

Denise Blair interviews Diakel Baptist
October 23, 2020
Long Island

Denise Blair: My name is Denise Blair and I will be interviewing Diakel Baptist in Freeport, Long Island. Today is October 23, 2020. Do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history?

Diakel Baptist: Yes

Blair: I'm going to start off by asking you a couple questions about yourself before we jump into the interview. First, How old are you?

Baptist: 28.

Blair: What's your occupation?

Baptist: I work with individuals who are diagnosed with autism.

Blair: How do you racially identify?

Baptist: African-American.

Blair: Your gender identity?

Baptist: Male.

Blair: Sexual orientation?

Baptist: Female.

Blair: Where are you from?

Baptist: New York, American.

Blair: Kay. How has Corona.. how has the corona virus changed your life?

Baptist: It put a, it opened my eyes to basically be grateful for the things that I do have with all of the deaths and all of the people who are affected by it, all of the jobs closing it just showed me that i should be more financially stable. And have money put away for tough times because you never know what could happen, it's a pandemic. It was unplanned and um you know, my father's sick so that's uh uh touchy subject as well. Because he's more susceptible to get it.

Blair: What was it like to be home so often?

Baptist: In the beginning it was in the beginning it was what I needed to clear my mind to take a little mental break from reality but after a while it just got too boring and I want to just go outside and get tired of being confined to one room.

Blair: Were you out of work?

Baptist: Yes, temporarily. Not as long as others but for a while my job was in quarantine so I wasn't able to go for 21 days.

Blair: How did it impact you mentally and emotionally?

Baptist: Um it frightened me and I was scared. We were all uninformed so it's not like there was stuff that I could do to prevent it we didn't really know anything about it really so there's no way to know like if it was curable and we could prevent it so it was just like us worrying and being scared to even go outside especially with the fact that i have sick people in my household. You know I didn't wanna go out and get it and bring it back to them.

Blair: Do you know anyone personally who has it or got it?

Baptist: No

Blair: How has it impacted you socially?

Baptist: It put a damper on me going out seeing friends, from me being social in general because everything closed down you know. You have to try to avoid spreading it but you don't know it's asymptomatic since you can't really tell who has it and who doesn't have it. I just tried to avoid everybody as much as I could.

Blair: Are the people in your household working?

Baptist: No

Blair: Were they working before corona?

Baptist: Yes.

Blair: What have you learned about yourself and your family since the beginning of this crisis?

Baptist: That we're tough. And we're tough but we were a little bit unprepared. It's a learning experience

Blair: Have you guys gotten any closer since you've been in the house all the time together ?

Baptist: No I don't think so.

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

Baptist: I would say just having to be someone who's someone of a rebel and the fact that I have to be confined to my house makes me just want to defy.

Blair: Has there been anything positive to come out of this pandemic for you?

Baptist: Um seeing as though I was out of work A hug my mind or something so I stayed in my own little sock business

Blair: Can you tell us a little more about that?

Baptist: I basically design socks and package them real nice and sell them. It started off as a hobby but then a lot of people were saying that they will order or a lot of people were offering me money for it so I said why not just sell it to cover the fact that I'm out of a job

Blair: And was that successful for you?

Baptist: Yeah it was, I still make a couple here and there not as much since the summer is over now

Blair: So it was a seasonal thing?

Baptist: It's more that it was time consuming so yes it was more like a seasonal thing but I can't continue to do it it's just like now that I'm back at work and things are slowly but surely opening. I don't have as much time to put towards that.

Blair: What do you think the nation in the world should learn from this pandemic?

Baptist: Just be more prepared as best as you can. And try to save money if you can for stability. Financial stability is a big thing because a lot of people were left stuck and stranded. no food, no money having to rely on the government to provide.

Blair: Pretend that I am an alien, explain to me why these anti-racist protests erupted.

Baptist: I wanna say that they erupted after the death of George Floyd and the death of Breonna Taylor. A lot of people were in an outrage because it seems like every, every so often it's an African-American being harmed or wrongfully killed to be honest by the police and we, we just really want peace and equality and justice.

Blair: Why do you think New York City became epicenter of the protest?

