

Dahlia Hughes Interviews David Burke
February 4, 2021
Bronx, NY

Dahlia Hughes: I'm the interviewer. My name is Delia Hughes. And I'm interviewing David Burke. We're currently in the Bronx, New York. The date is February 4, 2021. Do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history?

David Burkes: I give you permission to record and distribute this.

DH: All right, so what's your full first name? Your full first and last name?DB: My full name is David Burke.

DH: What is your age?

DB: I am 32 years old.

DH: What's your occupation?

DB: I'm a benefits manager for an investment bank.DH: Your racial identity?

DB: Black/African American.

DH: What's your gender identity?

DB: Male.

DH: Your sexual orientation?

DB: Straight.

DH: Okay. And where are you from? Tell us a little bit about how long you've been out here in New York City.

DB: Yeah, I was born in Kingston, Jamaica, I grew up in St. Catherine and then moved to New York City in 2002. So, I was just 13 years old when I moved to New York, and I've been here ever since, except for a short stint when I went away to college for four years in Connecticut.

DH: That's amazing. So how has Coronavirus changed your life? How has it affected you mentally and emotionally?

DB: Yeah, I mean, I think CORONA as we know has impacted everyone globally. For me, it's impacted the way we do work, the way I do school, in addition to work, I'm also in school. That means you know, it's positive in some aspects and negative in some in others. For example, the positive aspects include the fact that I can, you know, cut down on transportation costs, I can have more time to spend with family and balance work and family at the same time. Those are some positive things, you know, I can still get work done without having to commute without

having to incur additional expenses to do that from the comfort of my own home. You know, when the weather's bad, for example, this weekend, we just had a snowstorm, not having to worry about cancellations or delays in mass transit. So it's positive in those respects. The negative aspect of it for me is that you know, I like to engage with my colleagues and my peers and my classmates. And so not having that opportunity, even though we do that on a virtual basis. I just think you can't replace the in-person interaction, and having those organic conversations in person for an extended period of time, whether it's walking to class, or if I'm in the office to standing by the cooler and just catching up, you know, so not having that engagement as kind of a negative. But at the same time, I think this is a positive thing. For many workforces, you know, to go virtual, I mean, now we can work from anywhere, get our work done, and not have to worry about being in a particular place. And I think that's very productive for business as well.

DH: Right. Okay. Have you or anyone that you has known been affected or impacted by a coronavirus?

DB: I have folks who are members of my church who contracted COVID-19 which has been tough. Fortunately for us, none of my immediate church members passed away, but I do have friends and colleagues from other churches who do have people that caught it and succumb to it, they died as a result of it. I have a friend, for example, her dad caught it and he died. So it's really been emotional. My mom, you know, works in a hospital and you know, has to face this on a day-to-day basis. Even today. My wife is also a nurse and has to come back it's on a day-to-day basis, as well. So it's very taxing emotionally. But at the same time you know, we're fortunate enough to have the resources you know, whether it's a computer something as, recognizing that there are many folks in the world who don't have a computer of the type arm even if they do have a computer might not have internet or stable internet or might not be able to afford it. So simple things that we take for granted. You know I've really come to appreciate it. But to your question, yes, I have folks who have been impacted in many ways, but we're still trying to get through. And that's all we can do. And now that there's a vaccine out, just to encourage the masses to take that sit out, we can reduce the spread of this, not just to protect ourselves, but to protect our fellow human beings.

DH: He did mention the emotional toll that it took. How can you elaborate more on the emotional aspect of being home? More so than normal?

DB: Yeah, I mean for me, you know, I personally wasn't that affected emotionally, in the sense that, like, I'm fine. Being here. It's safer.

DH: How about mentally?

DB: I thought about everything is a pro and a con. And I felt like the safety and comfort of my own home weighed, going out and exposing myself and my family to this disease. But, I do have family members who have had, you know, reacted to this very emotionally. And just like anything else, everyone reacts to it differently. What we have to do is recognize that we have more in common than we have a part, and try to assist each other the best that we know-how. I recommend as those who are, were impacted emotionally, if you're in the workforce to try to see if your employer has any services for counseling or someone that you can speak to, or find ways

that you can mitigate it. And if you're in school, do the same thing. If you have a guidance counselor or some health facility on campus that can help because that's very important.

