



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



Oral History Interview

with

Darby Kimbunda

Interviewer: *Nora Malone*

Narrator: *Darby Kimbunda*

Location of Interview:

Alexandria City High School, Blackbox Theater, 3330 King St, Alexandria, VA 22302

Date of Interview: *5/22/2023*

Transcriber: *Kerry James Reed*

Summary:

Darby Kimbunda reflects on his experiences while on the Alexandria City Remembrance Programs pilgrimage to Mobile, Alabama, to honor Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas

Notes:

This interview was conducted by a student from Alexandria City High School, Nora Malone. This interview was part of Student Experience Week in the Spring of 2023, where a select group of students served as interns for the Office of Historic Alexandria for 2 weeks. Students from Alexandria City High School were trained in oral history practices and then conducted their own interviews. This is one interview from this project.

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General	A.C.R.P pilgrimage
People	Darly Kimbunda
Places	City of Alexandria; Mobile, Alabama

Nora Malone: [00:00:00] Yes. [00:00:00][0.0]

Darly Kimbunda: [00:00:01] Aight. That's what's up. [00:00:01][0.0]

Nora Malone: [00:00:04] Okay, cool. So can we start with your name, age, the date and the location. [00:00:09][4.7]

Darly Kimbunda: [00:00:10] Location. Like where we're at right now? So say that again. Name, date. [00:00:16][6.3]

Nora Malone: [00:00:16] Name, age, the date and the location. [00:00:18][1.5]

Darly Kimbunda: [00:00:19] Okay. My name is Darly Kimbunda. I am 18 years old. Today is May 22nd, 2023, and we are at Alexandria City High School. [00:00:32][13.5]

Nora Malone: [00:00:34] I'm Nora Malone. I am 18 years old. And it is the 22nd of May, and we're at the Blackbox Theater at Alexandria City High School. Ok. So we're going to talk about the pilgrimage. [00:00:55][21.0]

Darly Kimbunda: [00:00:56] Okay. [00:00:56][0.0]

Nora Malone: [00:01:00] Okay. Sorry. So what did you think it was going to be like? Or think about preparing before you went on the pilgrimage? [00:01:11][11.0]

Darly Kimbunda: [00:01:13] Well, I guess I wasn't necessarily preparing for anything besides just being filled with new information that I haven't learned in school. I didn't expect it to be, like, really emotional. And, you know, whenever we get some further questions, I'll talk a little bit more about that. But, yeah, I mean, I just basically prepared for, you know, the truth and what was actually happening in Alabama and like the history behind it. [00:01:49][36.2]

Nora Malone: [00:01:49] Yeah. Yeah. And can you explain, like, why you chose to go on the pilgrimage? [00:01:53][3.8]

Darly Kimbunda: [00:01:55] Um, I just thought I was blessed with an opportunity. I feel like a lot of people don't receive this type of opportunity to kind of just learn more about African-American history, you know. Considering the fact that we don't learn as much in schools, again, and it's bizarre to me. So, I wanted to take this opportunity to kind of educate myself, you know what I'm saying? And kind of just build off of the knowledge that I already know, with new knowledge. [00:02:20][24.8]

Nora Malone: [00:02:21] Ok, cool. So in your opinion, what is missing or incorrect in the mainstream historical narrative about Alexandria? [00:02:28][7.0]

Darly Kimbunda: [00:02:31] Can you repeat that one more time? [00:02:31][0.0]

Nora Malone: [00:02:31] Yeah. I mean, so in your opinion, what is missing or incorrect in the mainstream historical narrative of Alexandria? [00:02:37][5.4]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:02:38] Um, I guess thinking about it now, I feel like it's just really the context behind slavery and really it's like institutions, like schools and things like that really going deep into slavery and lynching, those types of topics because, you know, they hide it from us. And I feel like Alexandria, you know, trying to put that together, it's like, we are standing on grounds where a plantation was and where people have been lynched. But we're not given that information. And I'm sure 95% of the school doesn't know about Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas. So, I just think that if that type of history is being hidden, it shouldn't be. It should be released to the public, especially for those who are standing on the grounds, because essentially this is sacred grounds. They should know the information and know it very well. [00:03:33][55.0]

