois Kebe [00:21:34] But, but the trip itself was, it was miraculous.

Visting Selma

Allison Silberberg [00:21:39] How about when we walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma? To me, that was an astounding moment that I'll never forget. And to think back, they knew that when they crossed over and you can't really see on TV.

Lois Kebe [00:21:58] But the crest, once you get up to the top you can see down.

Allison Silberberg [00:22:02] You can see down, so you know

Lois Kebe [00:22:03] And Joann Bland talked about that so much about. No, her sister.

Allison Silberberg [00:22:07] Linda.

Lois Kebe [00:22:08] Talked about that.

Allison Silberberg [00:22:09] Right. The, the eyewitness accounts that we were able to hear right during the trip and right before we crossed over the bridge, all of us were in tears, right?

Lois Kebe [00:22:21] Absolutely.

Allison Silberberg [00:22:21] And then, and then walking arm in arm two by two over the bridge. And I was fine with the fact. I mean, at first, we were supposed to walk where the cars were, but I thought walking across on the sidewalk was totally fine.

Lois Kebe [00:22:35] People kept saying about how there were bodies in the river.

Allison Silberberg [00:22:41] Well, so the driver of the bus that we were on, and I think you and I might have been on the same bus, he said that he asked a friend, "how many bodies do you think are in this river under the Pettus Bridge?" And the person, who's lived in Selma forever, and multigenerational family said, "Oh, it's endless, it's countless." It's so tragic.

Lois Kebe [00:23:03] What? They just threw people in the river? I mean, I don't understand why.

Allison Silberberg [00:23:08] Because people literally.

Lois Kebe [00:23:11] You just dumped the body in the river?

Allison Silberberg [00:23:12] I think that people you know, the phrase is that they they were killed and without notice and that they were missing.

Lois Kebe [00:23:21] They made it sound like there were thousands of people down there. It's like, well, they need to dredge it, you know. I would like to know, is there?

Allison Silberberg [00:23:29] Well, those bodies tragically were... Yeah, but. But it's crossing that bridge arm in arm. All the generations of our group from young, from very young to people who are very, you know, certainly retired. And some with canes and walkers and, and that we crossed together. It was beyond words, emotional, certainly for me, for you, for everyone, right? And to think that, John Lewis

Lois Kebe [00:24:06] That's exactly what I was gonna say.

Allison Silberberg [00:24:07] 25 years old.

Lois Kebe [00:24:09] The steps that we took were the same steps.

Allison Silberberg [00:24:11] They were the same steps. And that Joanne Bland and her sister, Linda. And that they knew and as they come over the crest. And then that, you know what they saw at the bottom of the bridge?

Lois Kebe [00:24:20] They saw the dogs, they saw the horses, they saw

Allison Silberberg [00:24:23] State troopers.

Lois Kebe [00:24:24] Billy clubs, state troopers.

Allison Silberberg [00:24:25] And they knew they would get hurt or killed.

Lois Kebe [00:24:29] Right.

Allison Silberberg [00:24:29] And yet they they prayed in silence.

Lois Kebe [00:24:32] They prayed. She said they were prayed. But they moved on.

Allison Silberberg [00:24:35] Right. But the fact that we were walking in those footsteps.

Lois Kebe [00:24:39] Yeah. That was the amazing part. That was, you know. And another thing that struck me was Selma looks like 1960 Selma.

Allison Silberberg [00:24:48] That's right.

Lois Kebe [00:24:49] And I think even if they get money, they should never change it because it looks like a set. It looks like something out of the movies. Honest to God. It looks like a step back in time.

Allison Silberberg [00:24:59] The grave poverty in that city.

Lois Kebe [00:25:01] Oh, you can still see it. And even when we went over to George Washington Carver. To the, to the projects.

Allison Silberberg [00:25:07] Mm hmm. The public housing, the area.

Lois Kebe [00:25:11] Black people. It's like my people. I honest to God, sometimes it just makes me so sad. The. When I don't know the poverty and, you know. Just some of them.

Allison Silberberg [00:25:25] The poverty rate.

Lois Kebe [00:25:25] Some of them will never get out of there. They'll never get out of there. They're going to live and die in that project. There's no hope for them. So, we just have to pray.

Allison Silberberg [00:25:38] Right. And she said she was trying to raise money; Joanne Bland was trying to raise money for that playground.

Lois Kebe [00:25:44] Yeah. And we should do everything that we can to help them, because as a community, we owe that. And a playground is just the beginning. The church needs needs help. You know, the whole community.

