

Cristian Najera interviewed by Irma Perdomo

April 14<sup>th</sup> 2021

Sunset Park, Brooklyn

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

people, personally, pandemic, united states, protesting, feel, person, life, police, day, practice, individual, black, siblings, family, government, black lives matter, racing, students, learn

Irma Perdomo: My name is Irma Perdomo and I interviewed Cristian Najera in Brooklyn, New York. April 14 2021. Cristian Najera, do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history?

Cristian Najera: Permission granted.

IP: Thank you. What is your name?

CN: My name is Christian Najera.

IP: How old are you?

CN: I am 28 years old.

IP: What is your occupation?

CN: I am currently an assistant teacher at a preschool.

IP: Are you happy being an assistant teacher?

CN: I feel like I'm in the right path, But I do not want to be an assistant all my life.

IP: Okay. I understand you have a passion for music. I would like to know, why did you choose Study education?

CP: To me education, changes lives and education gives people opportunities. The reason why I chose education is because I as I was growing, it did not had the same opportunity in education. That is the reason why I decided to pursue a teacher education career.

IP: Okay.

IP: What neighborhood do you live in?

CN: I live in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

IP: Where are you from?

CN: I was born and raised in Honduras.

IP: What is your first language?

CN: My first language is Spanish.

IP: What is your racial identity?

CP: I identify myself as Latino/Hispanic.

IP: Can you tell me what is your gender identity?

CN: A male

IP: What is your sexual orientation?

CN: I am gay.

IP: Do your family accept your sexual orientation?

CN: Currently they do.

IP: How do you feel about it?

CN: Right now I feel proud. But at the beginning, it was really hard because we all look and seek for acceptance at some period in our life.

IP: Can you tell me the long story how you and your family ended out in New York?

CN: Well, I was born and raised in a broken family setting and unstable financially and emotionally. Honduras is a poor country. And my family does struggle a lot in order to find a job and provide for food and for other essential needs. So in 1998, my mother decided to immigrate to the United States leaving me and my siblings behind which it was painful for her and for us, But we understood that it was for a better future. Throughout the years, my mom brought my siblings here and myself, And that's how I ended up in New York City in the year of 2004.

IP: Thank you. It's important that you know you don't feel uncomfortable with any question, you can go ahead and let me know.

CN: Sure.

IP: When your mother immigrated to the United States, who take care of you in Honduras?

CN: When my mother emigrated back in 1998, I was six years old, and my mother left me with her sister, and then we ended up living with my grandmother.

IP: Okay.

IP: What has been the most difficult stage of your life?

CN: I think in life, we go through a lot of difficult stages. Some are worse than others. But I have to say one of the hardest stages of my life was immigrant into a new country with a new language, different experiences different kinds of people, and for sure a place that it was unknown for me.

IP: Thank you.

IP: Right now, I'm going to ask you some question related to COVID-19. Is that ok with you?

CN: Sure it is.

IP: How are you coping with that pandemic?.

CN: Dealing with the pandemic was hard since day one. For me, especially I work in education, teachers have to resort to remote learning from one day to another level stress during certain times was difficult to deal with, now things are going slowly back to normal.

IP: Do you have a self care routine?

CN: Since I returned to teach in person back in September, I said to myself that my self-care routine will be now bringing extra work home.

IP: What was your initial response to COVID and how has it changed over time?

CN: I gotten say, like, everyone I was in panic. Because I did not know the huge impact this pandemic was going to make worldwide. A year later, I still feel insecure, because as a teacher, I'm being exposed every day because I have to interact with students, parents, administration and co workers.

IP: How has the Coronavirus changed your life?

CN: I think Coronavirus has changed everyone's life either for positive or negative. On my side, I have to say that a helped me realize and it taught me to learn how to appreciate the little moments with the people that you love and the people around you. Worldwide stressful since day one. But personally, I feel like Coronavirus was an eye opening pandemic that made me change in a positive way.

IP: Have you or someone close to you have gotten COVID?

CN: Unfortunately, some family members and friends got infected with this terrible disease.

IP: What was that like?

CN: It was terrifying. Like anyone out there, you would not like to lose a family member or a friend. So it was a pretty scary moment.

