

Queer Newark Oral History Project
Interviewee: Darnell Moore
Interviewer: Timothy Stewart-Winter
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Location: New York, NY

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay. I'm here with Darnell Moore. I'm Tim Stewart-Winter and today is March 15th, 2016. We're in New York City and I'm interviewing you for the Queer Newark Oral History Project.

Darnell Moore: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This interview is a little different from most of the ones we do since you're the co-founder with Beryl Satter of the project. So, the usual questions seem a little funny, but I thought I might begin by asking about your first impressions of Newark. I know you grew up in Camden—I'm actually not sure when you first experienced Newark or Camden,—or knew about Newark.

Darnell Moore: Yup. So my first experience to—my first time traveling to Newark was in 1994. Um, and I was a senior in high school. I had—actually, I don't—yeah, I was a senior in high school and I visited the campus, Seton Hall University. In order to get to Seton Hall, which is in South Orange, I had to take the 31 bus down. [Chuckles] Uh, I guess, South Orange Avenue, and the—the trip that I remember is my Aunt Barbara who accompanied me to school. Up into that point, I had been driven in a car. And it was the summer and I was an EOF [Educational Opportunity Fund] student, which meant that I needed to be there in the summer and I remember looking around going—[Chuckles] as we're driving down on the 31

down on Market—no, that’s Market Street onto South Orange—I’m thinking: “What am I doing?” This is too—the cities look really, really, really—[00:02:00] uh, it just looked much larger than the urban space that I was used to in Camden. Um, lots of people all over the place. It was very busy. Very, very busy. And I was scared to death. But also excited because it was like this energy, an eclectic energy in the air that I picked up.

Um, and I also knew it was black, a black city. And that was really, really clear to me. I was like, “Okay, this is…” I’ve—I don’t think I’ve seen this many people in a particular place, driving through Broad and Market, the bus [chuckles 00:02:29], and they’re all black. At least downtown [00:02:34]. I don’t think I’ve ever seen as many in a New Jersey city in that way.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right. Yeah yeah yeah, cool. And when did you move to Newark?

Darnell Moore: Yes, so...

Tim Stewart-Winter: Get involved in Newark?

Darnell Moore: Yup, so...my time at Seton Hall was really my introduction to Newark.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right.

Darnell Moore: Um, in fact-

Tim Stewart-Winter: So close by.

Darnell Moore: It was so close by. So it was right next to South Orange and the person, the guy that I had been involved with—I don’t know if we—we didn’t call each other boyfriends, but he lived in Newark in Georgia King Village which, if anyone is familiar with Newark, Georgia King Village was sort of

well-known for being in the part of town where stolen cars would be—like would drive stolen cars through the area, like, do donuts. So I stayed with him and his family during a good portion of my undergrad time. Even though, I had campus housing [00:03:37], but I stayed with him. And in fact, when I—when I moved off campus for a year, which was probably '97 or '98, I lived with him in Georgia King Vill. So my first time living in Newark was Georgia King Village in about 1997, '98 for a year.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

It was with this guy?

Darnell Moore:

With—with him, yes. [00:04:00] And I would walk, uh, Kevin. I would walk from Georgia King Village sometimes when I couldn't afford the bus or he couldn't take me because we had an argument, and I would literally walk down South Orange Avenue, to Seton Hall, and walked by the Graveyard and it would be late at night to get back to campus. So yeah, it's interesting that I don't really think about that as the beginning of my time there, but it really was. And it was a different—my stay in Newark that time around was very different than what it would be the second time around. Like, I wasn't active. I was a college [-00:04:38] student still trying to figure out who I was and with a guy—neither of us were publicly out. We were both very heavily involved in the church which added different layer of stuff to our relationship. Anyway, it was an interesting time. [Chuckles]

Tim Stewart-Winter:

So you were living with him and you were both very involved in the church, but not—

Darnell Moore:

No, and—

Tim Stewart-Winter: —identified as—

Darnell Moore: Not at all.

Tim Stewart-Winter: —queer.

Darnell Moore: We didn't.

Tim Stewart-Winter: How did you—how did this fit in to sort of—yeah, or the-

Darnell Moore: It's interest—it's—Wow. [crosstalk 00:05:19].

Tim Stewart-Winter: It's a big question. [Crosstalk 00:05:19].

Darnell Moore: It is. It's also a really helpful one. So it's funny because up until—I've never ever talked about him by name in public because he's still—he doesn't—he just doesn't identify as queer. He's married, has kids. And for—we legitimately—we had—I don't know if we would call it a relationship, but for seven years, we were in each other's lives and sexually intimate. And mostly intimate and—you know, he was the nicest person. **[00:06:00]** I must say that he tended to be aggressive and violent sometimes.

And also— and I think a lot of that had a lot to do with him and he—he can only answer this for himself, but I assume it had a lot to do with his own internal struggles. But it was an interesting time for me because I was in the church and I, you know, the church is supposed to be like the hospital. [Quick chuckle] I sort of liken it to there being a lot of us in that hospital who were in need of serious help. So it was something that these were the darkest periods of the dark—some of the darkest days of my late teens, early—well, I was in my early twenties. That would—those were dark, dark days.

So fast forward, this actually precipitates my activist work. Because I ended up leaving. He—was so deeply involved,

but not boyfriends, that he moved—he and his family moved to South Jersey where I moved after undergrad. So after I finished Seton Hall, I moved back down to Camden, and the Camden area, ended up living there and he came down there, too, and his family followed him. His mom and his brother. And he joined the church I was at. And it meant now that we're in this church home—a really large church, Bethany Baptist Church in South Jersey, where lots and lots of people—we have this sort of relationship. And I'm in seminary and I'm also deeply, deeply depressed and questioning the extent to which I was ready to come out, and I did, and I told him that I couldn't be with him anymore. Now, what that meant was here is like a critical moment and I think my activism that leads me back to Newark.

[00:08:00] I, in seminary, I went to seminary because I was interested in asking questions about faith. My faith had been the thing and the theology, theological system I held on to had been the very thing that had me hating myself and had me nearly killing myself. And it was in seminary where I really, you know—I went to Princeton Theological Seminary, very finest form, sort of that tradition. Very conservative and I started hosting events like an event that was called "In The Spirit of Baldwin and Lorde" on campus, for example. Now, there have been other LGBTQ folk on campus up in—way before me. But it was—it was isolating because I was also one of the only, probably the only black person on campus? Who at the time was like, trying to, without me knowing, engage in a more intersectional—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Mm-hmm.

Darnell Moore:

When—and like, you know, it was—I wanted to talk—I wanted to host an event with Audre Lorde and Baldwin’s name in it for a reason. And it’s because I felt that being black and gay and Christian was something very different. So I moved to Newark shortly, when I graduated from seminary in 2007, through Bryan Epps, who actually became—[Laughs] he was my partner. I moved in, and it’s interesting. When I first got there—again, this was in 2007, so I had no intent of being, like, involved in the community. I got involved in the community through Bryan. Um, he’s deeply—he was deeply—he was—I guess they called it a "district leader." [00:10:00] You have to get voted for that. He was head of his neighborhood association, the James Street Neighborhood Association, and was deeply involved and a member of Bethany Baptist Church and had done all this stuff working in the community.

