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Transcript

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Theresa: So again, my name is Theresa Edwards and I'm a graduate student at UMSL majoring in museum studies /public history, and I so appreciate your taking the time to do this interview and discussing the life of Alice Windham, who just from what I've learned and know was an incredible, incredible lady. So would you mind just filling me in a little bit about yourself and your role at Wash U?

Jack K---: Jack K---. And Wash U. I arrived in Wash U in 1970. I came as the Co founder of black studies. And I was with Robert L Williams. We both were Co directors or Co founders. And I think in connection with Alice, I worked with a cousin of hers who is, oh, who worked with me in the school around the School of Social Work, named Fred Smith. And I know her through him because it was a very close family and they had the annual event which they did in the park and in University City and the facility there. And I guess I know because I myself served as the chair of the Education Committee of the NAACP in Syracuse.

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And so it was pretty much an action oriented group, Fred and his cousins and so that's really how I got to know her. And I had a very close relationship with her, very fond of it, and I know her for her perseverance. I know her because she was an individual who was a great strategist and I think that's important. Part of what I can bring to you because yes, I came as I said from Syracuse as the as the Chair of the Education Committee end up with B and so strategy was uppermost in our dialogue.

And having been the person along with and my co-founder, we were the Trail Blazers for Washington University it.

I guess. You could say we went from being. And taking the university from being desegregated to hopefully multicultural and we we got somewhere on the continuum of that. I'm not so sure how far and out of our efforts they evolved the African American

department. And they went their way and I went my way as as I was. And dual appointment school of social. And and liberal arts. And so I went on to the School of Social work. And I I found it a concentration which is called. Social economic development. I call that the other face of social work because it deals with how do you lift people up economically and how do you? Relate to institutions that. And mobilizing and will not let people achieve their fullest potential.

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Edwards: Thank you. I I also have heard a little bit Regarding a BBQ, some barbecues that you went to with Alice, can you tell me a little bit about those? How were those?

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Jack: They're not just barbecues. They were they. They were a test on whether you do the latest dances. So so it would be quite a gathering, I mean, and she had quite a following. So we would be and you know there's a facility in the park, in, in University City and that they would lease. And so we Would just be in that park and we have the the best of food and and we and meet and greet and and share. Frustrations and thoughts and and obstacles that were in the way of with black struggle and and then after that we went dance. So it was.

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Edwards: Any specific dances or just?

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Jack: Whatever. Whatever was going on at the time. So it was it was, it was, it was tremendous fun.

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Edwards: OK. Yeah, it sounds like would like to have been there to see that. Were you involved with any of the activism that she did?

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Jack: Yes, uh, one of the. Activists activities. I would share with you .Uh, it was the Barnes Jewish hospital. Hmm. And it was a time, of course. You know, the city of Saint Louis. Very racist. But this was a time when patients. Were coming into or being brought to. Uh. Barnes Jewish Hospital and they were saving it, according to their socio economic status or their insurance or what have. You. And that was the event that I'm very familiar with where? And. Alice was very much involved as a strategist. As to how we could bring dignity to individuals

in a hospital setting and recovery by not segregating them out on the basis of their financial status and that. Was a undertaken that Alice? Did with with with great finesse and diligence and strategy, and it was intensive. It was, it was. It was involving a great deal of time and. And it was inducing a great deal of embarrassment to an institution that was publicly and and invisible. Not providing the equity that it that it could and should to individuals recovering and and and there was much pressing and Alice was involved in the strategy. Working up shifts and working out the uh patterns of interventions. Uh making this a very visible and obvious fact of life and it. And took time and and she was committed and deliberate. And she walked the group through the period of time. That's the hardest in civil rights movements. It means when you you're you're putting in a lot of time and you're wondering if you're impactful. And she she she she not only helped us to see that the impact that that were impactful but the but they they they encouragement they they they. Bravo, this that she brought the basically the counseling that social organs got to hang in there, you know person and. And and it took time, considerable time, but it was effective.

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And it was accomplished. And it was applauded in in the African American community and so. I think that. Gave a tremendous boost in leap forwardness. And. In the city because. That situation or anything like that never occurred again. And. And Alice being. Alice. It was, you know, you just simply dust your hands and say, well, that's that what's next? So I'm. I'm I'm. I can all I can. Tell you. I s is that.

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Because I've done a lot of demonstrating what have you. But but the strength that you get from colleagues in the process to persevere and to hang in there when times look like, hey, nobody's recognizing this. Nobody is paying any attention to it. You have to go sit down because. This is not going to accomplish anything, but you know through all of that you can you can sometimes feel like that's the thing to do. Just hang it up because it has no positive end. And and things begin to break and the embarrassment becomes embarrassing. And and overwhelming to the institution that's supposed to. If there's anything that that they're supposed to do is is show even this service and and recovery. And uh. And so the press picked it up, of course and. M. And and and and you know at that time there were several black newspapers in the city, so.

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Edwards: I didn't know that.

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Jack: Yeah. So that was that was another factor that laid heavily on the the conscience of the city and so. It worked out very positive regard and.

