



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



# Oral History Interview

with

## Ra Alim Shabazz & Leslie Jones

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**Interviewer:** Francesco De Salvatore

**Narrator:** Ra Alim Shabazz and Leslie Jones

**Location of Interview:**

Alexandria City High School, King Street Campus. The Black Box Theater Room A101.

**Date of Interview:** November 1, 2022

**Transcriber:** *Michele Camley, PhD*

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**Summary:**

*Ra Alim Shabazz and Leslie Jones reflect on their experiences participating in the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Pilgrimage.*

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<b>General</b>	Education; Racism; Equity;
<b>People</b>	John Lewis; Martin Luther King, Jr.
<b>Places</b>	Alexandria City High School; Selma, Alabama; Montgomery, Alabama; Howard University; North Carolina; Edmund Pettus Bridge; George Washington Middle School; Newark, New Jersey

**Leslie Jones** [00:00:06] My name is Leslie A. Jones. I am 58 years old. Today is November 1st, 2022, and my location is Alexandria City High School, King Street Campus. The Black Box Theater Room A101.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:00:31] My name is Ra Alim Shabazz. I am age 52. It is currently November 1st, 2022. And my location is the Black Box Theater at 3330 King Street, the Alexandria City High School campus.

**Leslie Jones** [00:00:54] Okay. Mr. Shabazz, can you describe your personal history in Alexandria?

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:01:00] I can. I first really encountered Alexandria, not necessarily as a resident, but rather as an educator. When I first decided to come back to public education, when I was leaving my position at Howard University, I wanted to ensure that I taught in a school system that had the demographic that I was looking for. And essentially, I looked at all of the various school systems in the area and decided that Alexandria would be an excellent fit because of its diversity. So I first was hired here in about 2005, and I started off at George Washington Middle School teaching Civics and Economics. From there and a successful tenure there, I was recruited to then teach at Minnie Howard, where I spent a year teaching World History, and then our current Executive Principal came to my classroom specifically to ask me to come to the high school to teach some of the advanced courses in the Social Studies Department. And of course, you know, I jumped at the chance because I had worked in high school a number of years in other contexts. And this is always where eventually I wanted to end up teaching the older students. So I've been an educator here in the city of Alexandria since 2005. I've had a daughter graduate from here, so I consider myself a parent of a Titan. And I currently have a daughter that's matriculating here as well. So I'm a parent here in the city of Alexandria, and I'm also an educator in the city of Alexandria and very much vested in the community.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:03:04] Can you describe your personal history in Alexandria?

**Leslie Jones** [00:03:10] I came to Alexandria 24 years ago. I taught for eight years in Los Angeles, California and Pasadena, California. And I taught all three levels when I was there. So I taught elementary school. Then I jumped to middle school. And then my last two years in California, I taught on the high school level. And when I also wanted to make the move back east because I'm from Pennsylvania, I stumbled upon Alexandria, Virginia, and I liked T.C. Williams High School at the time. I liked the demographics of the school, and I knew that that was the fit for me. However, when after I did my phone interview, I was turned down for a position and ended up getting an offer from Prince William County, but they would not send me a contract until I got back on the East Coast. A week later, the principal for T.C. Williams for 20 some odd years called me up and said, "Hey, did you sign a contract with Prince William County?" Because I was real up front about some offers I had. And I said no, "I can't sign it until I get to the East Coast." And he said, "If we send you a contract, will you come to Alexandria, Virginia and teach at T.C. Williams High School?" And I said, absolutely, "Yes." Because I knew that I would be a fit, a good fit for this high school. So at this point, I have now taught here for 24 years. I, too, spent my very first year at Minnie Howard. I was supposed to be at King Street. Then I got bumped to Minnie Howard for one year, and then I came back to King Street. So this is my 23rd year at King Street with one year at Minnie Howard teaching ninth grade English. And then once I got to King Street, teaching Public Speaking, Debate, all three levels of Theater, and at this point three out of the four levels of English, English

9. English 11, English 12. The only English I have not taught since I've been here is English 10. And I live here in Alexandria, so I'm vested in Alexandria as well. Lived 10 minutes from the building the whole 24 years I've been here.