And that’s how I really knew people. That’s how I got to know people there. And that’s how I got my first apartment. It was through him because it was in a neighborhood where he was the neighborhood association president. And that’s how I met June Dowell-Burton, who really is the reason that I got involved in LGBTQ work there. She was—she and Janna, her partner at the time—she, her partner and I went to college together, and they were doing all this Newark Pride organizing without any resources really. They were using their own resources. And I started volunteering and that became like full-time work and—and we all ended up on a board—Bryan and I and Perris Straughter.

And there was no turning back from there [chuckles], so it was involved in every aspect of, like, queer life...up and to that point. It was a rather interesting journey.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

And you were still in the church? What was your religious journey or...?

Darnell Moore:

I just—at that point, I—when I left seminary, I—when I was in seminary, one of the things they make you do, you have to do field placement. You know, you go to a church and do work. And I remember saying I'm not—I had left my church at this point. I was really done with institutional church and I remember saying if—I was trying to argue with the placement office. I'm like, "I don't wanna be a minister." I actually went from the M.Div. program to M.A. precisely because of this reason. During seminary, I was suspended from my ministerial preparation. Not because of me being gay, but because I—they claimed that my commitment—wasn't there. [00:12:00] Like I hadn't been attending church or Bible study and church on Sunday and giving tithes and like, well, I'm a full-time seminary student at Princeton. And, like, I have to actually study Greek eight hours a day. I don't think I have time, like, to come to church, whatever. So I got suspended and at that point, I made a decision to leave the church. A lot of that also, in between the person that I was with for seven years, Kevin, and Bryan, I did meet someone—Shane. We were who—I was partner with who really helped me. Um, who was really like a Godsend. Who helped me out of a period of—of deep darkness, which had a lot to do with me being in the church and I—I felt, you know, him being in my life, and my

mother's not to mention, and leaving the church, literally saved my life.

So by the time I get to Newark, I—you know when I was in seminary, I was like, “I don't wanna do field placement in the church. Send me to a research office.” So instead of going to a church the first time, I went to a very, very—oh, this is so funny—conservative think-tank. I didn't realize that it would be conservative. I just looked—anything but in a church. And it was called the Center for Public Justice in DC and I would travel there from Elizabeth where I lived with Shane to DC three—I think from Monday to Wednesday. And here is a place of the architects—well, one of the architects of Bush's Office of Faith-Based Community initiatives. And that's where I ended up. [Laughing] So— [laughing].

Tim Stewart-Winter:

I didn't know any of this. Wow, that's fascinating.

Darnell Moore:

So I was a seminary intern at the Center for Public Justice and learning really how to think about a sort of public theology and policy development through the—through the guise and—and work of Stanley Carlson-Thies. **[00:14:00]** Thies, T-H-I-E-S. And his colleagues, and it was interesting. So I never named myself as gay there. I actually never even gave them any indication of what my politics were because I just didn't feel it and I didn't have the energy to really fight with them all the time. But I did raise some policy that—I'm pretty sure—I wrote policy briefs, I think. I can't— like some.

Um, so yeah, like, by the time I got to Newark, I was—I mean I— so the next one for my field placement, I ended up

doing my seminary field placement at The Reformed Church of America First Church in Park Slope, with Daniel Meeter, and I remember, this is the first person of the cloth who ever used the word “gay” in a sentence connected to God. And one day on supervision, he walked into Prospect Park, and he looked at me and he said, “Repeat these words.” So I was like—he’s a white, reformed, Church of America bastion of theology and PhD from Drew. So he was—even despite my desire to be out of the church, I still could not hang with his progressive theology. Like, my mind was still shaped by the fundamentalist type of tutelage that I had? So he said to me, “I want you to repeat these words,” he said: “Say, I’m gay and God loves me.” And I remember going, “Hooo! What?! I can’t say that!” Like I was 28 and I was, spent I don’t know how many years being taught the exact opposite, and I remember him saying, “You can say it.” And I said, “I am gay and God loves me.” And I remember thinking, “Oh. My. God. I don’t believe I just said that.”

And that was a pivotal, pivotal moment for me. [00:16:00] I just saw him again last year, and I—well, that’s—I don’t know how many years—2007 to 2016—but nine years later, still having an impact on me.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Wow, that’s intense. Are there other moments that you remember about your—your sort of religious journey that you think are relevant to your activism in ways that are...

Darnell Moore:

Yeah, I—I do, you know, and—and specifically as early as in Newark, I spent a lot of time in Newark churches on choirs, like, I used to sing and direct—I directed Seton Hall’s gospel choir and the gospel choir was very well-known. And it’s

interesting. So I sort of became this, like, a sort of ministerial leader on campus, which is weird in a—in a lot of different ways because it meant that here was a person that was deeply struggling expected to show up every week to lead—I mean, and the choir would get larger and larger every week. Like, these folk would come here like it was their church. Now we didn't have adults, like, around, you know—people around that could give us pastoral care. Uh, and...

Tim Stewart-Winter:

In the gospel choir.

Darnell Moore:

In the gospel choir. So then, I was really, I was proliferating like homo-antagonistic theologies. Even as I struggled through my own, I was coming into my own acceptance of myself. So I typically describe as like being very spiritually schizophrenic. Um, and I'm using that in a—in the most gentle way possible. **[00:18:00]** But there was sort of split cells, so Kevin and I would direct together, and espouse like this type of really rigid conservative theology and go home and sleep together. I mean, so Newark becomes a space where another young pastor, minister, was a sexual partner. And I remember he would ask me to pray over the— or going to churches and gospel choirs and having hands laid on you to get rid of demons of homosexuality.

So and this is all in Newark prior to me living there in 2007 as an adult. [Laughs] So Newark had a very particular—I had it—so you could imagine, like, my connection to Newark and sort of it as a potential space where queerness is a possibility. Particularly because I came, because of my experience, I just couldn't imagine one day that I'll be marching down Broad Street in a gay pride parade. Like

I—that didn't—that didn't seem possible then. And I'm certain that for those who were on the other side of my sermons or prayers or whatever else, they were always so shocked, but I also think that it brought a sense of relief to so many people, too. 'Cause a lot of the same—uh, same, particularly gay guys, you know, I would create space for them in my apartment when I lived on James Street and Burnet. And these guys would come like even before or after church, I think seeking refuge really.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Hmm. Before or after church.

Darnell Moore:

They would just hang out on my house. [00:20:00] My house was like the hang out spot for—for—and this is when I moved back in 2007. By that time, by this point, like I'm at—I'm in a very different point in my life. I've a very different sense of theology, so a lot of the folk that I was with, in the church scene with, would still hang around, who themselves might—may or may not identify as queer publicly, um, but who struggle to do so. And many homes suffered depression. So before, like, there was a sort of very public like type of activist work, I do see the creation of those type of spaces amongst our community as—as critical, too.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Tell me a little bit about what places in Newark you associate with—

Darnell Moore:

—Uh.—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

—LGBTQ people.

Darnell Moore:

Yeah. Dammit. What is the name of this bar? There's a bar—Murphy's?

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Murphy's?