Baptist: New York became the epicenter for it all because we're pretty much diverse so All races stood up and we just want peace and justice. We Went to school for the most part we had to learn the pledge of allegiance. In in the Pledge of Allegiance it states *laughs* I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands one nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

Blair: Since you were so active in these protests where were the ones that you took place at?

Baptist: I Went to a few of them By Rockville center. I went to most of them in Manhattan.

Blair: How have the uprisings across the country shifted how you think about your ethnic identity and your place in U.S society?

Baptist: I feel like my place in the US society is being taken for granted. I don't feel like I'm being treated equally. I feel like everyone as a minority I feel like it's almost as if we just are taken for granted ,we're unappreciated. When you think about it it's like we're blackballed in certain things. We're unable to purchase certain things we're unable to receive and reap the same benefits the other races are. So it's, yeah a little unfair.

Blair: Do you have any stories you're willing to share with your encounters with racism or the police?

Baptist: I-I would hate to say it or make a joke out of it but you know Starbucks, Starbucks is very demanding. I used to work at Starbucks and you get a lot of people of Caucasian ethnicity and for whatever reason they feel like they could talk to you any kind of way because you're back there making their drinks and not all of them but you get a lot of the older ones who just feel as if they can speak to you any kind of way or demand you to do things or if you make a mistake it's almost as if they are gonna penalize you as if they were your boss or something.

Blair: Are more stories among friends and family members being shared about racism and the police since the protest started?

Baptist: Yes. It's almost sickening to realize how often or how scared we are to come out because maybe we don't, maybe we feel like if we speak we will just go unheard of or no ones gonna really pay attention. But when you get amongst these protesters and rallies and you get amongst your peers you really see that you're not the only one that's been encountering these things; You're not the only one who feels as though you're being harassed by police, just because of the color of your skin, or because of where you're from, or how you dress or where you live or how you carry yourself.

Blair: Since you, have you only been active in protests in person or have you been on social media as well?

Baptist: I really rather do it in person because I feel like on social media to get a bunch of ignorance. Or people who take it as a joke. Or you get into arguments with people who really aren't outside so they really don't know. They're just speaking from a place or speaking from the comfort of their own homes so they can't really dictate or say , like they don't have any familiarity with like what's going on in the street.

Blair: What made you decide to get involved?

Baptist: I'm just fed up. I'm tired of like feeling as if I have the same credentials as someone that's in a different race why shouldn't we have the same opportunities or if someone of an African American decent or any type of minority commits a crime why are we being penalized and people in different races aren't. Or why do you think that most of the deaths that go viral are always an African American person being shot or being harmed in a way that's unethical.

Blair: Did you take part in the rioting and looting part as well or just the protests?

Baptist: Just the protesting part I think the rioting is gonna set back a lot of the communities because you're burning down the places where you live and expecting different results. I didn't really understand that part, that didn't have anything to do with what we were initially protesting for. The riots were just anger more than looking for a change.

Blair: How have the past few months changed how you look at police and racism in the US? Does it make you look at the police any differently ?

Baptist: I don't wanna put all of the on police because I do feel like just because there are a couple of bad apples doesn't mean the whole batch is no good. I just feel like maybe they should work on a different type of training or more of a mental thing. Maybe they should take more psych tests or training of that sort before they just become police officers because at the end of the day we're all human, we all have a family to go home to. So I can understand if you feel like maybe threatened or endangered so you would react in a way that's normal, but harming hurting these people and taking it a little too far because of the power that you have is really besides the point.

Blair: Umm do you feel like more people were at the protest because of corona and everyone was home and out of work? Do you think that the same amount of people would've come out if they had work?

Baptist: Yes because I feel like it's a time to stand up and fight for what we believe in. It's not it's not I just feel like I have called out of work plenty of times to go to these protests. Sometimes my manager would understand and sometimes she just didn't.

Blair: What have you seen your peers doing that inspired you?

Baptist: They've been all it's little things like they might shop with the black people or African American people not even just that local businesses they instead of using money to purchase clothes and jewelry they're trying to purchase you know land or businesses or like just open up things that's gonna make it better for the generation ahead.

Blair: What do you think about the cops' response to the protests that began in May 2020.