DH: For sure, how has your job been impacted by the pandemic?

DB: So, at the onset of the pandemic, I was actually laid off from my prior company, because downsizing impacted a business. Fortunately for me, I've been able to find work elsewhere. And for me, I'm loving it. I don't miss having to wake up early to drive to work, I can wake up in my pajamas literally turn by my nightstand grab my computer. And just like that, you're on for work. Yep. And I can make myself breakfast or lunch. Or if I want to run out to the cleaners or do something on my lunch break I can do that now. Where pre-Corona, I would have to do that on the weekend. So now I can make more time.

DH: Absolutely. During the protests over the summer, the riots, and the looting that I'm sure you've heard about, was your neighborhood impacted at all? Or targeted?

DB: Yes, and no. So on my block and the surrounding blocks, it wasn't impacted in terms of protests, per se, or looting. But in communities very close to mine, for example, Fordham Road, which is just a short drive away. So, tons of videos with people looting and protesting. Now, we want to separate protest from looting, they're two separate things. But I do think it's important. I think now we're at a point where especially looking at what occurred in the last election, we can see that our nation is very much divided at this point. And so, America, we're known for being resilient. We're known for being the country that can come back from tough times. And, you know, where, whether you're Republican, whether you're a Democrat, we're all Americans. And I say, I bring that up to say that being all Americans, the same should apply to our lives, whether you're black or white, we're all still Americans. And so, I do believe in the Black Lives Matter Movement not from a segregation perspective, but from a united perspective, not to segregate blacks and whites, but to really unite us to say that, you know, black people's lives matter. We've seen countless occasions across the nation, not just in any one city, where a person of color have succumbed at the hands of those who are meant to protect and serve us at that the hands of police officers, and so we can stop by whether you're black or white, we can continue to stand by and watch injustice go on. I mean, an injustice on one American is an injustice on all Americans. And so I do believe that the movement should continue to educate folks. And You know, sometimes people who may be racist might not recognize it, they might not be conscious of that fact. And so we have to continue to educate each other. And I would challenge organizations to put in place training that will support their employees and their managers so that we can kill any sort of racist cancer.

DH: In response to what you said, in regards to the strength of our country, how do you think our country will recover from all the chaos that has faced in the past?

DB: I want to apologize for my son making all that noise in the background. But I do think America will recover. If you've looked at our history, we've had some very tough times, then we've been able to recover from them all in 2008 when there were great declines in the market, you know, we've been able to recover, and that's the strength of the American people that I speak about, that's our competitive advantage over all the other nations in the world is that we have the ability to overcome, whenever we receive an arrhythmia. We are just persevering and overcome

that. And that's what I love about being an American. And so I think, while this is tough, I think we will overcome what you've seen how quickly we were able to turn around a vaccine, just within a year of this disease, which, which is a very short timeframe for a vaccine to be produced. and distribution has already occurred. In many municipalities, many, many towns. Of course, there are many more to be ruled out. But, the future looks very bright. I think in the short term, there is going to be some pain. We've seen mass unemployment, lots of unemployment, lots of industries, suffering, but at the same time, knowing the American people, I think it's an opportunity, as well for us to be innovative and create new business platforms to create jobs that weren't present before, to create a workforce that we didn't think was possible, right before when we imagine work, we imagine being in a physical building. And now I have kind of reimagine work, where it can happen from anywhere. And so with that possibility, and knowing all the amazing engineers and technologists that we have in this nation, I'm very confident that, two, three years from now, you will start to see America bounce back, you will start to see the stock market bouncing back and things will have some normalcy, I do want to say normalcy will not be necessarily normal, as we knew before, in that, you know, work one on one work in scoring operate the same way. But there will be a level of comfort in terms of how we go forward.

DH: That's a good answer. Another question that I have is since I'm most likely sure that you've been watching the elections. What do you make of Joe Biden being our new president? Do you think [he will right] former President Trump...wrongs? Do you think he will right them?