IP: Did you lose anyone close to you?

CN: Fortunately, I did not lose anyone that was close to me.

IP: Right now, how are you coping financially?

CN: Honestly, I was blessed enough to still keep my job and resort to remote learning. So I was working from home every day. So financially, nothing has changed for me.

IP: What was it like to be in home so often?

CN: For me being a home was a nightmare. I am usually a person that's very sociable and being locked down in my house was just not satisfying at all.

IP: Do you think is the same work from home that in person?

CN: It is definitely not the same because once you are used to work in person that is your routine. I'm feel like anybody out there. Nobody likes changes from one moment to another one. So definitely for me, I would preferred to stick with working in person, but of course trying to stay safe is our priority.

IP: How does it impact you socially, mentally and emotionally?

CN: Well, it did impact me in every field. Socially. Like I mentioned before, I'm a social person. I like to be out there. I like to visit family and friends and spend quality time. Mentally I feel like that's one of the hardest one because just by looking at the news, you see people dying every day, hundreds and thousands of people getting sick. So just being able to see all of those people passing away hearing stories of family members that were hospitalized. Just gives you really something to think about and I feel like mentally was one of the biggest impacts that Coronavirus had to do with me. Now, emotionally for some of us, it was horrible for me personally, my grandma passed away. Back home she's still in Honduras. So it was hard for me because I was not able to get together with my family and you know pay tribute and be able to at least say our last Goodbye My grandma passed away to COVID she had other heart issues. But emotionally that was one of the things that didn't really affect me.

IP: I am sorry to hear that. How did it impact your family?

CN: It didn't impact my family a lot. Son of my siblings lost their job and they were four months, financially unstable.

IP: Right now, are people in your household working?

CN: Yes, currently everyone is back to normal.

IP: What have you learn about yourself and your family since the beginning of the crisis?

CN: Personally, I have learned a lot. But I have to say I have learned the most is to appreciate the little moments and so also to learn how to support each other unconditionally.

IP: What has been the hardest part of this pandemic for you?

CN: One of the hardest things during this pandemic for me has definitely been I've not been able to interact with family and close friends. I feel like your family and your closest friends are your backbone those are the people that lift you up and for me, that was one of the hardest things to deal

IP: Has there been anything positive to come out of the pandemic for you?

CN: Yes, so definitely take more advantage of nature, the people around you not to just love everyone and appreciate it, but also to take more advantage of the modern nature, like just a simple walk at the park to enjoy the environment, the trees, the life.

IP: What´s been your favorite thing to do in lockdown?

CN: During the lockdown, I was able to learn to cook a little bit, And I better on my dance skills,

IP: How you improve your dance skills?

CN: Well, I guess like something that I will always say, by practicing, I personally enjoy and love dancing. So a lot of practicing.

IP: How has the COVID-19 change how you think about relationship between our health as individuals and our health as a society?

CN: Definitely COVID have those all to stay safe to practice distance, but most important to be constantly aware of germs and diseases around us and the world.

IP: How do you think that government handled the COVID crisis?

CN: Personally, I think that this virus could have been prevented and the government could have reacted sooner or take actions sooner.

IP: How would you grade the job the government did in rolling out the vaccine?

CN: As mentioned before a rapid reaction could have saved more lives.

IP: Will you be getting the vaccine?

CN: Right now I am currently unsure about this dilemma.

IP: Why?

CN: As you can see on the news, some of them might not be affected as an example of Johnson and Johnson. Definitely, I'm not 100% sure about getting by a vaccine right now. But if my job requires me to do so then that will be having no choice.

IP: How are you feeling about the world reopening?

CN: I felt that it is about time. I think as long as we all take the necessary precautions and we all have learned how to stay safe. So, I think that we need to go back to normal.

IP: What is the first thing you're going to do when you have your freedom from the pandemic?

CN: I wouldn't say freedom. But I'm not rushing to do anything. I returned to my school premises in September and just something that I was saying that this is the new normal. But something that I'm looking forward is just not wearing a mask.

IP: How do you think the world will be changed when we come out of this pandemic?