Darnell Moore: Murphy's. Yeah, so the first gay bar I ever went to in Newark was Murphy's and that was far before the Prudential Center was even there and I was a college student.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right, it was where it was demolished.

Darnell Moore: It was on Edison Place.

Tim Stewart-Winter: When did—

Darnell Moore: Well, right over—and it was demolished, and I went there.

Tim Stewart-Winter: What was it like?

Darnell Moore: Oh! I actually... the first time I went—I'm trying to think if it's the first or second—but I went by myself once, while an undergrad at Seton Hall. So I was young. And I was really, really, really seeking community. I mean, before, when I didn't go to Murphy's, I would go to the Village and hang out like Christopher Street [00:21:30]. And I remember going to Murphy's once, and I just remember all other people appearing much older than me. [Laughter]. And the music was like house music and I'm like—I'm from the '90s hip hop era—and I'm like, "I don't know what this music is." Then that made it feel older to me. I'm like, "This is music I don't know. The people look older." But—but it was so—I also felt very safe. [00:22:00] That's what I remember feeling like. I wasn't alone and I didn't feel any—any way unprotected or—or in line of violation.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Mhmm.

Darnell Moore: Despite the—like, Newark was by—like, so Newark culture was just very different from what I experienced growing up in South Jersey, Camden, Philly area. Like I would just hear hip hop. Never heard house music in my life. Like, when I saw people dancing to "the percolator," I'm like—you know,

the sort of house—I'm like, "I don't even know what... none of... I don't know what this is. This is so strange."

[laughing]. So the culture of the place was just very different. And that culture, you know, was interesting because it—you know, it wasn't just— so and the college parties on campus would be dancing to house music, but then I get to the gay club like Murphy's and—and here they are doing it, too, just a little slower.

Um, but I've—and the only other space—because I didn't really hang out in a lot of social spaces, remember? I was very churchy.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Right.

Darnell Moore:

For the first part, I mean, the first two years of college, I just was on campus and I would go to New York. Once I started going into Newark and like, you know, wanting to explore, I would go to Murphy's. I mean, like one time— there used to be— call— these phone, um, phone chat lines, you would call.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah.

Darnell Moore:

And I would call the phone chat lines and that's how I met guys. And I remember meeting, um, a few. One was a white guy who came to Seton Hall in, like, a red car. It was something fancy and I kept remembering and I'm standing—no one on campus knows I'm like gay— I'm standing at the gate and I'm thinking this is definitely, definitely—He had blond hair. He just looked very—[chuckles]. They're definitely gonna know I'm gay now.]

I think I hid so he couldn't see me, so we couldn't connect.

[00:24:00] Um, and another time, though, I ended up at the house of an older man in East Orange maybe. I don't know how—I had met him, I think, at Murphy's and we got a car, a taxi, to his house. I remember being in his house thinking, "this is the most disgusting apartment I've ever seen." I remember this like—and I was young. So I had to be 19 or 20.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Mhmm.

Darnell Moore:

I'm thinking, "this is disgusting." Like, I think I might have seen a rodent and I was staying on the bed and thinking, "why am I here? Why am I engaging him sexually?" Like, "what is this about?" and part—that was the years of my life really when I was in search of just, somebody. You know, and I remember getting back to cam—like having to get a taxi back to campus in the morning. Thinking like, "where... w-where am I living at?" **[00:24:53]** What, where, you know? And there would be moments like that. Moments when I would drift off. So the spaces where, you know, I spent a lot of time in Newark churches. Rarely—I didn't really go to bars and stuff back then. I did go to Murphy's. And then when I wanted to, like when I started to, like I—I would—when I really wanted queer life, I would go to New York City, and I went to, like, everywhere from, like, the Octagon, which was a really big club downtown in the '20s. And Christopher Street bars. Like all the random bars that are no longer there. I would go to the Pier, too.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

To the Pier. So this is an interesting. I hadn't planned on asking about this but—**[00:26:00]** It seems like one key aspect of, well, Newark in general, but specifically being

queer in Newark is having New York, you know, close but also, but also far in some ways. And New York being kind of like the—the place everyone in the whole country associates with queerness. Do you have thoughts about that experience of going to the city and coming back?

Darnell Moore: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Or—or particular memories about that. I mean—

Darnell Moore: I do.

Tim Stewart-Winter: —anything you wanna share about that.

Darnell Moore: There is one moment where—‘cause I have many boyfriends, so that’s not—

Tim Stewart-Winter: But that’s helpful. It gives us things to—

Darnell Moore: Oh my gosh. Damon Parker was my first boyfriend when I was—I don’t know—I was a freshman in—freshman?

Tim Stewart-Winter: At Seton Hall?

Darnell Moore: At Seton Hall, freshman or sophomore, I can’t recall. Um, anyway, I remember I was coming back. We were heading back to— we were on a PATH train, coming from New York, heading back to Seton Hall. And—

Tim Stewart-Winter: From New York?

Darnell Moore: From New York. Yup. From Christopher Street. And I remember sitting on his lap on a PATH train. And first time I’ve ever done anything like that in public. And I felt safe, for some reason. Now on the train are like, I mean that’s not like— it’s the same people that are probably traveling to Newark that I’d be walking on the streets with. But there was something about New York that I think I—we imagined to—for it to be like queer friendly. And, it was. I mean, like when we got— literally, when you would get off at

Christopher Street stop, like you would come into a sea of, like, black and brown folk. Trans girls, um, you know.

[00:28:00] Like, trans boy. I mean everybo—I mean, the streets were packed. At least, that’s how it felt to us. Like, that is the most black and brown, queer and trans people I’ve ever seen in like one—on the street, on the pier, voguing over here. Like, inside the bars, all over the place. And it’s not even Pride! It’s like a Friday night.

So the bodies and presences of those - of us, of each other, of the collective - is what brought safety. When we’re back in Newark, the dense, like, there was no sort of concentrated space like that.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah.

Darnell Moore:

That—that could make you sort of get a sense that we are here. And in a large number, right? Like—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah.

Darnell Moore:

And these, I didn’t, I’d never encountered that. Um, so that—I can remember, like, the difference. So—so that time, traveling from New York—from New York comes to mind. I would travel back all the—I would come travel back at the—you know, **[00:29:06]** I would be getting home when the sun is coming out, all the time. That’s what I did. And I was never victimized. And which has, I think, has something to do with like my gender presentation. Um, which I think allowed me to be safe.

Now, this is interesting because the first time I ever did anything publicly gay, in Newark, I was working at the United Way of Essex and West Hudson. **[00:29:30]** Keith

Green was the president and he was my boss. And they were having a, uh—

Tim Stewart-Winter: When was this? Sorry. When were you working there?

Darnell Moore: Uh, this is a good question. So this has to be, 2000—yeah, around 2009, 2008.

Tim Stewart-Winter: When you say doing something publicly gay—

Darnell Moore: **[00:30:00]** So City Hall was hosting with the Newark Pride Coalition a, um—the flag raising.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right.