**Leslie Jones** [00:05:51] Mr. Shabazz, can you describe your favorite memories from the ACRP [Alexandria Community Recovery Project] events that you attended?

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:06:01] Some of my favorite moments, that's a tough one. One of the things that I think really I don't know if I could classify it as favorite, because it was such a challenging moment for me personally, but when we attended the lynching display in a lynching museum. This is something that really rocked me to my core. Being at the museum and seeing all of these pillars that represented all of the lynchings that have occurred throughout the South from basically Reconstruction all the way up to the 1950s. Everywhere I turned, there were pillars with all of these names on them that I knew represented death and destruction and families being destroyed and changing the trajectory of people forever. Although, I was trying to also certainly lead students through this experience and have them gain the kind of information that they should get out of this untold human suffering because again, as Brother Malcolm once said, of all of our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research. So I wanted them to be really well aware of the atrocities that had taken place and how all of the rights and privileges that we have been literally paid for in blood. However, one of the things that really struck me, although I originally thought that this was going to be an intellectual experience and a spiritual experience for the students, I had my own situation where I actually saw one of the pillars that is from a county where my family is from in North Carolina. And when I was looking at this pillar, I had never met anyone from this area of North Carolina that I wasn't related to. So when I looked at the pillar and I saw one of my family's surnames, it rocked me to my core and tears streamed down my face because I realized suddenly in that moment, as students were swirling around and asking questions and taking this in for themselves, I realized at that moment, why I wasn't from North Carolina and that I was actually born in New Jersey because my own family had been victims of racial terror. And when I realized this, it was quite a powerful moment for me, because I recall talking with my mother and she mentioned a few years ago, I said "Well you know, you know Mom, would you ever want to go back to North Carolina?" Because we owned some, you know, some acres of land there. "Would you ever want to go back to North Carolina? Do you want me to maybe try and build something for you on the land?" And she turned to me suddenly and said, "If I never go back to North Carolina, it would be too soon. I don't even want to be buried there. Do you understand me?" And it's any good son. I said, "Of course Mom. I would always respect your wishes." But I didn't understand it until I actually went to that museum and stared at that pillar. And it was a powerful epiphany that I had to reconcile in my own head while at the same time, you know, repressing that to help the students deal with the overwhelming sense of loss and trauma that many of them were experiencing, although they didn't have necessarily a bloodline connection to this. There is no person that could walk through there and not feel for all the tragic loss of life and for trivial reasons. So your question asked me about the favorite, so I wouldn't classify that as the favorite, but I tell you, that was the most jarring, enlightening moment that I've had in recent memory.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:10:27] Can you describe some of the challenging moments from the ACRP pilgrimage that you recall Miss Jones?

**Leslie Jones** [00:10:38] I think for me because we had many hats that we wore together as a tool of some of the lead chaperons for the trip. I think for me, it was hard for me to really experience everything because there were so many things that I was responsible for. So I was responsible for 31 students. I was responsible to the chaperons. I was responsible to you. I was responsible for the school system, making sure that this trip goes right. So for me, I didn't really have the time to sit in and really have these moments. I mean, were there moments along the way in the different museums that we went to and the different activities that we experienced? Yes, but I'm still trying to process because I just haven't had the time to sit down and really process everything that we went through on the trip. I will say one thing that was very moving for me, where I left all of my responsibility out the door and just was in that particular moment and that was when we walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. So for me, that was the first time that my first step mom, because I have a first step mom and a second step mom, that was the first time that my first step mom and I ever took like a girls trip, you know, been on four or five days of of being together. And so that was that fun. It was heavy subject matter, but it was fun having a family member with me. But then what was even more moving was I asked my current student director and my student stage manager to walk behind us. And the reason being is I wanted to share that experience with those two students. And I wanted to make sure and I talked about this with some other people, that it was sort of like the torch being passed, because my first step mom is 12 years older than me. Then it was me. Then it was these two high school students who are probably around 16ish, somewhere in there. And so, that was a powerful moment for me because I was able to share that moment where all of the greats at some time had walked across that bridge. And when I mean by "greats," I'm talking about regular old people on top of of the famous people that we know and all of what the people before you and I had to go through to walk across that bridge. And you know, I never even knew there was a river there. So I'm looking over the side and we're walking and I'm seeing a river cause they never show that in pictures. So if you have not walked across that bridge, you would never know that there's like this river and there's all of this nice scenery. But at the same time, there's not so nice scenery that here we are in 2022, and we literally saw boarded up buildings and that whole area you can tell in some instances, not every single building, but you could tell just that neighborhood has not been built up. In all of these years, even though it's a historical marker, a historical area. And I really felt bad about that. So challenging? Yes. Many challenging moments. So far, definitely my favorite ACRP event so far.