CN: Well, I think that every event in life changes people for better or worse, personally I think people will keep in mind to practice better hygiene and keep distance from others. And also, people will learn how to love and protect each other.

IP: I want to remember you, if you don't feel comfortable with any question, just tell me.

CN: Thank you.

IP: Right now, I am going to ask you some questions about Black Lives Matter protest. Is that okay with you?

CN: That is okay.

IP: Do you remember where you were and what you thought when you first saw or heard about George Floyd murder?

CN: Exactly. I don't remember where I was, but I'm familiar with the topic.

IP: What do you remember about it?

CN: Because this is when the whole movement Black Lives Matter started.

IP: Explain to me why you think this anti racist protest erupted?

CN: Well, protests have always existed. The first amendment of the of the Constitution of the United States gave us the freedom of speech. I feel like why did this protests erupted was because of the way he was murdered.

IP: What are some of the reasons that you think protesting Black Americans and their indirect no Black allies are angry about the condition in the United States?

CN: There's no news for us that slavery existed in in the United States back in the days. I feel like these individuals are protesting and are angry, because they still feel that they don't have the right, Equal Rights.

IP: Do you believe there are issues with the criminal justice system in the United States that have helped flame this protest?

CN: I completely think that there are issues in the system that have helped frame this process. Those issues could be a simple example, when a police man will approach Hispanic Latino or a Black individual, they will usually be aggressive. But when the police approaches a White individual, they will treat them with more respect.

IP: When do you become aware of those issues?

CN: Personally, I had an experience back when I came from Honduras, I was a junior high school student. And I was taking the bus at that time, that will only give me 1.75 for the bus. Because my house was nearby a white student in front of me and I noticed that he was not able to also afford a full bus transportation fee, saw the driver let him go. However, when it was my turn, they asked me to get off the bus because I needed to pay full fare. So, in that moment I learned that not everyone is looked the same, other people will judge you just for simply how you look.

IP: Do you think the history of race and racism in the United States impacts the Black Lives Matter movement?

CN: I definitely I do.

IP: In what ways?

CN: Well, race and racism they go by the hand. What I mean by this is it's in the history of the United States. The racism has been one of the biggest issues since back in the days and it impacts the Black Lives Matter movements, because the only way that the black community began to gain rights was by protesting.

IP: Why do you think New York City become the epicenter of the protests?

CN: Although in my opinion, the South is more of a racist state. I think the New York became the epicenter because we have more diversity. And I feel like all those groups of different cultural backgrounds got together and were able to protest.

IP: Do you have any stories you are willing to share about encounters you have had with racism or the police?

CN: No.

IP: Were you active in their protest at all in digital or in person over the last six months? If so, how? Why do you decide to get involved?

CN: Yes, I was more of a digital, active person and why did I decided to do this is because I work for a low income, parents' school, most of my students are black and I feel that you cannot teach black students and not speak up about their rights.

IP: Do you have any stories or experiences about being involved in the protest that were impactful to you?

CN: My only experience was being active through social media defending the BLM protests.

IP: How has that Black Lives Matter shifted the culture?

CN: In my opinion, Black Lives Matters told us to be more open to be more understanding, and to basically respect one another for who we are. In the Black Lives Matter movement, you got to see not only Black people, but also Asians, Latinos, all type of people got to end even white, the White community we all got together in order to make our voice being heard.

IP: How have the past few months change how you think about police and racism in the US?

CN: Personally, I have always had strong opinions and I think the system is incorrect for personal experiences, it has not changed my mind at all. I still think that there is racism in the United States of America and the police do not treat people equally.

IP: Do you learn more about the history of racism in this country since the protest started? What have you learned?

CN: About the history of racism in the country is something that's been taught in high school or even before that, but something that I have learned is that we the people have the power and when we speak up, we are going to get heard

IP: What have you seen your peers doing that inspires you?

CN: Personally, I had friends that were out on the streets and were protesting and we're giving out their best in order to support the black community.



IP: Why do you think there is so much backlash to Black Lives Matter?

CN: Personally, I think we the community are tired. We are tired of continuous events. We are tired of seeing how the system does not treat us equally.

IP: How do you explain that looting and destruction of property that took place during that protest?

