

Leslie Martinez interviewed by Christopher Robles
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Harlem, Manhattan

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, feel, black lives matter, new york city, pandemic, happening, protests, students, teachers, trump, book, appointment, white, question, police, impacted, thought, black, movement, talking

Christopher Robles (00:01): My name is Christopher Robles and I'm interviewing Leslie Martinez. This is gonna be virtual and the day is 14, Wednesday. 2021. Do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history?

Leslie Martinez (00:17): Yes.

CR (00:19): Okay. So let's go with um, basic information. What is your name?

LM (00:25): Leslie Martinez.

CR (00:27): Your age?

LM (00:30): 42 years old, or 42 years young

CR (00:34): Occupation?

LM (00:38): I'm a special education teacher in the Department of Education.

CR (00:46): Neighborhood.

LM (00:48): I live in Harlem currently. But I teach in the West Village.

CR (00:57): Place of origin.

LM (01:02): So I was born here in New York City in the Bronx. But my family is from Honduras.

CR (01:10): Okay, first language.

LM (01:13): I speak multiple languages. So my first language will let's say, my native language is Garifuna and then I speak Spanish and English.

CR (01:26): Okay. racial identity. I couldn't I couldn't hear that. Can you repeat it again? Please?

LM (01:55): I couldn't hear your other question. Can you repeat it again? I can't hear it

CR (02:03): Oh, racial identity.

LM (02:04): Oh, no. I answered that. You heard me

CR (02:06): I couldn't hear you. It disconnected.

LM (02:11): Oh, okay. I'm Black Garifuna.

CR (02:14): Okay, gender identity?

LM (02:18): Gender identity is female.

CR (02:21): Sexual orientation?

LM (02:25): Queer.

CR (02:25): Okay. Where are you from? So tell me like a long story or short story like how you ended up in New York City.

LM (02:39): Mmm...Okay. My parents met in New York City. And funny enough. They're both Garifuna. They both are from Honduras. They both come from the same ahhh, will say one of the largest Garifuna communities in Honduras, which is located in the northern part off on the coast. And for some reason, my mom came here undocumented. And my father also came here undocumented, and they met here in the Bronx, in New York City. And, and they had me in the late 70s, and I got really, my parents, my mom, Let me start over, my mom got really ill, and she took me and my little brother back to Honduras for a couple of years. we came back.

CR (03:40): okay, thank you. So let's go with our COVID-19 questions. How are you coping with a pandemic?

LM (03:53): oh well mmm the pandemic has been really hard. I'm a teacher. And so when the pandemic first happened, I had to I was working in schools and it was you know, everybody was trying to figure out, you know, this whole virus so I think right now, like, I have to say that at this moment, I'm okay. But I was I wasn't always okay. coping with, with with the pandemic because I have older parents. And I was also concerned about my own safety.

CR (04:32): Okay. Do you have any self-care routines?

LM (04:47): Of COVID of the Pandemic, so my self-care routine, is actually, as I was looking for earlier is my journal so I still journal every ummm. Every day as much as I can, and I, I take a lot of walks now, and, umm I try to travel safely when I can. And those are the ways that I feel like I'm important. I listened to music, I dance at home. Those are the things I did to self to self-care and drink a lot of tea.

CR (05:24): Okay, What are your initial response to Covid? And how has it changed over time?

LM (05:33): I think that's what I was trying to say earlier. Initially, I actually thought that we were going to go back to school in May, or April, Easter, Easter, May. And then I started, um I felt like I was concerned. But I had a trip to go to Paris, in April. And so I was just like, Oh, no, this is gonna go away. And I'm going to be in Paris, and I'm gonna have fun, and it's going to be awesome. And then my trip got canceled, obviously. And um then I started getting really scared. And so I, I stayed home a lot. And that's the point where I felt really scared for my father, because he was still working. He's over 70. And I was trying to, like, you know, convince him to take a long vacation, which was impossible for him. But it was just like, very scary. I think. I was just thinking, Oh, my God, what if my dad dies? That's literally what was on my mind. Constantly. And your question was just about how I felt initially and how I feel now just how I felt an issue.