**Leslie Jones** [00:15:03] This is hard. Mr. Shabazz, can you look for the next question while I look for another one as well? Thank you.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:15:10] Certainly. What?

**Leslie Jones** [00:15:14] Sure.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:15:17] Yeah, yeah. Can you talk more about, so you're looking at this city or this area. Can you talk more about that has more about the people that you brought up, how it had been built up. Can you talk more about like witnessing that and why was that an important observation?

**Leslie Jones** [00:15:38] Well we both shared in a tag team of sisters who literally were some of the youngest people to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge during Martin Luther King's time, John Lewis' his time there. And it was so moving to hear their two stories. And they took us to an area

where these famous people literally stood and made us pick up rocks. And Mr. Shabazz's daughter was one of the students that she picked to pick up a rock and talked about Martin Luther King stood here and John Lewis stood here. And so just getting the historical feel of these people being in that area and at the same time realizing that Selma has not put in the money to build up that area and especially to make it a historical thing, which moved me enough that when things settle from my play that I'm currently directing, I want to give some money back to Selma, to that area. You know, I bought T-shirts, I bought books and all of that stuff. But I want to put a little bit more money into that area because I think it's a shame that that area is not more built up and more celebrated for so many different symbolic things and literal things that have happened. You know, we're talking over 400 years and and just to walk on the same ground as some of these people, like I said, the unknowns and the knowns, that was moving for me. And I want to give back in that way. Not saying that I don't want to give back to the city of Alexandria, but I see a need in Selma and I want to do something about it.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:17:31] Well, you know, I'd like to extend that point, and that is when I also saw a lot of the dilapidation and the poverty that was really around these amazing historical areas. And it reminded me of something Lorraine Hansberry said when I think she was traveling in Africa and she said, "It is still yesterday in Africa. It will take a thousand tomorrows to repair what has been done here." And as I, you know, walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge and realizing all of the strife and all of the obstacles that people had to overcome for us to be able to exercise the rights that were guaranteed to us 100 years prior to that, and to understand the level of bravery these people have to be able to look down at the bottom of the bridge and see all of these law enforcement officers and people who were filled with hate ready to beat them into oblivion for trying to exercise the rights that they already had. And then to fast forward and in that moment in 2022, to realize that so little has been done to transform the lives of the people who still live there, so little industry, so little infrastructure. And it made my heart heavy, and made me think that it would still take another thousand tomorrows to repair what has been done here, because they are experiencing the systemic oppression that has always been there. When I can walk across this bridge and I could see buildings boarded up right next to this historical landmark that everyone on the planet knows.

**Leslie Jones** [00:19:24] Yes.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:19:26] It weighed heavy on my heart and it really stood out to me as well that we absolutely have to do more, not just to look back at the past, but to figure out ways to improve the present for those people still living there.

**Leslie Jones** [00:19:43] What was something that surprised you from the ACRP pilgrimage?

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:19:54] I'm from Newark. I can't be surprised. No. A lot. I would say that the biggest thing that surprised me was, as strange as this may sound, the river that was underneath the bridge. Because although you think, right? when you hear "It's the Edmund Pettus Bridge" and as a historian and a history teacher, I've been teaching about these things and that bridge for the last two decades at least. But never did it dawn on me that a bridge only connects two places but what's under the bridge? So and here's why that was, I think, instructive for me, that these people were being beaten on this bridge. And I wondered, was anyone thrown over the bridge into the water? Because as I looked, I never even thought that there was water under this bridge. And I don't know

why, but it just it shocked me to my core as I looked over, because then for me that means that they had even more courage, because you're doing this over a body of water, in addition to facing all of the people who hate you and are in opposition to you exercising the rights that you've had 400 years. So I think the water underneath really, really surprised me.