Darnell Moore: And I was—this was like the—I was invited to speak. And I remember going into his office and I said, “Keith, so, I need to leave for lunch to go over to City Hall and give these remarks.” And he said, “Okay.” And I said, “I dunno if I can do it.” And he said, “Why?” I said, “Because I am about to stand up in front of City Hall and say I’m gay. In public.” And you know what he did? He said, “Okay.” And he got his stuff and he walked with me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow.

Darnell Moore: And he stood there. While I stood at that podium and read the speech. While at the same time, a man who was always out on the streets—he was houseless—was calling me faggot under his breath. I remem—and I ca—I also remember thinking—

Tim Stewart-Winter: While you were reading this?

Darnell Moore: In front of the police. While Cory Booker is here. But he was, you know—faced mental health issues. And I just remember like even that, like, what the streets represented for me, for at least for me, I don’t know about other people— And by the streets, I mean the ways that, you know, streets

can sort of serve as representations. Why is it that I felt like I could be my queer self on Christopher Street? Um, as opposed to not being my queer self and feel unsafe in front of City Hall with police officers there in Newark,

Tim Stewart-Winter: With police officers there because...

Darnell Moore: Well, you know, they were out—they were present because the Mayor was there.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sure, right.

Darnell Moore: And actually, they were—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Supposedly, supposed to make one feel safe.

Darnell Moore: Oh yeah. They—the presence is supposed to make you feel safe. But, you know, [00:32:00] Dana Rone was there on that—of course at the time, and she was out and—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Dana Rone, who was on the city council?

Darnell Moore: Dana, yup, Councilwoman Dana Rone, um, who was out and quite proud about her lesbian identity.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was this the first [crosstalk 00:32:17]?

Darnell Moore: You know what? That's a good question and may—and maybe the ear—yeah, first or second. And—

Tim Stewart-Winter: And your boss was there?

Darnell Moore: And my boss was there. Keith was there.

Tim Stewart-Winter: And he is—he is not gay, not out.

Darnell Moore: I w—you know what? I don't know if he's out.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Never came up.

Darnell Moore: You know, but like, you know, he's—he became a big brother to me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah.

Darnell Moore: You know? And like just [crosstalk 00:32:40].

Tim Stewart-Winter: That's a really powerful act of [crosstalk 00:32:43].

Darnell Moore:

It was amazing, you know what I mean? And it a—you know, to be quite honest, it's like that moment where—where my activism in Newark became pretty amped up. So what's important about this is, you know, I did a lot of work around LGBT stuff, but most of my energy went to doing work within other types of coalitions and collectives. So I was on the board of Stop Shooting, Inc., which—and out. I mean, they—they would be at things where I'm talking about my gayness. These are guys that were like, in your imagination, would be like the most homo-antagonistic former, like drug gangbangers, but you know, they were like, living in the projects, went to jail, been shot, shot at people. They would not be the type of black and Latino men you would think would be so embracing of me and that— they put me on their board.

You know I did a—, you know, we did stuff out on the streets like Stop the Violence marches. I was very publicly out by this point. That did not at all keep them from embracing me, publicly. [00:34:00] I was part of the New Jersey Governing Insti—Governing Institute of New Jersey as a board member, helping to try to keep that up and running, and New Jersey Women and AIDS Network. You know, all of it. I was on the board of Newark Legacy Charter School and all of these sort of areas. And part of why I was doing that is because I really was interested in, like, people connecting the dots between these struggles. Like if you're, if we're on, if we're doing Stop Shooting, if that's our goal, then it makes sense that we have to see anti-violence as also an—you know, stopping queer and trans antagonistic violence as part of that.

In the same way that I wouldn't, you know, my thoughts were like, if we're—if we're queer and trans identified, the Stop Shooting work is ours too. New Jersey Women and AIDS Network is ours too. This education reform. That's our work, too. And, uh, you know, it—yeah, it jus—yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So we—you brought up City Hall.

Darnell Moore: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: [Crosstalk 00:35:10] This moment in front of City Hall. And you were the founding chair of the mayoral commission. Can you tell us the story of the commission and whatever—whatever back story you think is best [crosstalk 00:35:30] so we put it in context.

Darnell Moore: Yeah, so—I think it's important to acknowledge the political leaders who were responsible for that—namely, Ron Rice and Dana Rone, and a lot of their colleagues. But those two championed this—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Ron Rice and Dana Rone.

Darnell Moore: Yeah, now the sort of—the skeleton was laid out really by them. But that was by also pressure of the community. Um, and—[crosstalk 00:35:57].

Tim Stewart-Winter: Pressure of what community?

Darnell Moore: **[00:36:00]** The queer and LGBT Community in Newark, so— And a lot of this also could be traced, you know, to—Cory Booker made lots of promises after Sakia Gunn was killed so the work that Gary Paul Wright and Laquetta Nelson and James Credle and Janyce and June had done, and Liberation in Truth, and all of the range of folk that they're connected to, made something like that commission possible. I mean, this was sort of like in the works over years. This

idea of some type of instrumentality of government or some type of means of accountability even if they didn't know what that looked like.

So you have the one in Dana Rone, and in Ron Rice, who were with the government, who could forward that. But even that, I want to lift up like, how I watched and was part of the community who helped. I remember, like, emails being passed among community members actually adding language to what would be the legislation that would set this up. A different way of doing work, right? Like Albert Cunningham and Gary—everybody weighing in on what a sort of draft legislation could look like that would go to Council, Ron Rice—they gave pretty much the—they put that in the hands of the community to shape it. The name—I mean, so it was really organic and a collaborative process between the community members and elected officials and a lot of the elected officials were very open. And staff, I mean. And, um—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Ron Rice was on the Council.

Darnell Moore:

Ron Rice was on council at the time. Dana Rone at some... she ended up being disposed. And Ron becomes a person who is like championing—that, he did. He was the person that made it happen.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

What was the name of the commission finally?

Darnell Moore:

That's a good question. [00:38:00] It was—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

We can get that.

Darnell Moore:

It was the LGBT—the Commission—City of Newark Commission on LGBTQ Concerns. And yeah, so they named me the—appointed me as chair. And our job was

really simple. I mean, we—what we later found out was that it couldn't—it wasn't really the city's Council. It was a Coun—it was a mayoral advisory collec—[chuckles] it was the mayor's council. We were supposed to be advising the mayor.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Can you explain that distinction or what do you mean by that?

Darnell Moore: So it fell under the office of the mayor.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Mm-hmm.

Darnell Moore: And this is one that Perris [Straughter] helped us to sort of—Perris and some of the other city hall staff helped us to clarify as we sort of became a body and started working through—we had to develop a structure. We needed by-lines and a type of structure to—so that this, you know, our—my—the goal was always like, “How can this live on past the bodies here now? And in that work, it became more clear that the way that this was organized was really a mayoral council. That the folk that—the mutual accountability would be between the mayor—whoever that is in office—and this group. Not necessarily this group, it's a—over—sort of holding accountable, like city council.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah.

Darnell Moore: If that makes any sense. So by default, it also means that we had access to the departments that fall under the mayor's domain. So it meant that our getting access to the police department, which we did, came through the mayor's office. Our getting access to health and human services came through the mayor's office. **[00:40:00]** Not city council which was—which was a really helpful thing for us.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Why?