CR (06:42): Yeah, like, yeah, you how you felt like over time.

LM (06:47): Over time too. Yeah I mean, so I think in the beginning, I was definitely very scared. And I was thinking, Oh, my God, do I want to go back to school because well, we, as teachers, we went to remote until the end of the year, right. And then in September, we had to vote in person. And I was kind of going back and forth, whether I think it's safe enough for me to go back. And so I had to, I went in, and then I was too scared. My own time, I wasn't feeling great. And so I, I, I got a medical accommodation and I, I basically, am now working remotely from home because I was scared, scared for my safety, like my own personal help.

CR (07:30): Okay, so you're saying that COVID has changed your life?

LM (07:35): Over what I'm sorry.

CR(07:36): So you're saying that COVID has changed your life?

LM (07:39): Oh, my god, yes. I mean not just my life. But yeah, I literally feel like my, my, the way I think, and just the lack of interaction that I have with people, I'm completely different now. And even when I interact with people is very different. So COVID has changed so much of my life. So much of my routines that I used to do, like, I used to join the train every day, I used to go to cafes, I will go out to

eat a lot. I had relationships with a lot of people and all of that went away with COVID you know, I was, I don't see, I can count how many people I've seen in the last year and half and um also I don't go to cafes anymore. Like I don't sit somewhere and have a coffee or have like, whatever my chai I usually like to have my whole like life has changed.

CR (08:33): Have you or someone close to you gotten COVID?

LM (08:38) Um..., you know, I suspect that I probably have COVID even though I didn't have any of the symptoms, I think my girlfriend definitely had it. I knew someone I go to a church in Harlem and one of the church members die no way yeah one of the church one or a couple of the church members died of COVID and I knew I know a lot of people who have how can I say, like I have colleagues that have very close family like their mothers die of COVID so I feel like it's like indirectly Yes. Yeah, yeah. So I just think that it's Yeah, their death everywhere.

CR (09:25): Okay. So do you lose anyone close to you?

LM (09:30): Um, no, I didn't lose anyone close to me. But I know I didn't lose anyone close to me not like in my immediate family or a friend or anything like that.

CR (09:44): That's good. So you told me like like how your home often I like how did it felt being home so often during the lockdown.

LM (09:57): yeah, I don't think it was good to be honest. Like out this psychologically, I feel like I don't know, I think that there's moments that I'm very down and depressed, but I don't even notice it. Not that I don't notice it quite, but it's just more like, oh, gosh, I feel so horrible today. And I think it's because I'm extroverted. So I always need to be around people and talk to people and hang out with people. And oh, that's how I get my energy. And I've been doing very little of that. I mean, yesterday, I went to see a friend's and we had masks and we went to a supermarket. But I used to do those things all the time. And I used to go to book events all the time.

CR(10:36):Yeah Yeah.

LM (10:37): Yea And that was very different. So yeah, I just, yeah.

CR (10:44): So that so that would be can you explain to me like more a little bit like how it impact you like, socially, mentally and emotionally, like, you told me? Can you tell me more about it?

LM (10:56): And yeah, like, I think like, for me, I just think that I feel trapped. Like, I feel, I feel trapped. I felt really like I couldn't, I all the things that I do to sort of express myself or all the things that I do that bring me joy, I wasn't doing those things, like for example, you know, I also felt a sense of

grief to right. So I don't know if you know this, but I love dance. And I will go out with my girlfriends to dance. Before the pandemic, I didn't do it for like a year. But I knew I could always go back. And then when the pandemic happened, I was like, Oh my god, I don't even know if I can ever go out to like, a dance place. And dance, you know, like, with people, and they're sweating, and I don't even know if I'll ever feel comfortable, again, dancing with strangers. And so for me, I felt like, there were two things happening, I was feeling very isolated and very alone. And also I was feeling a sense of mourning a sense of loss. And like I said earlier, like, I used to go out, like, I used to go to eat a lot and then I will go out to definitely took her face a lot. And I was sitting over journal, and also I, you know, I am a writer. So I will write stories, or I just think all of that impacted with a pandemic, just it was just really hard to it's really hard. I had to find different things to that will bring me joy.