**Leslie Jones** [00:21:27] It's funny you said that because I was thinking the same thing as I was reflecting about "Oh my goodness there's a river. " You know where this bridge is. So it's funny that you said that because that was my realization as well, that not "Do you think?" You know people were thrown over the side. So, I think for me, the most surprising thing was the quiet resilience I had. Because Mr. Shabazz, we went through a lot on that trip.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:22:05] Oh, yes. (laughing)

**Leslie Jones** [00:22:08] (laughing) I had to be reflective. I had to be quiet. I had to be a calming force for again different groups of people. So we're talking the students, we're talking the chaperons, we're talking you. And so, I was surprised of my calm and resilience of every time we, you know, had a little setback. I was able to get through it and make sure everybody around me was okay. There were times where I had to take care of myself on the trip, but it was a nice epiphany for me. Nothing I saw surprised me. So, you know, nothing in the museums, just nothing surprised me of what I was going to see. But I think my quiet calmness would be the thing that surprised me the most.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:23:41] Can you describe some of the important individuals and moments in your life that have shaped your values and politics?

**Leslie Jones** [00:23:52] Oh, my. This is an interesting question. Hmm. I come from two parents from different sides of the tracks. But politically they were, let's say, like in the Martin Luther King camp, as where as my older brother and myself and more my older brother, because, of course, you look up to your older siblings. So, my older brother was more into Malcolm X. So you know, for the longest time, you know, I was teetering in between these two great men when it came to politics. And as I got older and learned a lot more about African-American history, because you know you don't get it in school as much as you should. Because when I was coming through, we had Black History Week. My dad had Black History Day. So we've come a little farther with the whole month. So with me doing a lot of studying on my own and then just different people that I have met. I mean, I have lived in: different cities in Pennsylvania; the burroughs of New York; suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia; Los Angeles, California; and now Alexandria, Virginia. So I have lived all over the country except for the Midwest. I have met so many different people in my life. That in each city I lived in, somebody gave me something. So I don't want to start naming names because of course, you're going to miss people. And I don't want to do that, but I love to glean. I'm like a sponge. I mean, that's what theater people do. You observe, you're a sponge, because you have to play all these different types of characters. So I think every city or town that I have lived in or been involved with different organizations or even in my teaching career because, you know, I've been in 10 million different school buildings at this point. People have shaped me into who I am today. And I must say, Mr. Shabazz, I do want to go on record saying that you were definitely besides my parents and my family, one of the people who have shaped me politically and on this work that we do together for social justice. So, I did want to at least say that much. Oh. [Laughing] Because I mean, I don't even know. I mean, we knew each other. I taught his older daughter, then with us partnering

up with the Theater Department in Black Student Union, we have done more activities together. And then he asked me to be one of the lead chaperons for this trip. So, you know, our friendship and our work relationship of, you know, the mission of, you know, social justice, etc., has obviously gotten stronger over the years. So he's made me see a lot of of our history that we share that is not taught in the books and maybe I didn't know but have learned and want to research more. Because Mr. Shabazz is famous for giving you a quote or giving you an article to read and you better read it. [Laughing]

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:27:50] I mean it.

**Leslie Jones** [00:27:52] (Laughing) Because eventually we're going to come back around and have a conversation about it. So the historian that he is so. You know he, he, he has helped open my eyes about this work that we're doing and why it's so important and why we have to keep pressing on.

**Leslie Jones** [00:28:13] So, Mr. Shabazz, can you describe the important individuals and moments in your life that have shaped your values in politics?