DB: Yeah, well, I won't necessarily say he will write any wrongs from President Trump. Because every president has their own identity that they bring into the office. I do think Biden was the better election of the two candidates that we had. And he has some ideas that I think would be very positive for the American people. For example, He intends to reduce student loan debt for many Americans, and we've yet to see in what capacity that will occur. But, I think any alleviation of that debt will be tremendous to the financial bounce back for the American people. For example, we have over a trillion debt in student loans, trillion dollars in debt, student loans, and so if we were able to reduce and use that debt for many Americans that would sort of free up their finances to do more things for their family, whether that's to buy a home, invest in real estate, use that funds to do something else. And for others, they won't feel enslaved to that type of debt, and also will continue to encourage up in the up and coming generation to continue your education without necessarily worrying about being entangled in financial debt.

DH: What were your reactions to the invasion of the US Capitol by Trump's supporters on January 6?

DB: So, that was very disgraceful. That was very disgraceful. And again, to the earlier question about when I mentioned Black Lives Matter, I think the rate that Trump supporters attack in the Capitol like that is exactly why we need to bring awareness to movements like for example, I do believe if that was a group of black folks entering the Capitol, I do believe that the repercussions would have been much more severe, I don't think they would have been able to make it home to their families and have dinner at 6 pm as those Trump supporters did. And so I hope I trust and hope that will not occur again, or at least certainly not in the near future. And I think there's some there's a lesson in it for all of us to learn. And again, I mentioned at the beginning of this interview, that further shows how far we are the American people how far we are apart. And I think Joe Biden will bring together the American People, he seems to be a peacemaker, who will

put in place strategies, not for a democrat or not for Republicans, but institute stuff that's going to be beneficial for Americans as a whole.

DH: What do you think led these people to attempt the violent and overthrow of the government?

DB: I'm sorry, can you please repeat that question? I could not hear you.

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

DB: Ah, well, I think any institution, any organization tend to follow the capacity of your leader, and I think President Trump does not explicitly request this, I think his personality and how he approaches the media, or the nation's reporters, defines women, the Mexicans, the way he speaks to different types of folks, gives them sort of Mr. Entitlement. And even with the election itself, despite what the numbers show, he completely opposed that and wanted to do re-elections and in a number of counties. He did not accept defeat as we've seen from all the previous presidents. And so, that type of behavior should not be tolerated. And it's very unamerican.

DH: Were you surprised by how those people were treated by the police?

DB: I'm not surprised, as I said, I'm not surprised because they weren't black. If they were black folks, then you know, it would have been for far too long. In this country, we've seen an N if you look across many organizations. Now there's a big D initiative going on. It's just diversity, equity, and inclusion. Because there's no more white stream recognition that white supremacy still stands and in many of our counties, many of our states. And so, we see that in the Capitol in the way they're treated versus how African Americans are treated when they're encountered with the police. And so I'm not surprised. But at the same time, it's a reminder that there's still a far way for us to go to bridge the divide between white and black.

DH: Most understandable. Were you active in protests at all digitally? Or even in person? Did you mention that you?

DB: Yeah, yeah. So I didn't actively protest as an in-person again, I think, for me trying to protect myself and my family, but I did not want to expose myself to Coronavirus and I think those mass gatherings despite many folks were in masks, I saw that there are many folks who were also not wearing masks to protect myself and my family. So, for that reason, did not participate in any protests, but I did voice my opinion on virtual platforms, social media platform, just so that others can read, and really use it, not necessarily to bash anyone person, but just to use it as an education forum where our minds can meet, come together, put in different ideas, how we can move forward, and what some things we can do to uplift our communities.

DH: Why did you decide to get involved?

DB: Why do I did decide to be get involved is because I believe that by being silent when you're silent, silent means agreement? And so I wanted to just like voting if you're not voting, you're not taking an active stance. And so, for me, I think every voice is important. It doesn't matter if it's reaching the masses. As long as you can reach one other person, you're making an impact and so for that reason, I will continue to share my opinions.

DH: Okay, thank you so much for your time. DB: Awesome. Yeah. That's awesome. That's it.

DB: Well, thank you so much for having me. Feel free if you ever have any further questions on this topic. If your professor has any further questions, I'll make myself available to assist.

DH: Okay, thank you very much.

DB: Thank you for having me.