Darnell Moore: Because it—these are folks who are responsible. Their—their job—they’re responsible to the—

Tim Stewart-Winter: To the mayor. Yeah, right.

Darnell Moore: In a way that city council may call, say a chief of police, to appear for questioning. They don’t have to come. [Laughs]

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah, right.

Darnell Moore: But it made a difference that the mayor, that this was coming from the mayor’s office. And that was hard work but it was—We—I think we got a lot accomplished.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Was there opposition to creating this—the commission?

Darnell Moore: Not—you know what? It wasn’t loud enough that I noticed. I can—I remember even the sort of swearing in. It was like official swearing in service, or whatever, at city hall.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Do you have photos of that?

Darnell Moore: Yeah. Yeah, we do, actually. I really—and it’s so funny, like, oh my God, that was years ago!—but I do have photos. And it was a beautiful service. I mean, they had beautiful programs made. It was attended by community members and it wasn’t open—it wasn’t like the city council convened or the mayor convened just for this moment. I think this was a part of a larger day, if I can recall. Now, maybe they did have—I can’t remember, but it wasn’t any—I don’t remember there being any—

Tim Stewart-Winter: I’d love to scan those photos.

Darnell Moore: In any—uh, yeah, I will give them to you. Like any antagonism, I can’t remember. I don’t—not even from the city coun—if I remember correctly, that was like voted unanimously.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow. Cool. What were the goals?

Darnell Moore: Yeah, our goals, well, we didn't really know. [Laughs]
[00:42:00] And to be—all we know is like we thought—we assumed, you know, in some of our minds, accruing any type of political capital in a city where many felt a lack of it, felt like a win. But I think that we misinterpreted what that meant.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Interesting.

Darnell Moore: Having, you know, a commission does not necessarily mean that you're gonna witness material changes within structures, right? It means you can of—and that was a big lesson for me. That relying on the state instrument to do some work, one, you tend not to see changes in quick amounts of time, so what we did see were things like the flag raising being sort of institutionalized as a practice. And like ceremonies being held. What we did see was like a mandatory—like a way that community departments, departments of city hall could be called in to be in—to actually have conversation with community members who are LGBTQ. We did mayoral forums. I don't know, so this may have been the first time in the city's history where there were specific mayoral forums, good ones, specifically themed around LGBTQ issues of concern. So like—

Tim Stewart-Winter: With—with Mayor Booker?

Darnell Moore: Yeah. And, you know, that was a big deal—and whoever else is running and who is—when somebody else is running, it was really funny because I met with them all the time. I can't remember. Can't be that popular. But like, I remember having to meet—there was another person running against

Booker and I remember him—we'd like—us having
cof—Bryan and— we would sit down and have cof—Who is
this guy? What's his name? Anyway, but we sit down—

Tim Stewart-Winter: You mean running for mayor?

Darnell Moore: **[00:44:00]** Running for mayor as a contender against Booker.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Not—not Sharpe James?

Darnell Moore: No, it was— I can't remember. But we used to meet with,
like, with these type of officials and—and actually one
at—so that's a big deal. And also like, it ended up—you
know there was a training that was mandated for city hall
employees, via the work of the commission, especially the
work of the commission once I left, that they partnered with
Maren Greathouse to create the training for city hall, like, for
employees of the city. Like all of this stuff was bona fide, I
think, measures of success, if you wanna call it that. Now to
the extent though, that more or less, say LGBT folk were
able to get jobs, if employment and, discrimination is a thing,
to the extent that we could shift the sort of contour— like to
the extent that we could like impact things like housing
discrimination or get a shelter built.

Like those things, one, you realize, "Oh, none of these things
ever really happen in a four—term time-frame. And two,
most of the time, to really make substantive change like that
happen, you're gonna have to work outside of the
government offices to do it. [Laughs] So that was a sobering
lesson, right?**[00:45:33]** 'Cause there were lots of promises,
you know. "Look for a building, we'll get you a building for
a community center." "Look for...where would you all like
to go?" A type of pandering that I think was sincere,

but—and not priority. And because if it was priority, if we were Steve Aduato they would have gotten that building. [00:46:00] You understand? So it's like, for much of it after, I felt like it was just perfunctory, [00:46:07], like it was just [off mic 00:46:09], you know.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

For much of it after you left?

Darnell Moore:

Well, you know, I ended up leaving. You know I was—I was deeply, deeply involved. I left Newark, actually, moved, because I had gotten to a point where I literally started getting sick. By the time I left, I'd done a bunch of things. I ended up at Rutgers, you know, as associate director of the Newark Schools Research Collaborative, which itself was a really highly politicized job. Because we worked, Alan Sadovnik and I, in partnership with Newark Schools, Newark Public Schools, around data. Now, data collection and public school reform is just like the messiest waters one could ever engage in.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah. I can imagine.

Darnell Moore:

Oh my God. And then I went and was brought on and contracted by HMI to develop under— So Newark got money from Facebook. They were developing a series of potential school models, traditional public school models with themes, and my—I was hired to develop the school that was to loosely model the Harvey Milk High School in New York. But here in Newark—in Newark—[sneezes] excuse me—our goal was to create a school that was focused on civic engagement and—and the sort of theory around that was— another way to say it, was a school that was—uh, that—whose theme was social justice.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Mmhmm.

Darnell Moore:

And equity. Hardest work I could have ever done in my life. I wasn't prepared. [00:48:00] I was a team of one, with two consultants that I hired, working in a district that was under fire for having received a million dollars—or however amount of money from Mark Zuckerberg—and community who felt like the city wasn't accountable to them with a new superintendent who, for all purposes came in really not wanting to take on any projects that were started by the superintendent before her, so as, if they were to fail, she would not be seen as—I mean, this is my interpretation—clearly, she may have a different perspective—but the superintendent before her, I was very close to, Superintendent [Janey], and I worked with him a lot around data collection issues, but also he was very, very open to the work that we wanted to do, and started doing with staff around LGBTQs cultural—So I trained hundreds of staff.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

In the Newark Schools.

Darnell Moore:

Yeah, hundreds. I did three-hour trainings on LGBTQ identities with—I once did a training over the course of—three times, I think—two to three hours each—with all of the ancillary instructors, so Special Ed teachers. And I would do that type of stuff. This was under his watch. It was also through the—he was there when we helped to develop a sort of similar arm of LGBTQ staff and allies within Newark public school to help them to rethink curriculum and safety issues.

I should also mention that it was the development also of the commission that prompted the development of Essex

County's similar commission. So most of the Newark committee members met—we worked with the County Executive's Office to develop what would become their commission. [00:50:00] So all this stuff was happening and then I did this education work—and it was horrible. I mean I may have—like I may have given you all emails, but like the emails that—that argue—the debating I had to do when I would go to these meetings and community members would say things like, “We don't want the criminals or the gays.” Another school was being developed—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

This is the—when you're working on developing the LGBTQ, the social justice theme in school. “We don't want the criminals...”