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:28:23] I don't know why I'm surprised by this question, but it's so many. Two things jump out at me. One, my family, I come from a long line of activists, people that were really involved in the Civil Rights Movement. You know, my grandmother was very instrumental in the Civil Rights Movement. And in New Jersey, where I'm from, was very much connected, very, very politically oriented. And I also have lots of relatives that, you know, were involved with the Black Panthers. And, you know, I [and even my aunt was once mistaken for Joanne Chesimard, who was actually Assata Shakur, and and was arrested because they thought when she was in hiding that perhaps my aunt was actually her. So just growing up in that environment and hearing the kind of conversations, all of the books that my mother had, I was an only child for a long time and my mother's library was so extensive and I was always a real precocious kind of kid. So I remember reading all of her books when she was gone. Nobody Knows My Name by Baldwin. I remember that. I remember reading all of these autobiographies, a lot of Donald Goines, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, books by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. You know, all of these just amazing works that I really was too young for. Let's be, let's be honest. But it really, it really helped to, I think, crystallize how, how I would think and interpret the world later. But the one moment so that was the context for, you know, for what shaped me. But I think that one of the most pivotal moments in my life, happened in high school. And the truncated version of this story is that in Newark, it could have gone either way. For anyone who knows anything about Newark, New Jersey, it's a dangerous place. And there are a lot of ways that lives are thrown away. And many of my friends, many of my friends went down the wrong path. But I always managed to know when things were going to go left and I would go right. But I was always hanging with people who may not have been the most positive, I'll say that. But so I was wayward. But I had this one teacher who I think saw something in me because I think very often you try and blend in environments like that. So this one teacher really saw something in me because I was the type of student that I would, I would always know the answers, but I never really would do the work. And so I think this teacher kind of got tired of that, you know, because they would they would ask questions and I would be so engaging in talking about, you know, what was in the text. And then it was time to turn in to work and I didn't have it. So I think that this really made him angry. So at one point he came to me and he said, "Listen, I want you to read a book," and I'll never forget it. He gave me the book, The Souls of Black Folk. And I read it, but not at first. He kept badgering me. "Did you read it yet?" I said,



"Oh, no, I'm getting to it." "Did you read it yet?" So finally, I knew that he wasn't going to give up. So I read that, I read it, and then he started asking me questions in class. He would say, "Well, what did you think about the book?" You know, during class, "Share what the class, what you thought." And then he gave me *Up From Slavery* by Booker T Washington. He said, "Okay, well, how would you compare what Dubois was talking about with Washington? Who do you think was right? I want you to tell the class your thoughts." So I didn't really understand what he was doing. I was really somewhat annoyed, but yes, also somewhat flattered that he thought enough of me to ask me my opinion. So then he started getting me involved in \_\_\_ United Nations. He told me to join Youth and Government. He told me to join the debate team. He took me to *Close Up* two years in a row, which he never, ever would do. And over the time, over that time period, the more that I became involved with school and I started achieving a lot of academic success, I started being really successful at debate. We started placing at tournaments and we never had before. I started winning a lot of awards, writing awards and it, it made me proud and it affirmed that I had all of these skill sets that I could do something with. But to be honest, I thought that I was going to be a lawyer. So after all of this and remember, he was coming to my classes, he was asking, making sure that I was there, making sure I wasn't skipping class. So here's this pivotal moment. The night of my high school graduation. He walks over to me, and of course, I'm very thankful for all that he had done. So I'm emotional and I'm saying, "Hey, listen," you know, "I just wanted to thank you for all that you did for me. Give me all those books to read, you know, encouraging me to join the debate team and all of these things. It really changed my life. I just really want to thank you." He said, "Ah, shut up. If you want to thank me. There are other ways to do that. What do you, what do you, what do you want to do?" And I said, "Oh, I didn't tell you. I'm going to major in Political Science. I'm going to be a lawyer. And a, and that's my path. I'm really, really committed to that. And I'm going to Hampton and major in Political Science." And he said, "Oh. You want to be a lawyer? Yeah, that's. That's just what we need in the black community. Another lawyer? A lawyer helped you right?" And it hit me. In that moment, that he had invested all of that time in me because he, similar to what you said earlier, was trying to pass the baton and saw something in me and he was grooming me for this life of service. I remember Marian Wright Edelman once said, service is the rent we pay for living, and not something you can do in your spare time. And this man had poured all of this into me. And normally, normally when you say as a youth that you're going to be a lawyer to an adult, they're impressed. He was the first one that looked at me like I said, "I want to do jumping jacks for living." You know, like he was not impressed at all. And it was in that moment when he circled back and said, "Yeah, if you really want to thank me, why don't you do this for someone else?" And that is the pivotal moment because that is when I decided, "Yeah, maybe I'm not going to be a lawyer." And I decided to major in History Education, at that moment, with a minor in African Studies because I wanted to inspire other students the way that he had inspired me. And all these years later, I stand on that end. And I would humbly say that I think that I have touched some lives. And that's the debt that I owed to this man who was so insulted that I was going to be a lawyer.