CR (12:36): Okay. And how would you say this impacted your family COVID?

LM (12:44): My family?

CR (12:43): Yeah Like, you told me that you were worried about your father getting sick?

LM (12:54): Yeah, well, I haven't seen my father a lot, I actually made appointments to, for him to get his vaccine, and my mom too. And, and I haven't seen my mom in over a year. And I half and I haven't seen my in February. But before that, I haven't seen them. And you know what I mean, I haven't seen my parents a lot, because I don't want to be around them. Before I was vaccinated, I didn't want to be around them. But and then I have a daughter who's 24. And she has a different sort of attitude towards the towards, towards COVID. So she's always wearing a mask. So it's not. I've seen her more often, but it's not something that I want to see her as often. Because she's not always wearing a mask.

CR (13:45): So what have you learned about yourself during the crisis?

LM (13:55): And very important to me, and where I write just as important as me writing. And that, yeah, and that I need a long time. Because even if I'm in a romantic relationship, or even with friends, doesn't matter, I always need alone time even though I'm extroverted. And, but I need a certain type of alone time. It's not just being in the house encerrada(locked) you know, it's also like, you know, being somewhere and writing and or traveling somewhere in writing. I need a certain type of long time. I also learned a lot about my own boundaries, like just creating boundaries with people at work. During the pandemic.

CR (14:44): What has been the hardest part of the pandemic for you?

LM (14:50): I think I said that earlier. The hardest part has been being extroverted, wanting to be in a crowd with people and enjoying people's company. But then there'll be able to do that now during COVID. So I think the hardest part has been being with people. It's like, literally, that's what I, I get my

energy from not being with people not being able to have been able to see a lot of people and I've been able to have dinner, you know, take them over to the house.

CR (15:22): So that so would you say that the hardest also hardest part would be missing the book club? Because you you guys would always meet, like almost every Friday?

LM (15:33): Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Took a big hit. Yeah, because I book book book club took a bigger hit, virtually, with new members than it did with the old ones. Because I felt like when it was, when it was us, when it was people who have people who have been in Book Club for three or four years, and the pandemic hit, it was we already had relationships. So when we moved to virtual, it was not a fad. But we did it and we know each other, and we know our our intentions. And that was that. But now when new members is very different, because they started virtually so they never did it in person. So they don't necessarily know about fruits or how I feel about books and make, they don't know those experiences. And they're also the things that make book club valuable based on talking to you and to other members is the feet. how other people experience the book and how other people experience, you know, like reading together. And I think that in the virtual world, some people tend to hide, don't want to like participate as much because I can't see them. In the beginning. I was like, I need to see who you are how you look like and they will kind of like look, because I think it's important and book club, you know, so yeah. I'm happy that I'm still doing it. And then I started sending them packages over the mail over the mail, like actual like arts and crafts.

CR (17:17): Oh, yes, yeah.

LM (17:18): This year, if I push myself more, you know, just so it could feel like how it was when we were together physically, but it's just been it's been challenging.

CR (17:27) So you will say that you missed the most of our book club is the social interaction with your students.

LM (17:34): Yea social interaction by in person, the feeling like oh, my god, you're special. I used to have like, I used to have fresh flowers every week when I can manage it, right.

CR(17:46): Oh yes.

LM (17:47): There's no fresh flowers and virtual. So I feel like, just even I don't know, I feel like a lot of students, I believe students sometimes don't experience on making a fuss over them in some way. So I like that whole presentation, the presentation part of bookclub like, Hey, we're getting together, we're gonna have these snacks, we're gonna put linen on the table, we're going to have flowers where we're going to, you know, get conches(bread) whatever, like all of that part. And that's the part that's missing.