Darnell Moore:

So there was another school that was a similar, so another—there are about six to seven school models, one of which was the school I was working on, which we were gonna call the Sakia Gunn School for Civic Engagement. The other was—and we actually met with Sakia's mom and got per—like, you know. The other school was a school that was focused on court adjudicated young people, youth, or young people who had been in the juvenile justice system. And that school was being developed by another team. So they would clump them two together. [00:51:08] “We don't want any criminals. We don't want criminals with our kids. We don't want the gays with our kids.” To which I would often say, “Most of our kids either got some type of criminal history, a lot of them do. Or they're gay. Or queer.” Like—but it was hard. I remember once—[crosstalk 00:51:23]...

Tim Stewart-Winter: This is under Superintendent Anderson?

Darnell Moore: Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay.

Darnell Moore: I remember leaving a really, really heated school board meeting where I had to get up and give a two-minute description of the school. I was told beforehand, "Don't turn your—keep your back, talk only to the school board. Do not turn your back and directly talk to the attendees." Behind me, they're screaming all types of shit. [00:52:00] And these are people who I—because I've told you I've done all these various forms of community organizing—I know by first name [00:52:03]. I know Donna Jackson. I know Wilhelmina. They loved me all day until I started working in the school, and then they're screaming all of these things. "This is reverse—this is segregation! Why would you...?" and I turned around. And absolutely then—Shavar Jeffries was the school board president at the time— I remember them looking at me so— There was so much compassion.

Tim Stewart-Winter: And you turned around and...?

Darnell Moore: I talked to them, you know. I just told them, like I cannot believe that most of you who I stand next to, like who I see out here fighting for justice, would say things like this. Now, I just remembered there being a lot of screaming and someone saying to me, "It's the first time I've ever had anything like this happen to me in Newark." Because I—by this point—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Is that the school board?

Darnell Moore: It was a school board meeting. And by this point, I had moved because I couldn't—I just—the politics of it all was

just—I went to the cardiologist. The cardiologist told me my blood pressure had went up 60 points. And this day, he said, "Do you need a escort to the train station?" And this is the first time, in all of the time I've been there, where that had been the case and these have been people that I knew, you know? I—I would—I thought, were relatively— and still do. And, I respect them a lot.

And in addition though, there was also, you know, within all communities, nothing's ever perfect. So I don't wanna paint the picture like our sort of LGBT collective itself was perfect. It wasn't. There was a lot of infighting [00:53:42]. So much drama. It's just, you know, and this is nothing different than I had experienced in other places, but there was sort of this distinction between sort of this new guard of leaders, and I think this operated in both the queer and trans spaces, as well as the larger Newark community. [00:54:00] So for me, I was part of a contingent of newer, younger folk coming in. And whether it was the folk outside of the LGBT community, and, it was always this question of, you know, "you're not even from here!" [Laughs]

And that was pivotal because it means, you know, when you get appointed to something like the chair of the commission that—and people see that as power, when it really ain't no power, you become the subject of scorn. And I left Newark really, really, really hurt. Because I felt—you know my—all of this work that I did until I started working for HMI, that was volunteer work. I've worked full-time jobs doing all the rest of that stuff. When we were working to build that after-school program from HMI with MPA, I was a

volunteer. We were working—to all this stuff around the Commission, I was a volunteer. When we're working around Defarra Gaymon's case, like all the stuff I've done, it was all, like, we were volunteer and I'm like, "I don't know what you think I'm getting out of this." Like, I'm not getting paid! But—and that was really hurtful to me. So between experiencing the drama of the school opening and the internal fighting, or what I understood to be just like this competition for power. Now, let me be clear. I also understand what that feels like. I do think that—I'm gonna be very clear—Barry Mattis in the Mayoral—in the mayor's administration. I don't think that, you know, took a liking to, I think, me and Perris and Bryan. **[00:56:00]** One, beca—and I don't wanna minimize any of our work—but I think when you're like the right type of representative, like—who you're sort of read as the "well-spoken"...went to the sort of "right school"—you know how to sort of perform in these various spaces, these various, before these various publics. I think they saw us as a sort of "good Negroes." The good enough Negroes who, like, represent and talk to the Mayor to do **[00:56:20]** all of these other things in ways they didn't with others. I also think the fact of our maleness **[00:56:28]** had something—has a lot to do with us ascending in ways as—you know, leaders, in ways that some of our sisters did not, who have been there for years. So all of their critiques were not necessarily wrong. You understand? Like, when Reverend Janyce had a critique, like, "Why are you the chair?" She had every right to say that. Because she's been in that city forever. She's been

working forever, and I know how easy it is in cities like Newark, where manhood becomes the sort of rubric for any type of leadership position, to be lifted up in ways they weren't. So, but I didn't really—I wasn't able to sit with that, until after. I mean like, 'cause I, you know, initially, I'm like "Why, why do they keep asking me to do stuff? 'Cause I'm working the hardest!"

Tim Stewart-Winter: Mm-hmm. Right. And it is volunteer work.

Darnell Moore: You know, I kept saying that—like, "I'm working my ass off!" But then I had to think, "You know what? She has a point."

Tim Stewart-Winter: Hmm.

Darnell Moore: She has a point. **[00:57:24]** James, you know, they have a point. We have to be careful about how we can easily be branded and commodified in this work. Like what—you know, you want sort of—you know, these folk have been here for years, for years, for years, and they've laid the groundwork, the foundation, for everything we have been doing. And they didn't get the same respect.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Hmmph.

Darnell Moore: But I couldn't see that. You know, and it makes me wonder—

Tim Stewart-Winter: That's really complicated.

Darnell Moore: Yeah, it is. It is. 'Cause you know in the moment, **[00:58:00]** I'm thinking like, you know, I'm carrying my feelings on my shoulders. "You don't appreciate shit! I'm getting beat up at these meetings and then you are supporting—" And at the same time, I hadn't realized that so

many of them had felt beat down for so many years. And then here we come, and all of a sudden like, the city is like—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Opens up to you, or—

Darnell Moore: And that could, I don't know. It could be a lot of different reasons, you know. And I have yet to fully understand it, but I get it.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Wow. Just so that I make sure I get the name, you' mentioned Barry Mattis.

Darnell Moore: Barry Mattis.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Mattis, in—in City Hall.

Darnell Moore: Mm-hmm.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Um.

Darnell Moore: Who was a pivotal actor—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay.

Darnell Moore: And very, very pivotal to the formation of Hetrick-Martin Institute. She is the reason... she was a former board member of Hetrick-Martin in New York City. So she was the money connector, like, the money to sort of like, get Hetrick-Martin Newark off the ground, which because of Barry, she was the force behind us doing the work. When we needed things for the commission—she took a liking to me. By the way, my boss, Thomas Krever from Hetrick-Martin said to me once in our supervision meeting: **[00:59:11]** “You know, Barry has a thing for black gay men.” [Laughing] Just wrong on many levels, but she was—she herself took this on as a key issue, so in so many ways, she got critiqued a lot by everybody in the city. But I, and for right reasons, I also knew that she—for many of the things that we were celebrating in the community—she was the force behind

ensuring that we got them. Isn't that the problem of politics, right? [01:00:00] So like, part of our balance was we were finally experiencing, like, resources coming, I mean, like this is the first time like MPA, which is just—just founded itself. Like, I mean, as an organization through Bryan's work. You know, we did a strategic plan with them. It was most of these groups were like... not yet, it's a [unintelligible - 01:00:14]. So when MPA gets it to first grant, and it's from Prudential Foundation, you think you're winning. You get—you sense that you're like, "Oh, we're finally getting our piece of the pie." Like when—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

When he gets a grant from the Prudential Foundation—[crosstalk 01:00:28].