Allison Silberberg [00:25:56] The whole, the whole community.

Lois Kebe [00:25:57] I was.

Visting Montgomery

Allison Silberberg [00:25:58] And how about the Dr. King House? The little the little.

Lois Kebe [00:26:01] Oh that was so cute.

Allison Silberberg [00:26:03] But then the fact that it it was bombed with his wife and first child, that Coretta Scott King and the first child under a year old. The fact that they weren't injured or killed, and that he raced home from the church. That must have been so unbelievable and frightening for him as a young man and for Coretta Scott King.

Lois Kebe [00:26:25] That was back in Montgomery.

Allison Silberberg [00:26:26] And to know the threats that they endured for years and the pressure and the stress. Incredible courage. And that's the thing that I was going to say is that John Lewis, his courage, Joanne's and Linda's courage and all the people that marched on Bloody Sunday in 1965 that they faced the all those troopers and the billy clubs, as you mentioned, and the dogs. And it was their courage. And yet, you know, the peaceful protest, the nonviolent protest that Dr. King envisioned. And that it all in Montgomery, Alabama, the state capital of Alabama, with the state flag to this day is derivative of the Confederate flag.

Lois Kebe [00:27:15] I thought it was the Confederate flag?

Allison Silberberg [00:27:17] It's certainly a derivative.

Lois Kebe [00:27:19] It looks so much like it. I thought it was the Confederate flag. And then they told me, no, that's the state flag. But it looks so much like the Confederate flag.

Allison Silberberg [00:27:25] Looks very much. Yes. And so, it's almost like the city

Lois Kebe [00:27:30] Doesn't want to let go of that. They just

Allison Silberberg [00:27:33] But they also have

Lois Kebe [00:27:36] They want to be progressive but

Allison Silberberg [00:27:36] Thank God.

Lois Kebe [00:27:37] But is it just for money? I mean, do they want to move forward just for the money or?

Allison Silberberg [00:27:42] I don't know. Because thank God for Bryan Stevenson and his group, the Equal Justice Initiative and Bryan Stevenson. I mean, he's a national treasure. To envision this and to see it through and the national memorial with the pillars. It's, it's unbelievable to see all those pillars and to know that each pillar only represents not just one death, some of those pillars had 20 or 30 names.

Lois Kebe [00:28:11] Yeah, depending on the county.

Allison Silberberg [00:28:13] Right. So. Right. And, and so at first, it's at eye level or below you. And then slowly it's above you, just like those who were hung from a tree.

Lois Kebe [00:28:24] But did you see the one installation where it was a wall of water and there were words and I don't know the words exactly, but what it depicted was these names represent the lives of those that were lynched, but it's just a portion of the people that lost their lives. There were so many that are unknown and unnamed that, you know, they're still paying tribute to, but they're like, we don't know.

Allison Silberberg [00:28:52] We can never know exactly.

History of lynching and slavery in Alexandria

Lois Kebe [00:28:54] Because everything wasn't recorded. And I'm sure here in this very city in Alexandria, even though we have two names, I'm sure there were more lynchings.

Allison Silberberg [00:29:03] Well and if they

Lois Kebe [00:29:03] And the slave ships came here, too, didn't they?

Allison Silberberg [00:29:06] Yes well, the slave trade the

Lois Kebe [00:29:10] Through Norfolk and.

Allison Silberberg [00:29:11] The, the arm.

Lois Kebe [00:29:16] What? The?

Allison Silberberg [00:29:16] The, the where, where the Freedom House is now on Duke Street is really where Armfield and I, I always forget the full name and

Lois Kebe [00:29:29] The slave traders.

Allison Silberberg [00:29:30] The slave trade, which is the biggest on the eastern seaboard or one of the biggest. And the fact that it's here in our city, but it's now a museum. And while I was mayor,

it was a big discussion between the city and the national, you know, the Urban League, because the Urban League had that building, had that building and we

Lois Kebe [00:29:54] The city has since bought it, right?

Investing in education

Allison Silberberg [00:29:55] Yes. But at the time we were we loaned some money and a bridge loan and were having conversations. And really, the Urban League had to, of Northern Virginia, had to decide what they wanted to do. It belonged to them. It wasn't up to us as a city to tell them what to do. And I didn't. And so but I, I did have a number of conversations with them to try to help them in any way I could. It was a very difficult decision, but in the end, I mean, their mission is great, to help young African-Americans go to college, to help them with their education. That's how we're going to be able to really create sustainable change.