CR (18:21): Oh, and also I remember the field trip you will take us to like trips to the movie theaters or to do something else I remember.

LM (18:29): Yeah.

CR (18:31): Has anything positive came out of the pandemic for you?

LM (18:42): I think the only thing that's positive I came out of the pandemic for me is to know things things, not take things for granted. You know, I feel a sense of loss and dread sometimes. And I for instance, when we were together, I have promised everyone like we're gonna go to sleep over at the museum and now because of the pandemic, they canceled it and I have so many opportunities to take all of you overnight and I did it and so now I feel like whether it's book club or whether is my own personal things, whether it is worth I don't want to wait to do it, you know, I want to get it done. So I am or also if I'm doing too much, and I don't feel like heard I want to withdraw and then put my energies somewhere else. Like I spent a lot of time with book club. I don't think students know how much time I spent on it but like I spent a lot of time I rather do that then waste my energy somewhere else, you know? Yeah.

CR (19:48): Is there something you would have done? Done or do differently if you know you're going to be in quarantine?

LM (19:59): Yeah. Yeah, totally. Yeah, I think, you know, I remember once Jacqueline Woodson have said that she wanted to come back to humanities and Jason Reynolds wanted to come back. And, and mean, I would have had them back. You know, like, I also feel like I would have just traveled more. Like I would have just, I mean, for example, I had a friend of mine says, from Ecuador, and she will always invite me and I'm like, next year, next year, now, there's no next year. you know, I feel like I would have all those opportunities. I had to go to Ecuador, to go back to Rio Brazil now Brazil like, devastated. You know, like, I wouldn't, I wouldn't definitely traveled more, and I want to build more of my relationships with my authors.

CR (21:02): Okay. So this would go to like mostly about government stuff. How do you think the government handle COVID COVID crisis? What are your thoughts?

LM (21:16): Well, we weren't under Trump, when the COVID hit, and I feel like I didn't know this. I know this now. But I'm not sure if maybe people knew this when COVID first hit. But there was a playbook of the Coronavirus because George Bush was freaked out, for some reason by a possibility of the pandemic happening of a pandemic happening. And he puts together like a playbook. And then when Obama was president, he added to the playbook. And he There was also a potential pandemic that was happening, that that could have happened like Ebola, and SARS, all sorts of things. And because of his leadership and his cabinet, and whoever he worked with, he was able to, like, minimize it. And so when Trump was in office, and in the pandemic hit, I think that they didn't deal with it. Well, and I think, you

know, everybody would agree that because of Trump's umm inability to take the virus seriously, and, and not wear a mask and multiple long list of things that you didn't do. There were a lot of lives, like lost that didn't have to be lost. I know. Some people his cabinets are saying all that stuff. So So yeah, I definitely felt like they didn't handle that well at all.

CR (22:48): I think like, like the United States, we listen to our politicians more than our like doctors, for example, I think other countries, listen to their own doctors more and I feel like that would help the country become like more stronger, because they listen to someone who knows about the virus, not like a politician.

LM (23:10): Right, right. Yeah. I mean, so many words. Yeah. But basically, yes. science over over over politics. Right. Yeah. Definitely Coronavirus was, I think it was very political. It got it became very political very quickly. And that was right. And that. I mean, I have Yeah, this really sad.

CR (23:35): Yes. How would you grade the job the government did in rolling out the vaccines, like you think they did a good job or you think they did a bad job? Like, what are your thoughts?