**Leslie Jones** [00:36:21] Mr. Shabazz, uh, why don't you ask the next question?

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:36:25] Certainly. I'm really. I'm really curious about. Can you describe some of the challenges you may have experienced planning a historical trip of this magnitude with a diverse group of students who come from different backgrounds? You work with the Theater Department. That's a very different demographic than the Black Student Union. Can you talk about the challenges involved with planning a trip of this magnitude and with all of the different kinds of

students from different backgrounds? Did you, did you find that challenging at all? What are your thoughts?

**Leslie Jones** [00:37:00] Yes and no. For the most part, no, because the students that I basically picked were the students that you know of from the play that I directed last school year, Facing Our Truth, ten minute plays on Trayvon Martin, race and privilege. And so, the nucleus part of that group, the cast. I knew that I wanted to honor the work that they did last year for the social justice work that we did together last year, Black Student Union and the Theater students. And I wanted to honor them in a more meaningful and powerful way. So I thought of no one but the cast of that fall play from last year that I directed. When some of them said that they could not go on the trip, I opened it up to some of the crew members from that play because, again, you know, we had that shared experience and I didn't want to take another group of students other than those students who already had social justice on their minds. The demographics of my Theater Department has been more Caucasian students as opposed to students of color. And so we've been working to make sure that our Theater Department is more welcoming and more open for students of color to want to come. And that goes along with the types of plays we pick and of course, the students that audition and get cast in the shows or work behind the scenes in the crew. So, one of the challenges was how were we going to blend the Black Student Union students with the Theater students? And it's funny you ask that question because I was teetering in between that and the next one, because I think if we had to do this again, which I'm sure we will have another chance to do this Part II. I think separately, but then jointly we could have had more meetings with the students. Showed "Selma" and "Just Mercy" before we left. We had no idea we would get on the bus. You know, I spent the money, got these DVDs. We were all ready to watch these movies on this long bus trip we had. And the DVD player didn't work. So just plan out more time where the two of us with the students that we were going on the trip could spend more time together. We could talk about, you know, do Power Point slides, "Okay, this is what you're going to see" this, that and the other. Just to prepare the students and maybe even ourselves a little bit more for it. But. Um. [Long pause] I would say that. And like I said, we you know, we went through a lot on that trip. And, you know, I wouldn't trade any of the students out that went, the whole 31 that went. But I think just making sure that everybody was more aware of what we all were getting ready to see, hear and feel, just some of those types of challenges.

**Leslie Jones** [00:40:51] So, Mr. Shabazz, I'm literally going to do the same for you. You know, that question you asked me, but then also some of the things that we might have been able to do better to prepare our students.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:41:06] I think that you outlined a really important piece, and that is preparing the students for what they are going to see. I think that in our vision, we thought that we had an opportunity on the bus to kind of show them the films that were kind of helped to contextualize the experience. But I realize with some of the the trauma that they went through.

**Leslie Jones** [00:41:33] Yes.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:41:33] That just like adults, they were not prepared.

**Leslie Jones** [00:41:38] Yes.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:41:39] For what they were going to see and experience. So that, that in and of itself, I think, you know, was really enlightening because when, when because I'm going to claim it as you did, when we have the opportunity to do this again, I think that we'll do a lot more the groundwork.