CN: Personally, I do not agree with destroying property. But if we go back to 1969 when the riots of the stone wall happen when gay people were fighting for the rights, and not just the Rosa Park events, Martin Luther King, I feel like people got tired of just rising the voice and not being heard. So, I feel like they feel that they need to do anything else in order for the voices to be heard. But personally, I do not agree with people destroying properties.

IP: How do you explain folks who respond to Black Lives Matters with “All lives matter”?

CN: That is correct. All lives matter, but I feel like some, not everybody go through what the Black community has been through with our racism and slavery it all take us back in history. And I feel like of course all lives matter, but just some of us have to be out there.

IP: How would you like to see this movement resolved?

CN: Personally, I think it will be great if we all get treated equally, and it will be amazing. If one day we can all protests and be able to be heard without having to get violent.

IP: Do you believe we're any closer than when George Floyd was murder?

CN: It's hard to say. But I think, as long as we speak up, and we raise our voices, we are going to get heard. And we need to unite ourselves and be together in order to fight racism.

IP: Is there anything else about the anti-racist uprising you'd like to share?

CN: I would just like to say, we should always speak up whenever we do not agree with anything, and we should always let our voices be heard, because we are all human beings. And we all deserve respect and being treated equally, especially in such a diverse country like the United States.

IP: Thank you. Please let me know you don't feel comfortable with any question. Right now. I going to ask you some question about events that happened so far in the year 2020.

CN: Okay.

IP: What was going through your mind when you first heard the US capitol was invaded?

CN: First of all, I couldn't believe it. I felt like 2021 started really rough for everyone out there, because these are events that were so unexpected.

IP: What are your reactions to the invasion of the US capitol by Trump supporters on January 6, 2021?

CN: I have a strong opinion about this topic personally, because I do not like Trump as president of the United States. Being Latino, Hispanic, I don't feel like he knows how to respect and treat people equally. Personally, I think that he encouraged his supporters to take actions like this.

IP: What do you think led these people to attempt to violently overthrow the government?

CN: Personally, like mentioned before, I think that they were encouraged by Donald Trump. And definitely, with the elections that just happened in November, he was not happy with the results.

IP: Were you surprised how they were treated by the police?

CN: I was definitely surprised. This is how you get to see white supremacy, and how really the system has more respect for the white community. Personally, I think the way the way they were treated by the police, it was unfair. I feel that if this was a Hispanic or Latino or a Black member of the community, they would have shut them right away. I think that the police didn't react the way they should have.

IP: There have been reports that members of the groups that stormed the US capitol include police officers, elected officials, and members so US military. What, if anything, should we as a society do with the information that segments of US law enforcement, elected officials, and the armed forced tried to overthrow U.S. Democracy?

CN: I think that no matter who you are, or what position do you have in the government, you are first a citizen of the United States of America and you should never overthrow our democracy. Basically, just like any other person, individual would have got arrested, if they've done this. I think that those elected officials, or US militaries, they need to face the consequences as human beings and learn from their mistakes.

IP: What do you think about the President Trump's reaction to the invasion?

CN: From my perspective, I think the Donald Trump knew what was coming. I think that he prepared all of this. And as I mentioned before, he encouraged this supporters to do all of this invasion to the US Capitol. However, his reaction does not surprise me. He is not a person that knows about respect to others.

IP: What do you think about the impeachment trial of former President Trump?

CN: I think that is something that needed to be done long time ago. It is not news to us the president Trump was not the right person to be the president of such a great nation like the United States of America.

IP: How do you explain the lack of hostility between the two political parties?

CN: Personally, I think both of these political parties will say anything in order to get votes when they were running for president, however, once they have a position, they just play with people's minds and emotions. They do not always lead by example.

IP: If Trump was a woman or non-white, how would the impeachment trial have been that same or different?

CN: I think that it will have been a lot different. Personally, I think this country is used to having president's white male presidents. And I think that if he would have been a non-white or a female that would actually speed up the process in order to make the impeachment possible.

IP: This is the end of the interview. Cristian Najera, thank you for taking part of it.

CN: You're welcome, Irma Perdomo.