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And and and Alice being Alice. Like I said, she didn't stand for a bow. She just simply moved on. And we we moved on with her. But I've seen her involved. Uh. And the teaching of strategy, which to me and that's what I teach. She she teaches. And she taught individuals hang in there.

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Edwards: Right.

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Jack: Uh, you know, it may not look like daylight's coming, but the evidence is there that there's going to be another day and every day that you're there, you get stronger. And so I'm very pleased to have been with her and work with her. MHM. Uh. Dance with it so.

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Edwards: That's that's awesome. It sounds like she was a real leader and had a great impact on you and her community and. Like I said, she sounds like a fascinating lady, and that's just wow, I'm overwhelmed with. Knowing someone like that.

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Jack: That's true.

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Edwards: Yeah. Do you have a? Maybe a favorite memory of her, something that comes to mind of like oh. I remember when she did this or I remember.

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Jack: Well, she used to tell us the the things stories about, you know, she has a history of of doing things in Africa and. And he would tell us. Dignitaries that she related to in Africa and how she was involved in and the connection of helping blacks who were in the civil rights movement to to be connected to. The struggle and struggles in Africa and out of. That.The. That's the the kind of historical piece that allowed us who were working with her. To not be fatigued and because it's. When when you? When you know that the whole continent is is trying to get to. What you struggling to get over? Which would be a luxury. Somewhere else, she.She was able to. Force force all of us to look back on where we were and and how how

we were obligated to pull these people who were. Dignitaries in the movement. To be. Impactful with us. And for us to? Actually have the patience there to persevere. And so we We used to kind of listen to to that because you can, you can, you can understand and we're talking about in the the 70s. And how how? You're looking at a movement of dignity of people of color. Which is something that is. Taking place and.

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And it's something that. Is a movement beyond your movement and the movement that we were in was pulling forward and the movement in Africa. So you kind of have an obligation, you know, to, to be able to report back to them. Progress. And and so you you don't have the luxury of of, of not being involved in and not using all of the energy and imagination that you have in your struggle to see it. Bing. Something that's going to enhance those people behind your struggle to catch up with you and to. Not only see this struggle as a racial and counting, but the fact that the economics behind. Oh. Uh is is something to be, uh. Related to because it's one thing to be poor and. And and black and and struggling against things that where there's the. At least the semblance. Of a system that will give you support as opposed to being in a situation where none of that structure is there.

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MHM. And you're asking people to. And to take on pain and and agony. And so that generations behind them. Can come forth and and have. And some. Some dignity and some life, you know, like right now, for instance, at the School of Social. Yes. Work I taught. A fellow. Who? Is responsible. We're bringing a tremendous number of Africans to to brown. And he's he's, uh, a faculty person who has a a huge grant has his name. His first name is Fred. He is a huge grant. Is enhancing. A large, large population of of Africans to be a part of Washington University. And he's got a huge research grant and that would think that and you can. Talk with him about. How how all of this impacted his energy to accomplish? His last name I'll have to text it to you.

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Edwards: Sure, sure. What you mentioned Ghana. I was going to ask. You know, I I knew that she was in Ghana and met with Malcolm X and Maya Angelou was over there. Do you know what sparked her interest in going to Ghana? Was there some specific reason? She just. Was there a conference or something?

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Jack: Really, don't. Don't know why she went. I think that's a that question that you probably have to ask your brother. But I know that's that's smart. The continuum of her involvement.

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Edwards: OK. I also have heard that she I've also seen that she really liked books and has quite the collection. Do you know if was there something specific, a book that really got her attention or a book that she would kind of go to for inspiration?

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Jack: Hmm.

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Edwards: I'm just curious because she has so many and it's such a variety, you know?

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Jack: Have you ever seen? You've seen, have you seen the books that you had?

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Edwards: Some. Yes.

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Jack: Oh, my goodness. Yeah. Yeah, that's she had a collection of books and yeah. I I'm sure. And many of them she had and might be. Very few of them around that, that they have that that kind of almost that has have that kind of ancient Larry but that she. Uh. She she she was into so many different things. And reading you write was tremendous more and and she would throw an author at you. And why she thought what she thought at any moments notice. And you're right that she. She got a lot of energy from reading, she, she and she cared. She was a historian. Sorry, she carried. She carried movements that were happening in many places and you could bring you insight about those movements, that would energize. Come. You know you when you and doing things with it. And you and have you thought you were a second or two that you were really on the cutting edge, she tell you? Hey, let me tell you about this, you know, and you say well, and and and it's, I know better but. Oh, I would say. Descriptive words like she just was a a person who was.

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Dear trait to tremendous faith that what she was doing was right, which was bringing people to the end. Of. Kind of justice. That everybody had a right to have and. MHM. And

she did it in a way that was not arrogant. She did it in a way that individuals could see that the challenge was basically negotiation. And the negotiation was basically you can see the advantage. And for all of us, and what is being attempted, what is being presented as a way of? Working out a difficulty. UM, so that he could make. Even in in. In in a challenge of negotiations, you can make. The parties see. The progress in the. Hmm. The mainland, the encounter, which was where you, you actually not have an encounter that is hostile with the encounter that that realize the advantages both to the parties and the situation going forward.