Lois Kebe [00:30:36] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Education is the key.

Allison Silberberg [00:30:41] Right. And our youth and investing in them and making sure that they know that that we are there for them and that we want them to fulfill their God given potential, and that we need to also break down more barriers. Whether that means more Pell Grants for college or invest more in a Pell Grant, I think, is a big stepping stone. The President, the current President, President Biden, just as you know, reduced or eliminated a lot of student debt. That affects a lot of

Lois Kebe [00:31:15] But that's under controversy still. Isn't that in the Supreme Court?

Allison Silberberg [00:31:18] Yeah, but that's, but still, it's helping communities of color because education, as we just said, you know, you're not

Lois Kebe [00:31:25] You know, a lot of people still are in denial and think that it's not necessary to have that type of of availability to the minorities. But there is still a need, there is still a need because it's not an equal playing ground. It's not an equal playing field.

Allison Silberberg [00:31:45] Well, as we speak, actually, the Supreme Court is going to be looking at, as you know, affirmative action issues.

Lois Kebe [00:31:53] I'm sure they're going to take some of it away.

Affordable housing in Alexandria

Allison Silberberg [00:31:55] Well, I think it's made a tremendous difference, frankly, personally. So, I'm supportive of it. But and as far as affordable housing, first of all, thank you for serving on that committee for five years. That's a huge commitment of time.

Lois Kebe [00:32:11] But like I said, it's like spinning wheels. They sdo not want; they don't want poor people in the city. I know, but

Allison Silberberg [00:32:20] I don't feel that way.

Lois Kebe [00:32:21] Well, not you personally, and I'm sure not personally, a lot of people. But, you know, the city is very progressive and it's just thousands of black people have been moved out of this city. I'm talking about complete communities. I'm not talking about just one or two people. I'm talking about complete communities have been wiped out since I've been here. Since I've been here, I can name areas where that used to be black, all of those houses, all of those, all of those dwellings, Black people lived in them.

Allison Silberberg [00:32:56] Well, we're supposed to have, we have a policy in our city that's a one for one replacement.

Lois Kebe [00:33:01] That's not realistic. And that doesn't happen.

Allison Silberberg [00:33:03] That's Resolution 830.

Lois Kebe [00:33:04] I know, ideally.

Allison Silberberg [00:33:05] I know you would know what that is because you were on the committee. So I'm proud of the fact that we frankly, one of the things that I'm really not that this is, well, we did add to the dedicated funding for the affordable housing fund while I was mayor, but that was a split vote it was very controversial. Four-three, four-three vote.

Lois Kebe [00:33:28] That's close too.

Retribution

Allison Silberberg [00:33:29] It couldn't be closer. But, you know, I think back to the pilgrimage. What you're, I mean, for us, when we were at the soil collection and then submitting the soil and meeting some of the descendants at the soil collection, meeting some of the descendants of Mr. McCoy, and I think they haven't found family members yet of Mr. Thomas, but knowing where they went to church and sharing that, just the transcript, if you will, of what happened and the trauma of it all. And. Okay. And then the

Lois Kebe [00:34:08] Is there going to be retribution? Is there going to be retribution to the families? Are the families. Reconciliation. Right, reparation.

Allison Silberberg [00:34:19] I don't know the answer to that.

Lois Kebe [00:34:20] Should there be?

History of land theft in Alexandria

Allison Silberberg [00:34:24] Well, I do think that there as a community, we can certainly have that conversation. And, you know, I do feel that with regard to Mr. Thomas and Mr. McCoy, that that

would certainly make sense. But I want you to know that there was land at. You know, where is our high school? We have one high school.

Lois Kebe [00:34:50] Oh, yeah, TC Williams, behind that. That used to be black, too.

Allison Silberberg [00:34:53] That's right. And the city showed up one day in the early sixties.

Lois Kebe [00:34:57] And took it.

Allison Silberberg [00:34:58] And threatened eminent domain.

Lois Kebe [00:35:00] Right.

Allison Silberberg [00:35:00] And the city

Lois Kebe [00:35:00] That's just another area

Allison Silberberg [00:35:01] And as mayor, I apologized on the dais during a meeting. I apologized to the African-American community that as mayor, I, I just found this horrible what had happened. Not only that land

Lois Kebe [00:35:19] They're still ram-rodding those people to this day because, you know, they still don't get the respect that they deserve.