Nora Malone: [00:03:34] Yeah. And do you think the pilgrimage helped with expanding that knowledge, at least a little bit? [00:03:38][3.6]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:03:38] Most definitely. Because we were able to not only set foot on the pilgrimage, we were also able to hold black box lectures just informing people and letting them know that this actually happened. That this was a place that, unfortunately, two African-Americans and, if not many more, were lynched and had to go through slavery. And it's just very important that, you know, we were able to gain information and learn more from the pilgrimage and being able to express it to other people. So that way they can also know that information and, you know, be educated in terms of the past and what has happened here. [00:04:21][42.9]

Nora Malone: [00:04:22] And can you elaborate on those black box lectures that you mentioned? [00:04:24][2.7]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:04:25] Of course. So the lecture series was, you know, created by America Girls [Name] who was the president of the BSU, and her and Gianni Morris Angarre who's also the vice president created these slides that were filled with information regarding not just Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas, but also just other ideas like inequality and oppression, marginalization or racial prejudice. It was also topics with, you know, Africa and itself, the motherland and the countries that are within it, and the history behind that. It just goes beyond just history. It also goes to like, you know, society as a whole. And they were very informative, very helpful. [00:05:16][51.3]

Nora Malone: [00:05:17] Cool. And did the pilgrimage alter any of your relationship with your peers, do you feel? [00:05:22][5.0]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:05:25] You know, I definitely did move away from some people, and I did think differently of some people as well because of the things that they were saying. I started taking into account, like, racial slurs and just racial stereotypes that were being said. And you know how it is with white people at the school. And like not to bash or anything, but I'm still going to bash any way, they, you know, say some things, and of course, they're just trying to be funny. But really, it's not funny at all. And I guess I just started, like, staying away from those people and, you know, also letting them know that you shouldn't be saying that, like, it's not funny, it's messed up. And yeah, I definitely altered and felt some type of, like, different type of way. [00:06:13][47.9]

Nora Malone: [00:06:13] Hmm. Did you strengthen any relationships through the pilgrimage? [00:06:16][2.5]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:06:18] Oh, yeah. I definitely did. Being able to not only strengthen relationships with my peers, but also make new ones. And, you know, especially with the teachers and the staff that were also on the trip. I got to meet like Miss Jones, for example. Miss Jones was such a sweetheart. I love her. And literally, meeting her was so cool. And, you know, I got to meet, like, a lot of other people. You know, I'm not going to mention everyone on the list, but yeah, it definitely ended up with a lot of new connections and more experiences that came afterward. [00:06:55][37.4]

Nora Malone: [00:06:56] What would you say is an exhibit in any of the museums that stuck out to you the most? [00:07:00][3.5]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:07:03] That's a good one. I have to say in the Lynching museum, there was this panel with the months, and I believe it was the months with the names of the people who were lynched in those months. And reading through that was just, you know, heartbreaking because, you know, every month there's always, like, a lot of people who were lynched and the names just adding up. And it just really was, you know, hard to read. And not only that, just above that, you see, like children were also just, like, watching those people getting lynched and, you know, it's just horrific. [00:07:38][35.6]

Nora Malone: [00:07:41] And can you describe, like, any strong emotions that you felt during the pilgrimage? [00:07:45][3.7]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:07:48] I believe my emotions really sparked when we were walking through the legacy museum and it was, like, a lot of, like, water. And then there was, like, skulls in the sand and, like, just like, you can see art sculptures of, like, actual people, essentially. And really walking through there had me thinking like, 'wow, these are like people.' Special people, I might add, were just being marginalized and oppressed for no reason, having to endure such hellish treatment, all because other people, just the dominant culture, decided to believe that they should be on farms and working. And it just really, you know, sparked something in my heart where it was like, this is so inhuman. [00:08:42][54.2]

Nora Malone: [00:08:44] And I know this pilgrimage has changed, like, your relationships with other people. Did it change anything about how you think about yourself, the relationship with yourself? [00:08:50][6.0]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:08:53] Yeah, I definitely had, like, a long thought with how I present myself to people. I feel like though, going on the trip helped me to change the way I used to act before. Because I too was also falling victim to saying, you know, racial stereotypes without actually really thinking about what I'm saying. But I feel like now there's, like, more thought to it, and I try to stay away from making those racial stereotypes and to really help better my community and, you know, also educate others who don't know as much. [00:09:31][38.6]