LM (23:46): Oh, wait. Okay. Well, this is tricky because the vaccines were created under Trump, right? And then he left office in January. I'm trying to remember now it feels like two years ago, five years ago. I definitely think that the rolling out of the vaccine was a bad job. okay to be bad. I just can't remember. Like, I don't remember who's doing what but I think it started with Trump and it ended with Biden, but it's completely bad only because my own personal experience. We're getting the vaccine getting appointments for my dad and my girlfriend's dad and my mother. And I had to stay up at midnight actually, when I got teachers were allowed. I think the second group to get vaccine, and I made my bag I've made my appointment right. And I lost my appointment. It was for Pfizer. I lost her because the New York City ran out of vaccines and so I when I the hospital called me I said, Can you Please reschedule me for another appointment. And it was like no, that I had to do the whole process again, which was painful. So I had to get another appointment and got Moderna instead. And then when they started allowing people 65 and older, because it was first it was like, other frontline people, then teachers then like 65 and older. I couldn't get an appointment for my dad. I try for a week and I couldn't get it. And then like my colleague, finally revealed to me the secret and the secret was to stay up until midnight on so all the appointments or the new appointments and then make the appointment so I literally wasn't I didn't sleep for one day, maybe I mean, I slept but I slept like at one o'clock in the morning. appointments for my dad, you know.

CR (25:52): Yeah. So you're telling me you got the vaccine, right?

LM (25:56): Yeah, I'm vaccinated.

CR (25:57): Okay. So hard, like how are you feeling towards like the world reopening? Like, you know, stores are opening? Like, yeah, stores been opening since I guess the summer also restaurants are having like, I will say like, you could eat inside, but not some stores? Don't. Some restaurants don't have that. Like, what are your feelings about the world we opening?

LM (26:22): Yeah, I think that's very political. Right. So I feel like outside of the United States, everybody's taking a different take on reopening. And I think like, I think France right now is on lockdown for another two weeks. and Canada. They are open there they go back and forth from being locked down. I think for us right now, in New York's New York City. is tricky. Because we're so dense. There's so many people here. I personally, I personally feel like it would be great if we were all working remotely and all the students were remote. But I also see the benefits of students being in the classroom and you know, being back at school. But then it's conflicting when this when this restaurants, being opens And so I'm nervous about the reopening. But I but I think that it's important for students to prioritize students other than businesses. Without business we can't function well. So it's just I don't know, I think that I think that we have to just be safe reopening.

CR (27:34): Can you tell me more? More more thoughts about like the schools reopening? Cuz I think the founder like interesting upon, like, what are your thoughts about the school reopening? or it should be closed? Like, what do you think of like, Can you tell me more about it?

LM (27:49): Yeah, well, initially, I felt like if the schools are going to be open, and like meaning, like from elementary to high school, then all the restaurants should be limited to not to, like, the businesses should be very limited. And then those schools can be like, open, because it's all about infection rate, right. So if you have all the bars and the movie theaters, and the restaurants and all of them open, and people are like hanging out doing sorts of things, good things or whatever, that's gonna increase the infection rate. And so it's going to jeopardize schools. So that was my thought, That' not my thought process. We have two prioritize, test one or the other. So if we want kids to be safe, then we need to not be as active with the restaurant and with the businesses. You know, we could do takeout, but not like, have like, businesses. be fully Yeah. Yeah, so it's yours. But, um, but I feel like, there has been, I don't know the numbers, so you can't really quote me, but pardon me, there has been an increase of suicide rates among students because of COVID. And because of like, just remote learning, and so then being back in school is so so it's a wonderful thing, but it's all about just keeping students safe. And it's just all very political. So I feel like I'm talking more about my own personal experiences. And like, for me, for instance, I want to you know, continue to be to work remotely. And then in September, I'll be back in school, or if there's no need for me right now. You know, then I'll go back to school, in person, but then the interesting part for me personally, is that in my school, a lot of students with special needs, they're remote, and so it helps them remote to but yeah, so I don't know what that's what's my my take on. who should be open, who should be close, but that's not really the city's take on it.

CR (29:56): Okay, so my next topic is going to be about Black Lives Matter protests. So the first question would be Do you remember where? Where do you do you remember where you were? And what your thought? When the first when you first heard about George Floyd murder.