Baptist: I feel like they're just uninformed. They want us to think that I feel as if we're in America and everyone should have the same freedom. I just feel like they take us for granted like I said they think this is a dictatorship. That they can just move or go about things however they

see fit. I could understand that I want to be having a bad day, but your bad day shouldn't lead to a death of anyone, any race.

Blair: What do you think of the local and national governments response to the protest that began in May 2020?

Baptist: I feel like at first maybe they didn't think it was gonna go as far as it did. I didn't think it was gonna go as far as it did. But I feel like they became, I feel like their eyes were open. They were aware they saw how serious we are about equality and although it's not an overnight thing or one day thing I feel like things are changing. I feel like the younger generation are somewhat less racist. I feel like when a child is born they're not born racist the racism or the way that they are brought up is what will lead to them being racist. I feel like a lot of the younger generation of younger parents are not taught that way because we grew up in such a diverse area your best friend could be any race and I wouldn't be frowned upon in the way.

Blair: You said you have people at home that are sick. What made you continue to go to protest if you knew they were high risk for Covid?

Baptist: My father's tough and he said if that's what you wanna do he's not going to stop me from doing it. He actually admired it so it's almost as if I went out there with him in my mind and in my thoughts and carried a piece of him with me because he also went through the same things when he was younger. When that was Martin Luther King times and stuff of that nature. He went through and experienced firsthand racism so he's gonna be with whatever when it comes to putting a stop to it.

Blair: When things started getting dangerous did you continue to go?

Baptist: Yes, I feel like I tried to be as non-violent as possible, I tried to avoid as much of it as I possibly could. I did most of it in the daytime, when the nighttime came I wasn't outside.

Blair: You respected the curfew that they set?

Baptist: Yes.

Blair: How did you prepare to go knowing that they were shooting people and stuff like that?

Baptist: I feel like it's more less the cops who were there although you may see on the news where you see them a lot of incidents where they're attacking you have to also think that their underman they're in distress there's a lot going on. When you're really there you see. Most of them I wanna say like 70% of the people that I met were for it they didn't have a problem with it they just needed to fill the comfortability of being safe. They didn't, it's not like they were telling us to stop. They weren't stopping us from doing anything. They weren't just attacking us for no reason. It was only when things began to get rowdy that they started acting in a defensive way. But I feel like the cops were pretty much on board for the protest.

Blair: Do you consider yourself an activist?

Baptist : I wouldn't consider myself an activist. I just feel like I'm standing up for what I believe is right.

Blair: Okay. How would you like to see this movement resolved?

Baptist: I just want equality for everyone, for every race not just African Americans just Spanish people. I just want, there shouldn't be no such thing as minority or majority it should just be that we're all one. We're all human everybody should have the same opportunities.

Blair: What's your role in achieving that outcome?

Baptist: Just day-to-day trying to do whatever I can.

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

Baptist: I feel like it made a big push towards, I feel like it's all about awareness. You can't fix something if you're unaware of it. So now I feel like all of the governments and they see how serious we are about it and how serious we are looking to just be treated equally. We're not asking for anything obscene or absurd. We just want to be treated fairly. If I do something and someone of another race does the same thing i don't see why our charges should be different. We should, if we're gonna be penalized we should be penalized equally or the same

Blair: Is there anything that you think that I should've asked you that I haven't asked yet?

Baptist : Um, I feel like we pretty much covered everything. You didn't ask me about my views on certain things like the George Floyd thing .

Blair: So would you like to speak about your thoughts on those ?

Baptist: I feel like honestly with the George Floyd thing I feel it wasn't necessarily anything about him. It's just the fact that it was just like a reminder of the Eric Garner case where he was choked out actually here in New York he was choked to death just for selling cigarettes. And George Floyd was pretty much choked to death although he was resisting he didn't have to i know, i have family members who work with police and they say like you're allowed to use excessive force if you are in danger or if you're gonna match the force. Just because he was resisting arrest I don't think that calls for you to stand on his neck for 8 minutes or however long it was. That's a bit excessive. But other than that I feel like you know.

Blair: And your views on Breonna?

Baptist : I feel like it wasn't her time to go

Blair: Is that all?

Baptist: Yes.

Blair: Well that concludes everything, thank you.

Baptist : You're welcome.