**Leslie Jones** [00:42:01] Yes.

[00:42:01] We'll meet with them.

**Leslie Jones** [00:42:01] Yes.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:42:03] We will, you know, set up roundtable discussions after we show them, you know, videos or whatever educational materials we're going to present and really engage them in the experience to build a scaffold that then when they go on the trip, they will have something to attach that knowledge to and be able to process it a bit better.

**Leslie Jones** [00:42:25] Yes.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:42:25] So, that's one of the things that I'm really excited about because as an educator, we know that it's both a science and an art. And the art piece is, you know, sort of the creative elements and in identifying these kinds of experiences. But certainly the science is taking a look at the patterns and what happened based on what we were presented with, and then to try and make adjustments so that we get a different outcome. So that's the one thing that that I would concur with you on. And that is the groundwork is so really important for them to be able to maximize a field experience of this magnitude.

**Leslie Jones** [00:43:14] But Mr. Shabazz, I know you feel the same way. I would not trade out the 31 students or the chaperons for this trip. That the memories of the community we built on that bus and in the hotel together, I will never forget that. And so even though we can always improve, I don't think we did that bad.[Laughing]

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:43:41] No, I would agree with you. I think that, you know, certainly, as I said, there's, if you're not getting better, you're getting worse. But so there are always ways to improve. But overall, I am so incredibly proud of the students.

**Leslie Jones** [00:44:00] Yes.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:44:00] I'm proud of the chaperons. They were amazing.

**Leslie Jones** [00:44:04] Yes, they were.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:44:04] And I am certainly proud of you, because I know that this was something that really, you know, took you out of your comfort zone. You are a brilliant theater teacher. You do so much around here. You always give of your time. And I knew that this would be a tremendous commitment on your part. And I am so pleased that you were so committed that you took yourself out of your comfort zone and you took a trip across the country for the benefit of students. And I would like to think that maybe you gained something in the process as well.

**Leslie Jones** [00:44:43] Oh, definitely I did. I gained a lot. Yes.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:44:50] Well, as we kind of close out, I would like to ask one more question.

**Leslie Jones** [00:44:56] Sure.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:44:57] And that is, what changes would you like to see in the city of Alexandria when it comes to dealing with institutional racism?

**Leslie Jones** [00:45:06] That's a loaded question Mr. Shabazz. And I don't think we have time to answer it. But I guess the short answer would be, pay attention to all of the students. I've been here 24 years, so. I have seen. I have seen. And I have seen. And, the squeaky wheel in Alexandria gets all of the attention, the funding, the right schools, the right classes, the right everything. And we have some beautiful students of color that are not being serviced in this city, and this has to stop. Because one day these students will be adults and they may move away and they may come back and they deserve a better Alexandria than what's going on right now. I mean, does Alexandria provide a lot for our students? Yes. But Alexandria can do so much more. And it shouldn't take another 24 years for this type of systemic racism to stop. And I think what you and I are doing and other people are doing and passing that torch on to the current students or even the students from our past that we taught will help Alexandria become a better city because it must become a better city than what it is now.

**Leslie Jones** [00:46:50] And I'll yield my time to you. Mr. Shabazz, what do you recommend?

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:46:57] Well its a deep question. But I will just kind of close with this. We cannot talk about issues of equity. If we are not looking at the hiring practices, yes, because 80% of the teaching force in America is white. And that is not how the student demographics look at all. So I think it is critically important that if we are talking about equity, that we have to be intentional about our hiring practices to ensure that there is some representation because representation matters. And if we have a diverse group of students, we have to put the kind of instructors that are diverse in terms of their backgrounds as well. Because Miss Jones, as you know, is hard to be what you can't see.

**Leslie Jones** [00:47:58] You're right about that.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:47:59] And if they are more intentional with the hiring practices and ensuring that there is a great deal of diversity, then I think that the outcome is that you get more people like yourself. You get more people like Mr. Shabazz. You get more people that are committed to doing the work that ACRP has engaged in because everyone had this opportunity here. But there were very few that could find the time. And certainly people have families. I get it.