Nora Malone: [00:09:33] And was there anything that really surprised you on the pilgrimage? [00:09:35][2.5]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:09:41] Let me think. There was a lot of things that surprised me. I feel like one thing that really had me, like, snap [snaps his fingers] was when we were in the Legacy Museum

again. But this time there was an exhibit where there was holograms of people in jail cells. And as I was walking past, I was hearing their stories. And you get to the like the very last one and it's a video or it's a hologram of two kids. They're crying out to their mother. That one actually brought a tear to my eye because I, and as much as it was painful watching the others, that one just really clicked for me because a child losing their mother is just heartbreaking. And again, I remember one time where, you know, I've been lost too. This was when I was younger, I was lost. I couldn't find my mother. I was heartbroken. I was crying on the ground, sobbing until my mother was able to find me. I couldn't imagine. I couldn't even think about how they would feel not being able to see their mother for days, weeks, months, possibly years. They were going through a lot and it just really hurt me. [00:10:51][70.4]

Nora Malone: [00:10:53] Are there any, like, changes you want to see in the city of Alexandria when it comes to dealing with institutionalized racism, either in the city at large or the school specifically? [00:10:59][6.9]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:11:02] I feel as though, you know, we're at a start with like allowing more people to spread information regarding, you know, slavery and racism. Not only that, we have the support of the NAACP. We have, you know, B.S.Us all over the country. But I feel like what we really need to do to get our point across is to have the mayors also take action, the mayors of Alexandria. Specifically talking about here, like I'd say the mayors, most definitely, you know, leaders who tackle issues regarding, you know, disparities between race. And I feel like it's just another battle that just needs to be fought upfront and everybody just needs to chip in. [00:11:52][49.9]

Nora Malone: [00:11:56] So can you talk about your, like, personal history in Alexandria? [00:11:59][3.3]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:12:00] I've lived in Alexandria for about 15 years. Because I used to live in Arlington, but I moved here when I was like three. I was mainly going from... Yeah, okay. So I went from Polk, to Hammond and then Minnie Howard, A.C. So, yeah, I've been here relatively long. I do talk with people from Philly because, you know, my mom used to live in Philly and all that, so I talk with people there. Sometimes I'll go there. But yeah, I'm mainly a resident here. [00:12:35][34.5]

Nora Malone: [00:12:35] Cool. And can you describe like the important individuals or moments in your life that have shaped your understanding of, like, racism and oppression? [00:12:42][6.6]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:12:45] I believe when I was playing soccer at one point, like, I was seen as like somebody who, you know, wouldn't be good at soccer because of my, you know, my skin color. And, you know, most of the most people on my soccer team was, you know, white or Hispanic, right? And so there wasn't too much belief in the fact that I could actually be just as good as everybody else. And that's when, and this was when I was like 13, I was starting to realize that, hey, this is sick. Like, this is actually crazy. And so, you know, that also pushed me to work harder to be, you know, one of the best strikers on my team. And I feel as though, like, it starts when you're young because the root of racism begins by how you were raised, by how you were taught. So if somebody is doing something to you that is, you know, stereotypical or just like derogatory things like that, the child's always going to remember and, you know, they grow up like that. And I feel like that's just how it is now with the issues in our society. [00:14:01][75.7]

Nora Malone: [00:14:08] Did you go to any other A.C.R.P events around the pilgrimage? And, like, if so, can you just talk about them, your experience? [00:14:17][8.0]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:14:19] So we also went to, Ok, so I mentioned the lynching museum. I don't know if I mentioned the E.J.I. Ok, well, the E.J.I. was another lynching oriented museum. I just feel like it was mainly displaying lynching and how people throughout Alabama, not just here, but Alabama, I believe it was also talking about other states as well. They talked about, you know, how many people have been lynched. So, I had to think about that. And they also talked about other problems that African-Americans have faced, you know? Like, I'm sorry, I'm losing my words right now. It's just taken a little bit. But, you know, interracial relationships and having any type of interaction with, you know, the dominant culture, it would lead to either our arrest or, you know, being lynched and things like that. And you know, that the E.J.I Really highlighted those aspects of our history. [00:15:41][81.4]