Darnell Moore:

[Crosstalk 01:00:28] A capacity-building grant. And that was in 2000 what? Maybe around the same—around 2010, 2011. Because the capacity grant was given to MPA so that it could establish itself to essentially take over the role of managing the HMI Newark project, which never happened. So what was supposed to happen is the way this developed in the community, HMI, MPA developed this in partnership. HMI was supposed to sort of—was gonna train up those in MPA to eventually take ownership of the project so that it can be more focused. That hadn't happened, still haven't happened, and for what—for various reasons.

But, like, these are the types of things that, like—this required, like, strategic planning, required, like, some of us—you know, Bryan worked...he had a policy, you know, , MPA, you know, Perris went to school for urban planning. Pryor[?] went to school for policy. I had done all this

administrative work. So this is why we were able to be so nimble as well. June was in school for social work. Like we—we had. Like, so we had people who were grant writers, who—and that, you know, when we hadn't had no grant writers around [laughing].

Tim Stewart-Winter: Yeah.

Darnell Moore: Like, folks who could now, like, do resource development. Who knew how to host a fundraiser and get money. Who knew how to like, you know, find a list of **[unintelligible - 01:01:51]** work with these politicals to sort of...

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sorry.

Darnell Moore: To work with the political machines.

Tim Stewart-Winter: **[01:02:00]** Yeah.

Darnell Moore: To get money for, like—Hetrick-Martin development. Like, those meetings, the way that this money comes at Hetrick-Martin is because most of us Newark folk sat in the meetings as representatives of this partnership and they believed in the work because of the presence of the Newark community that was there. Many of whom had deep ties in the community and actually the skill set to do a lot of the stuff.

Tim Stewart-Winter: So it's this transition to being insiders, politically.

Darnell Moore: Oh my gosh, and that's—and you know what? That comes with so many costs. Which by the way is the reason why when I was in Newark, I thought about running for office. I was going to run for council. By the time I'm—

Tim Stewart-Winter: Really? I had no idea.

Darnell Moore: By the time I left Newark, I said I will never—I can never be a politician 'cause I don't want to lie. I can't lie.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Wow.

Darnell Moore:

And I—I think I felt in many ways, comp—I mean, like compromising—you know, you make these compromises, um, that—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Even without running for office.

Darnell Moore:

Even without running for office. Even without having really the substantial political power. But I remember being asked to write bullet points for its—for, like, the mayor around particular issues. Some—most of which were, I think, were fair, but, you know, you do things like when the mayor doesn't show up to the closing of branch, of Baxter Terrace projects, for example, Baxter Terrace which was—it's located—it was on James Street. A large housing project unit that was shut down. And I remember the day, I lived two blocks away from there on James, when the community that lived there was called to meet at a community center on James Street.

[01:04:00] Well, they were pretty much told the time that—the amount of time they would have before this housing project would be demolished and they need to move out. And I remember the mayor wasn't there. And this is what I mean by compromises. Like, I had to make a decision. Do you or do you not call out the mayor here? And in a public way? Because if you do, the relationship that you worked to build with Barry, who does not like the mayor being called out— And Barry is the whole, like, the connection to the money. [laughs] She has a lot of, like she—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

The money for the—for [crosstalk 01:04:39].

Darnell Moore: For—for the... yeah. [Crosstalk 01:04:40] This was—this is Mayor Booker’s money person. I don’t know. But that’s why she’s there. So like, you know, so—and I—I mean, I said—I think I wrote a blog or something, I can’t recall. But I’m giving that as—that’s the type of situation you find you have. You know, Barry does something wrong or says something wrong or treats somebody wrong and you’re thinking, “Well, fuck. I can’t really, like, cuss Barry out, because if I cuss Barry out, that \$10,000 thing that we might need to get this project off the ground, like it’s—you know, like will we get that? You know, you think about, like, I did the work around, with that Facebook money. My paycheck came out of that money. And I’m thinking, “Well, I guess this is worth it because if we can get the school built, that would have benefited these young people.” Now the school never got built.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Right.

Darnell Moore: But that does not mean that the community didn’t have a problem with this money they understood to be politically driven, and that I was paid by that. So there are all of these complicated, thorny - ugh! - issues that really make you think sometimes [being on the] *inside* don’t—does not always mean it’s gonna be the best either. It could—for the community, or for you individually, in terms of your integrity. That was a big lesson for me.

Tim Stewart-Winter: **[01:06:00]** Wow, that’s—that’s—unexpected—I mean, uh, I’m learning a lot. Which is great. Do we have until 3:30 or 4:00 or...?

Darnell Moore: 3:30.

Tim Stewart-Winter: 3:30.

Darnell Moore: Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Okay. So there are a few things I wanna make sure that—to just at least bounce off you? **[01:06:26]**

Darnell Moore: Yup.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Um, and those are Newark Pride and what marching down Broad Street felt like. I'd love to—if you have memories associated with Sakia Gunn and that tragedy's kind of role **[01:06:53]** in Newark's queer identity. You mentioned the Defarra Gaymon case. And then, what you think—what you would like to see for queer Newark, in the next five years or ten years? So do you wanna... can we touch on each of those?

Darnell Moore: Yeah. Um, Sakia Gunn, I was—I was on—it happened in 2003. I was back in South Jersey at the time. And I wasn't there in Newark when it happened. But the ghost of her death had—it shaped, I think, that—you know, the more recent development of activism, or if there was already activism on the ground, which there was. **[01:08:00]** And maybe activism looks like, I don't know, the cr—you know, people showing that—that queer and trans people have a place to party . or, you know, they are pushing government. I mean, I think, it takes various—to its various iterations, but Sakia's death animated—it is the thing that like catapulted, I think, the surge of activist energy that I was—that I came at the tail end of.

There were people like Dawn James, who was a young lesbian girl, and friend of Sakia, who—she eventually moved out of Newark—who was just as vocal and—and *about* it,

and protesting on the street, and holding marches with Sakia's cousins, with Sakia's cousin and her family, as anybody else. And in fact, it's important to acknowledge the young people that were Sakia's friends who were part of the marches and walks. So in many ways, you know, I've always felt obligated to recount the history of Sakia's death as a big motivation for why people decided to do the work, if nothing else, to prevent Sakia's—that type of violence from happening again. Which is interesting because and so when Defarra Gaymon, who didn't identify at least publicly as gay. We were very careful to maneuver how we took on this particular task. One, because we didn't wanna do him violence and death by naming him in ways he may not have named himself.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Sorry. I got to interr—what task?

Darnell Moore:

So we did a bunch of advocacy. [01:10:00] We worked with the sheriff's office and the county to push for an investigation of the officer and if possible some type of consequence for the shooting of him—for Defarra's shooting. Like he, you know, it—so Kyle Rosenkranz at the time was working with us, who was a white, cis heterosexual ally, who is also a lawyer, for example. So like, you know, this one I met by, like, this interesting coalition we were able to put together.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah.