Allison Silberberg [00:35:25] Well, there was a promise made.

Lois Kebe [00:35:26] About a tree, or something?

Allison Silberberg [00:35:28] Not only about the the witness tree, but also about the lies. There was a promise made to the African-American community that for Nancy Day and, and others, you know, were involved with it, apparently. But the, Fran Terrell and her husband's family, Calvin Terrell, I mean, these they had homes for over 100 years in one family, multigenerational homestead and they, the city leadership, people in my position or the city manager or both came and showed up one day and said, you know, we want this land, you need to move on and if you don't, don't give us any guff or else and we I mean, you can imagine the threats. And so, they ended up taking the land pennies on the dollar, but they didn't buy the land around the house. They just bought where the house was. So, they owned massive acreage around their homes for multiple generations. And not just happened where Chinquapin and the high school is, it didn't just happen there. It also happened at Fort Ward Park, the exact same story. And what I would suggest is that maybe this happened in other parts of our city. I don't really know. But that is why I apologized. And, and I feel that's the least that we could do.

Lois Kebe [00:36:53] Apologies are one thing.

Allison Silberberg [00:36:54] But but

Lois Kebe [00:36:55] But Retribution. They have to make some kind of, make it equal. But, you know, my uncle, bless his life. He's, he's passed now. He was from southern Virginia and he told me about living there. And white people actually took his land. And that's why he moved to Ohio, because there was a time where white people would just take your land. You could be, black people could be living on it, they would just take it. There's a deacon.

Allison Silberberg [00:37:23] Horrible.

Documenting history of lynchings in Alexandria

Lois Kebe [00:37:24] Deacon in my church, Deacon Alton Wallace, and he wrote a little dissertation in the 2000s. He went to the library here in Alexandria and he asked the librarian about the lynchings. The librarian said there was no such thing. And he was like, okay. And he went home and he thought about it. And he went back to the library and asked another librarian the same question. And that librarian said, Well, yeah, there was a lynching. And the reason that that lady said there was not one was because she's a local and they just try to, they don't want to, they don't want to put a scar on the city. So, this was in 2000. This is a city employee because you're a city employee if you're a librarian. They're, they're in denial that there was actually a lynching. But the one good thing is this person, Deacon Alton Wallace, he was at one of the commemorative events at Market Square. He heard everybody talk and he heard how sorry the city was and what he, what he got out of that is there is hope. That it can be turned around.

Allison Silberberg [00:38:40] Right.

Lois Kebe [00:38:40] And there is hope.

Allison Silberberg [00:38:41] There is hope. It's taken, it was years in the making, obviously, because it took a number of years from the time that I received the letter, we worked on it for two years, and then the next term.

Lois Kebe [00:38:55] You know, that's raising, that's, I think, now this is off topic, but I think that the fact that you were not acknowledged that it went to your desk first, that I think that's like sexism or something. It's like, how how can you not talk about the beginning if you're talking about the end? How can? How can I don't you know, it's like

Allison Silberberg [00:39:19] Just tell the truth. Just tell the truth.

Lois Kebe [00:39:21] Why rewrite history? Why wasn't that a component? Why isn't that even brought up? Why doesn't anybody know that? And I'm not saying it's that important, but I'm saying it's a milestone. If this is the beginning, why doesn't anybody say it all started during your administration? What's the harm in saying that?

Allison Silberberg [00:39:41] Well,

Lois Kebe [00:39:42] Why didn't they bring you up to the podium? I don't understand. You know, I'm 75 and I still haven't figured it out.

Allison Silberberg [00:39:50] Well, first of all, you look like you're 55. You look younger than I am. So, I mean that.

Lois Kebe [00:40:01] But you know what I'm saying? You understand what I'm saying?

Allison Silberberg [00:40:03] Yeah, right. Well

Lois Kebe [00:40:04] It's just that. Even little

Allison Silberberg [00:40:05] I was honored

Lois Kebe [00:40:05] Things like that. If you can't tell the truth, then when can you tell the truth?

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project and OHA

Allison Silberberg [00:40:09] Right. Okay. Well. You know, thanks for mentioning that. I, I certainly was honored to serve and I'm just glad that it's, now we've taken the next steps as we envisioned it and and Gretchen Bulova and all of the OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria] staff.

Lois Kebe [00:40:31] They did an amazing job.

Allison Silberberg [00:40:31] Have done an amazing job.