Nora Malone: [00:15:41] Hmm. And did you attend, like, the soil collection ceremony that was in front of City Hall? And they had it, like, set up. [unintelligible] and Nathan performed? [00:15:57][15.9]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:15:58] Oh, I wasn't able to attend that event. [00:15:59][1.2]

Nora Malone: [00:16:00] Was there any, like, challenging moments on the pilgrimage? I mean, just can you describe them? [00:16:07][6.4]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:16:08] Like, challenging as in, like? [00:16:10][1.6]

Nora Malone: [00:16:10] Challenging for you? Challenging for you dealing with yourself. Dealing with what you're reading about. Dealing with your peers. Anything that really affected you. [00:16:17][6.3]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:16:18] Um, I feel like something that was really challenging for me personally was trying to figure out what I what I could say to my peers, you know. Because, I mean, sure, I was going through my problems and, you know, I was going through a whole, like, change. My peers were going through, you know, maybe something similar, but something possibly even deeper. Like, I know we had some people on the trip who had seen, like their own family in those in the lines of being lynched. And they were going through something way deeper than I was. And I was challenged trying to figure out what I could say to them, to reassure them or like, do my best to, you know, comfort them, let them talk to me. Like, I wasn't sure how to really, you know, kind of just help in general. [00:17:09][50.8]

Nora Malone: [00:17:09] And is there anything you believe the city should do to continue honoring the memories of Joseph McKoy and Benjamin Thomas? [00:17:15][5.9]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:17:17] I feel like it should just. There should just be, like, a monument or like a statue, like, near the school or, if not, like, anywhere on the campus just to serve their memory. Like I know in Old Town, we have a Joseph McCoy's little, we had a ceremony there. We had left some, a collage of, like, roses I believe. It was just something somewhere where we could put, like, some pebbles, stones to kind of to honor him and things like that. I was just thinking maybe we

could do something like that for here. Just to have their memory, you know, serve as proof that, you know, they were here, they were lynched. And this bad thing happened at the school.

[00:18:03][45.7]

Nora Malone: [00:18:04] Yeah. And so you really are into sharing their stories in the school and sharing the stories of the pilgrimage in the school? [00:18:10][5.8]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:18:11] Of course. [00:18:11][0.1]

Nora Malone: [00:18:12] Yes. And how would you think the best way to go about that would be? [00:18:15][3.3]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:18:16] I feel like just holding black box lectures like the ones that we've had previously. I feel like they played an impact in, you know, the school. Just learning a little bit more about the history behind Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas. And if not, I feel like another additional thing we could have is like, maybe like announcements, you know, bring it up like facts around Alexandria and just things like that. I feel like that would definitely help and keep the kids like, you know, somewhat up with the news about Alexandria, cause there's a lot that goes on around in this city. [00:18:53][36.2]

Nora Malone: [00:18:53] And I know that that pilgrimage was a challenging time, but is there any moments that you really enjoyed, like, favorite moments? [00:18:59][5.9]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:19:01] Um, my favorite moment in Alabama was definitely trying out one of the restaurants with Jaylen and Max and Reema. That was one of my favorite moments. Maybe actually, that's the second one. Actually, I lied. My favorite moment was being able to have a community circle with everyone who went on the trip and just being able to talk about how we felt. And I feel like that really brought us together as not just friends, but as a family. So that was definitely my favorite part of the trip. [00:19:36][34.6]

Nora Malone: [00:19:37] Nice. And is there anything else around the trip that you really want to talk about? [00:19:41][3.8]

Darby Kimbunda: [00:19:43] I just think that it's a trip that should be kept throughout the years, or the ages. However long the school is up for, this trip should forever, like, just stay here, remain, have people come and go, visit it, experience the same things we did and, you know, possibly even grab new members that could, you know, join a B.S.U, possibly even might just have the knowledge and educate others. Really, it's just about being able to grow as a community and being aware of where we are and how we respond to different things. But other than that, yes. [00:20:28][44.4]

Nora Malone: [00:20:28] Nice. All right.