Darnell Moore:

And we wanted to know to what extent—and also, the ACLU was a big part, took a big lead in this—but to what extent—they *led* it really—along with the community—to what extent was his shooting coerced? Not just his shooting specific, but these type of actions. We wanted to know why

were undercover officers in parks where sex work or other type of exchanges may be going on and you're almost soliciting that from someone? And then, if someone comes on and a scuffle happens, and someone ends up dead, which leads us back to the question of the state's culpability in this man's death.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah.

Darnell Moore:

And this is again another example of what I mean by, like, reform don't always necessarily mean equity or transform—equitable transformation.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Was there reform?

Darnell Moore:

As a result of that, this was why the Essex County Commission was formed.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

The Essex?

Darnell Moore:

The Essex County LGBT, they have a commission that—

Tim Stewart-Winter:

That was formed out of—

Darnell Moore:

Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

—that case. I had no idea. Because it was a county officer? I forgot that.

Darnell Moore:

Yes.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Gotcha.

Darnell Moore:

So it's like, you look back and what the fuck you, you get—you know? **[01:12:00]** So you give—you give this—you know, this county, or you give Newark folk who were the most vocal, an opportunity to help shape it. You know, we talked about how many, you know—which gives you the impression that you're actually doing something good. Until you look back years later and go, "The officer is probably still fucking working." This—you know, I'm not

saying that the county isn't— that instrumentality isn't good, but this is what I mean [01:12:25] by like, the way that the government can really play you. [Laughs] [01:12:28] Or we cannot, you know—and I don't want to act like we don't have agency—we were part of creating that—but in the moment, that felt like a quick win. A quick win. But what I mean now is that looking back in retrospect, I would rather not have had a fucking commission. I would have rather them stop being, you know, so the ACLU kept pressing in it. They may have pressed up—I'm pretty sure they went to court. They did to ensure that that type of actions—I'm pretty sure, they went to court for that. To ensure they weren't sort of coercing people in that way anymore.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah.

Darnell Moore:

Um.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

And using undercover—?

Darnell Moore:

Yes. Police.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah. Huh. But you would rather the commission—

Darnell Moore:

I would rather it not exist.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Not exist.

Darnell Moore:

And r—Because it—I know what it was, you know. And, you know, I didn't—I didn't know it then. You know, I felt like, "Oh, see, we're—we're making change."

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah.

Darnell Moore:

"We are doing something good."

Tim Stewart-Winter:

But it was the appearance.

Darnell Moore:

It was ceremonial.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Yeah. Hmm.

Darnell Moore: And this is all really shifting my poli—like I really, really have—like, to the extent that this is—my work in Newark has really shifted my politics. So now we’re in this sort of Movement for Black Lives moment. [01:14:00] And my patience with the state or ability to even negotiate with the state around these ceremonial—I have - I’m like, "Fuck all of that." I don’t need to—I don’t want no meeting with the president. Like, we don’t need, like, a proclamation. We need shit to, I mean, *substantially* change, you know? That is because of this type of stuff in Newark that I would see, you know, because I can look back and go, “I took part in creating that—that commission.” I walked away feeling like we did something good. And it was good, maybe, it’s a *type* of good.

But what type of justice did that bring to this man’s family? What type, like, how—what other people were not, you know, who was—who was coerced after him? You know, I’m like—unless I see that stuff stop, I don’t give a fuck about this other stuff. I don’t even want the New—the City of Newark Commission if—if you’re still allowing LGBT people to be discriminated in your city hall. Like it doesn’t matter to me. A lot of my lessons and my politics and my practice as an organizer were shaped because of this work.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Sure.

Darnell Moore: You know? Um—

Tim Stewart-Winter: So you see the Defarra Gaymon case through the lens of Black Lives Matter and vice-versa?

Darnell Moore: Oh yes, I do, and Sakia Gunn. I see these as fitting with this genealogy of what I call the “congregation of the dead.”

People who have been killed along this intersection, you know. Yes, you know, and - which also means that Newark has a substantial part in this movement for black lives, too.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Um, Newark Pride.

Darnell Moore:

Oh yeah. Newark Pride. You know, what's really power—what was and is powerful about Newark Pride is the power of representation. **[01:16:00]** People saw live and in color, queer and trans people, gender non-conforming people, out on the streets. And that is so—you know, *optics* are so important.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Mm-hmm.

Darnell Moore:

And I think what these moments said and—one, it said, in a way that so many people, particularly the folk who buy in to the sort of idea that—and in some ways, they are right—like that gayness is overly represented as white. Here was people—here was an example that no, these are our people, these are—they are our brothers and sisters, our cousins. Our neighbors—and they all *over there*. They are here. And it was also a way of re-imagining the sort of—this—like it was a way of re-imagining who the Newarker is. Because Newarkers have a very strong sense of place. And I think this was saying, "Oh, wait—they are Newarkers, too. Not just LGBT, but no, they're *Newarkers*, who just happen to be LGBT." That's crucial in Newark.

And I think that—for that march to happen along the same streets where Sakia's blood was spilled is super powerful. Because there—if she was killed because of the push against invisibility, here we have folk who are making themselves as visible as possible. **[01:18:00]** And demanding of their

Newark family to be seen, to not be victimized and violated. To not be killed or hurt, but to be respected. Years later, and maybe it's two or three years ago, I had wrote a friend—they had started hosting these mock funerals in Newark as a protest and this was organized by, like, Newark Anti-Violence Coalition, which is like a coalition of different groups, as a way to stage these public demonstrations of trauma and remembrance, really, by literally walking down the street with, like, coffins, or faux coffins, to stop violence. And I wrote one of the friends of the organizers saying—encouraging them to—to remember Sakia Gunn at the big demonstration they were gonna do. And the response to her, to me, was "that's not what this is about."

So yeah, you know, my sense is you know, while—while representation is good and I think it's useful, optics are good, we need more than that. We need shifts in people's ideologies and in their hearts. The opposite example I give is, you know, I interviewed Amiri Baraka before he passed. Let's see—oh yeah. So I interviewed Amiri Baraka before he passed and one of the things—the day that we interviewed him was the anniversary of his daughter's death. She was killed. She was a lesbian. [01:20:00] She and her partner were killed, and that day, Amiri Baraka, who everyone has known as like this sort of homo-antagonistic poet of the Black Arts Movement, remembered his daughter and just talked about how much he loved her. And I remember just looking at his eyes, and just thinking—this is what I mean by transformation.

Tim Stewart-Winter:

Wow.

Darnell Moore: That he's come to love, not only his daughter, but LGBT people. His wife—I stood on the same stage with her at times. With tears in her eyes as we advocated for her. She was the head of the PFLAG in Newark, Amina Baraka. So like just being around and just watching my elders, who at some point may have been homo-antagonistic, love the hell out of us. That's the type of change that I mean. I've seen both of those things in the world. Yeah.

Tim Stewart-Winter: Thank you.

Darnell Moore: Thank you.

Tim Stewart-Winter: This was phenomenal.

Darnell Moore: Thank you.

/AT/rj/lb