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Edwards: With all that she accomplished and all that she did, activism, going to Ghana, everything she did, being a mentor, a leader. What? Do you think? She would say she was most proud of in her life.

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Jack: I don't think she's not being most proud of of being a. They. Catalyst of being being there and and bringing together. And groups and helping them. To see. Beyond the the particular issue and and to how this opens up horizons much wider. Then what? Appeared to be that's the strategy part of her. She's she. She was. She was a vision there. Yes, uh and and and and then then and then visioneering. She and the humanitarian human. Human antarian goals she wasn't. She wasn't concerned about, you know, look at me and you see all of the things that I've done. I mean, you'd have to press her to get to things as opposed to. Having any desire braggadocious.

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Edwards: How has she impacted your life and the work that you do if you're able to answer?

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Jack: That well, you know, as I said, 1978. And we came to. Chair of the Concentration and social work, which is social economic development, which doesn't exist in any school or social work in the country, and I think which was instrumental in helping the Brown school to become the second. Most renowned school in the country and and and it was on on the basis. How? You. You. Move into a field of social work. And. And take the concept of service which is the. Is it? MHM. Percentage it's it's. It's the way that it's normally perceived. And then except that if there's nothing beyond that. Then what it does is it generates. Behind it, a long line of of poverty. And so so so with. The the the idea of how do you take? Poverty and how do you build on? On poverty and and and and and make sure

that you you organize and that you you use you use one another and situations and steps to move forward.

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And. Uh. When I when I teach social, economic and development, it's it's how do you. Penetrate. Institutions. Because my my basic concept is that we have institutionalized racism in America. If you if you take. If you open the door, for instance, like let's say coming into a school of social work. Oh. And coming into a university and you have many, many departments. So how do you how do you bridge? How do you help others to see that many of the things that have been accomplished? In different ways by different people. The contribution to the society as a whole so that you you're not learning. Actually you can go to school as you know and and and be and be instructed in racism.

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So my whole concept then was how do you go and sit? You go to school, but there's a difference between going to school and getting an education and and and to get an education is to be able to challenge. What is and one of the courses that challenge basically the psychology that is, that is the psychology that's presented is the question of.

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Who am I? And I my challenge is is that if you use who am I? Then you're you're dealing with prestige. That if you deal with what am I? Humanism and and they that makes the difference in what you expect to. See.

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Edwards: Yes, I I like that. What you said, there's a difference between going to school. And education. And the fact that Alice, you saw her as a catalyst. Dusting off your hands, what's next? Thank you for that. So I just want to I feel like through through you I I've learned so much more about her. I would describe her as a leader, a catalyst, generous. Studios. Hardworking. How would you describe her? What words would you describe her?

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Jack: Well, that I'm I'm I'm conquering. That's the rest here. I mean you you put something in front of Alice that you saying that this is the problem she's going To Examine every corner of it and look at how it can be overcome. She's a very unconquered person.

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Edwards: Would you describe yourself like that too?

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Jack: I I was describe myself to students and say, you know that there's there's a difference between vision and television and television shows. You what has happened and shows you what has happened and the vision. As soon as you went around the corner. And so so.

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Edwards: I love your analogies. I really do it. It makes me think I love that. And that's, you know, you when you look around the corner you you you know think about what's is what is good for me you think about what's good for us. So many people today, I think, have that opposite view. You know, it's all about me and it's not all about us and that's what community is. And I I feel like Alice kind of embodied that community. And like you said, it wasn't just about her, it was about. Her plus everyone else in her life, in her, in her community. So I really admire that.

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Jack: Mm-hmm. How will how will we be different after this as opposed to how you know, let's let let's put this down as as something that we've won. You know, specific but with one general.

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Edwards: Well, thank you so much. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about her that we haven't talked about or?

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Jack: sure I haven't. Let's see the the thing that I really want you to see is that she's she's. She's a strategist for. Progress and out of her strategy. And if they're losers in it, then she will evaluate and examine the losers. You can say shipping when you're struggling to do something. It should be to do something right, and if you're struggling to do it right, then the people who feel that. The losers and can't be brought into the fullness of of this understanding. Then the workers to go back and deal with. Why, how and what can be done?

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Edwards: Well, thank you so much, professor. I have really enjoyed meeting you and and getting to know you and Alice Windom And I feel that I have a much better understanding of the kind of person she was and wishing that I would have had the opportunity to talk with her. Just sit down and have a conversation that would have been something.

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Jack: Well, what what? Something would have been is to see the movie was dancing.

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Edwards: Yeah, I think I would.

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Jack: Have well, she.

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Edwards: Sounds like she would have been very persuasive, so she probably would have persuaded me to do a little bit of that. I would not have been very good at it. Wow, those are amazing stories.

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Jack: so. Thank you very much for the opportunity to share with you.

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But yeah, thank you so much. I so appreciate your taking the time to do this.

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