LM (30:15): I thought I was home because where else I would be and wait, what's that's interesting now though, was I was in school. I don't remember what exactly I was, but I remember when I found out about it and I'm not sure why I watched the video but I did. And I will never watch the video again. And I do remember like being so shocked that and just seeing the officers face, like not caring at all and just I just remember being confused. Like why how? I think it's different. I think for me, maybe this is how people's take it as different. It's like when you're shooting someone, right? Because you could say a lot of things about like, Oh, I did have a mistake, or were they I thought they had a gun. But this was actually it was so disgusting. And it was so like, how how many minutes? Was there? like seven minutes, eight minutes?

CR (31:17): Like it was like 10 minutes? Or something like that?

LM (31:20): Yeah, it's like you literally are in someone's neck for that long. That's not a mistake. And so and it's like blatantly racist and blatantly violence and blatantly not respectful life for black life. And so I just feel to be honest, I feel like it was really hard. It was really hard. Like, it was kind of , even people who were conservative, I feel like had a visceral reaction towards that. Like, like, what? So I remember feeling really, really just really saddened by it. And just knowing that that's a validation of how my life is seen in the States.

CR (32:06): Yeah, I think it was like a sad moment, I believe in history. Um, yeah, I agree with you. Because, um, when I, I believe I was in home and and I was on watching the news. And now I was also surprised. I was like, also like, seeing other videos about it. Like, like, explain, like, I'm like, what was the background of like, what happened and everything. So I was like, really surprised when that happened to.

LM (32:32) Yeah.

CR (32:32): So can you explain to me on like, why do you think anti racism, anti racist, protests erupted?

LM (32:44): I think they erupted because this this was like the last drawer, like the last year on the camel's back, I don't know if that's even a same. But I think that people were just, I mean, I think it's the pandemic right, and how the pandemic was, was being unproportionately impacted by Latin x and black people like they were We were dying more. And I think people would just really sick and tired of this whole racist sort of racist sort of structures and like, this blatant racist, a police brutality, I think people were just fed up. And I think that's where every surface because Black Lives Matter happened. You

know, a couple years back maybe four or five years ago, by these three African American women are three black woman, let me say that and have their book somewhere over here. But I just and I feel like when they started the movement, it didn't get that much. Like, I mean, it did get attention, but it wasn't. It wasn't the same as now. I mean, now it's just like, much more powerful.

CR(34:02): Yes, it is.

LM (34:05): Yeah, I just think people were just like, yeah, this is enough where no more no more and I think that's that's why they went out and started the protests.

CR (34:18): Do you believe there are issues with the criminal justice system in the United States? That how how flamed the these protests?

LM (34:28): Yeah, yeah. I think that I can't really speak I can't speak a lot on this but like this history or how the police force started right in the United States, how they came out of slavery. And but I think that these you know, the Black Lives Matter movement is a direct consequence and reaction towards the in justices. in policing black people, you In the in the in the structures, these races, the structural racism. Only a lot of people, a lot of black and Latinx people die by the hands of police.

CR (35:15): Yeah.

LM (35:16): Yeah, that movement is completely because of that.

CR (35:21): Though Do you think the history of race and racism in the United States impacts the black black, black life? Black Lives Matter movement?

LM (35:31): Yeah. I mean, I think that the How does it impacted? I feel like i think that i think that there's so much that we've gained, but there's so much more than we need to gain, you know, like black and like, women don't get paid the same. Black woman don't get the the same. Black people and LatinX, people don't necessarily have the same access as white people in this education in public education specifically. Like, it's just, yeah, definitely, I feel like the Black Lives Matter movement is really trying to shift the way that we see injustice. For example, you know, if one of us, I keep thinking if one of us is not free, none of us are free. And so it's not about I think it's important for people to know like, hey, like, Black Lives do Matter. And because they don't matter, these things are happening.

CR (36:50): So you're so you're telling me that you support the Black Lives Matter movement?