Lois Kebe [00:40:33] They did an amazing job.

Allison Silberberg [00:40:34] And, and I thought that the first, all the eyewitnesses that met with us and that the Seder, the telling dinner was phenomenal and chilling, and tears came to my eyes and and I just, I thought the whole trip was life changing. And at the end of the day, it is about just telling the truth. And it, it makes sense. Gretchen told me in like 2016 or 17 or whatever that it was going to take a number of years, she told, she's the head of OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria], so she told me that to prepare myself, that it was going to take a number of years, as it should, because if we just go down to Montgomery and grab the pillar, that's not what Bryan Stevenson wants and that's not what we should be doing. We, we, we prepared ourselves. We, we thoughtfully got the soil collection as a community. That was very moving the way that was done. The OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria] staff, you know, deserves a lot of credit. A lot of things in our city, by the way, are multi administrations, right? And so, I just believe, you know, whatever it is, it is. But the unthinkable tragedy of the murders of Mr. McCoy and Mr. Thomas, teenage boys and this trauma to their families and also the unthinkable trauma in a multigenerational way towards all African-Americans in our country, that it's no wonder that there's this you know, we know that there's more high blood pressure in the African-American community. We know that the health disparities not only today, but going back for over 200 years. Look at Serena Williams, the famous tennis star, and that she was complaining about something and no one would listen to her. We, we have come such a long way as a country, but we have a long way to go.

Lois Kebe [00:42:41] And we'll get there.

Looking to the future

Allison Silberberg [00:42:41] And we are making progress. And I'm glad to hear the deacon say. I'd love to meet him, not meet him, I'm sure I know him. But to see him, to talk to him about what he thought and hear his thoughts and

Lois Kebe [00:42:54] I'll put you in contact.

Allison Silberberg [00:42:55] I would love that and I'm glad to hear that he said that he has hope.

Lois Kebe [00:42:59] He did. He did. In the end that was, that was his takeaway that there is hope. And I believe that.

Allison Silberberg [00:43:05] And what would Dr. King say today, in your opinion, about where we are and not just as a country, but specifically here in our city, that if he

Lois Kebe [00:43:15] I think he would be pleased. I think he would be pleased.

Allison Silberberg [00:43:18] I do, too. I'm so glad we did this, Lois. I look forward to this. Let's get together and chat. I'm going to post more of my pictures on the web. I've just been traveling, but

Lois Kebe [00:43:35] We'll keep in touch.

Allison Silberberg [00:43:35] Absolutely.

Lois Kebe [00:43:37] I have others to share with you and the rest of the people as well. So we'll keep in touch.

Allison Silberberg [00:43:40] Absolutely. And just let me say, just as a resident here, that I'm, I'm first of all, I'm really glad that we were on the trip and that getting to know everyone, it was very bonding. And, and I'm really glad about this oral history project that Francesco, that you are in charge of. And he's sitting here if the people that are listening, he's sitting here monitoring this whole thing. But I you, and Gretchen and Audrey Davis and Tiffany Pace and everyone involved from top to bottom and everyone in between. And all the donors, there were donors who gave for the pilgrimage and for the oral history project. And let's just also talk about one more second, the youth. I thought the students were really outstanding. These students from Alexandria City High School and this, and the chaperones from the from the school staff and and the school superintendent and everyone outstanding.

Lois Kebe [00:44:50] I was so proud to look over across the way and see them and see their little faces. And you could tell that they were absorbing it. You know, you could just

Allison Silberberg [00:44:59] They're our future.

Lois Kebe [00:45:00] Yeah. Yeah, they're our future.

Allison Silberberg [00:45:01] And, and and I want our kids to know that anything is possible. They can grow up to be, you know, a photographer, a lawyer, the mayor. They can grow up to be Bryan Stevenson, they can grow up to be anything. But I hope that they stand up for justice and stand up for the truth and speak the truth and are involved and vote, and that they, that they are part of the legacy of really Dr. King and and Mr. Abernathy and and all of those who participated in the Civil Rights Movement, including Mrs. King and everyone and all of those brave souls from John Lewis to all the people that the two people that we met, Joanne and Linda, who were on that bridge on Bloody Sunday. Shocking, amazing courage. So. So, anyway, I'm honored to have done this with you.

Lois Kebe [00:46:05] It has been wonderful. Thank you. Francesco, thank you so much for allowing us this opportunity to share our experiences.

Allison Silberberg [00:46:12] Thank you very much.