**Leslie Jones** [00:48:30] Yes.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:48:30] But at the same time, this is, this was a powerful thing that we could have done for kids. And I think that if we are focused on who we are bringing in to educate the

students, then I think that we would do a world of good in terms of starting to dismantle some of the systematized oppression that many of our marginalized students face.

**Leslie Jones** [00:48:54] I would have to agree with what you said, Mr. Shabazz. And thank you.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:48:58] Thank you.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:49:01] One more?

**Leslie Jones** [00:49:02] Sure.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:49:02] Yeah. So I think you both have talked a lot about how your life has been of service. And so in talks, you talked about how you had to be a common presence on the trip.

**Leslie Jones** [00:49:14] Yes.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:49:16] You guys both talked about how that like, what did that feel for you that both the experiencing, everything involved in having be a calming presence and be of service.

**Leslie Jones** [00:49:36] For me personally, I'm still processing. I really, in all honesty, haven't had a chance to really process the trip, as fully as I want to. And I don't think it's going to happen until after this current fall show that I am directing closes. So I'm still feeling a lot of the different emotions of what I saw, what I witnessed. You know, when we went to the museums, when we went to the infamous Saturday dinner.[Laughing] So I'm still processing all of that, and then I'm still processing the hurt and the trauma that our students went through. So, for me, this is still a work in progress. I do not regret the trip. I would do it tomorrow if I had to. But I don't think that it, I didn't think and it might be one of the surprising things that it would emotionally affect me as much as it did. But it has. And I know I will never be the same person again. But at the same time, knowing that I had a responsibility to other people that I kind of pushed myself in the background. And it's funny saying that as the theater person I am, to have to push myself in the background to help others with their processing. And that's still ongoing. But at the same time, I would like to spend time with myself to to process as well. So I think this is going to be, even though this trip happened in the middle of October, I think this is, this is going to be with me for a while, forever. Really. Be honest with you.

**Leslie Jones** [00:51:45] Mr. Shabazz?

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:51:46] Well, for me, I know, you know, it's been said never work for money or for power because they won't save your soul or help you sleep at night. And I think the difficulty for me is that as a historian and someone that is really engaged in this, in this content and in this work, in this social justice work, I found that trying to mentor students to be a great pillar for them, to be someone that they could come to during the trip and beyond and seek wise counsel. How do I process this? What does this mean? What am I supposed to do with this information? At the same time, I'm processing an incredible sense of loss at what I experienced and what I learned on the trip about my own family. So I felt in a way, I felt like a martyr because, because although I found this

out, I had to sort of repress what I was feeling so that I could be available emotionally and mentally for my students and for all of the students that went on the trip. But, but I and I respect all of the people who've martyred themselves, you know, for similar causes, because, you know, the problem with martyrs, they are never around when you need them,

**Leslie Jones** [00:53:16] Need them. Yeah.

**Ra Alim Shabazz** [00:53:17] So I know that also, you know, there has to be some self-care as well. So in my moments of silent repose, you know, I tried to process this, you know, at night away from the students trying to reconcile all that I had witnessed. At the same time, you know, being available for my students during the day. So, so it was it was a really difficult process, but one that I think I was uniquely prepared for because of my experiences at Hampton. I just have such a great love for the school in a way that it prepared me to do this work. The motto is Education for Life. And, and what I understood about the mission and the Education Department is that this isn't about you. You are learning all of this so that you can go out and do good works in the tradition of our ancestors. So, so for me, I know that it was an extension of what I learned as an undergraduate at Hampton, where there's an Emancipation Oak, you know, where the first, you know, enslaved Africans learned that they were free under this oak. And this is where Hampton University actually got started. They started teaching people to read under this tree. So looking at all the sacrifice that all of those people made, if this is my sacrifice. But I got to say, it was very difficult to go through this and and have these, you know, moments of epiphany around my own family and still be available for the students. But I knew, I knew, I knew that it was something that I absolutely had to do. And, and a I don't have any regrets. But it was, it was a difficult process.

**Leslie Jones** [00:55:08] Mm hmm.