LM (36:56): I do.

CR (36:57): Okay. And what do you think New York City became an epic center of the protests?

LM (37:14): Why did I think that New York City, I think, because there's so many different people here. And also because New York City, in terms of how their mindset is, is very much in line with the Black Lives Matter movement. I'm trying to think whether those three black woman who started the movement, whether they live in New York City, and I'm not sure, sadly. And I think that I think that think New York City is the epicenter for a lot of things, but I definitely, I'm not surprised. I didn't know that. But I'm not surprised. Because I think there's a lot of liberals in New York City.

CR (37:56) Of course yes. Like no, like, New York City, wood is like a diverse community. And it's, it's like, almost like, City, New York City is a well known city from like other countries, too. So I feel like that's what like impacts on, like, it's mostly the center, and like, why people protest in New York City? Because that's where there's a lot of attention in that in New York City, of course. And were you active in like protests, like over the last six months?

LM (38:34) In the sense that I if I went to like a protest, or, I mean, I, to be honest with you, I didn't, I wasn't I didn't go to protests, because I felt like I was scared for my safety. And I, some of the protests were peaceful. And some of them were not like, some of them, like, some people that are hurt, or they got pepper sprayed, or they got like, I don't know, things, a lot of things that are happening. And there were, I know, some of my friends, or some of my colleagues will protest that. And they will find until they left and they weren't fine. You know, like, I just didn't, I didn't, I didn't have the capacity to quote unquote, physically be out there, crossing bridges and protesting, but I feel like as an educator, I protest in my own ways, and I feel like book club actually is one of those ways that I do that, by focusing on reading books by black authors and other people of color, you know, and by not ever letting go of that, you know, and, you know, all right, mostly give everyone has been mostly maybe with the exception of one or two books have been always by black people or by other people of color. So that's my way of being like an activist of protesting because it's more about protesting last century whiteness and white supremacy and Um, and so I think I do that through, hopefully, I mean, that's my goal.

CR (40:12): Yes, has the black lives matter? ship the culture? Do you think it helps shape the culture?

LM4 (0:20): Has it shifted a quarter in New York City?

CR (40:23): Yeah, it could be in New York City.

LM (40:27): Or just in general?

CR (40:28): It could be in general and New York City?

LM (40:33): Um, yeah. I think that they are just, you know, I think that I mean, I think was, I think what's important about Black Lives Matter is that there's, there's a movement and, and a set of values

and ideals that is communicated to the, to the country. I mean, it's not a it's not, it's not enough to just put a Black Lives Matter sign on your window of your business or have a Black Lives Matter statement. I feel like that's not good enough. But it's a start, right? So I think like, is better than nothing. And I feel like they have they, this is the time that I think companies have shifted, and incorporated those that mindset into their company. Then the first time what Black Lives Matter came, you know, when Black Lives Matter came the first time there weren't a lot of companies thinking and talking in general terms, but they weren't. I don't feel like I've, I've seen it as much. Now I see where there's literally organizations pointing to Black Lives Matter and saying, Hey, we were you know, we're with them. So I think that they shifted the culture, at least by on paper. Paper, they shifted the culture and, and businesses feel accountable to us. So tell us at least on their websites, that they believe that our lives matter.

CR (42:08): Do you agree with them doing that? Or do you think they're just doing it for like money?

LM(42:16): Um I guess, do I think that I think some levels of it might be performative like they're doing it to for show, but I think that, I think that they should do that. And they shouldn't do more than that. I believe they need to do more like, meaning like, there needs to be people in those organizations. I look like me and you there needs to be CEOs, a that look like me and you there needs to be in museums, people in the board that looks like me, you it's not just about having a Black Lives Matter statement. But it's also about saying, Yeah, our board members and our staff, has people of color and has black people, before running things and making things happen in our organizations. So that way, I sort of feel like this fake, you know, feels more real and more genuine.

CR (43:13): Yeah, I agree with what you're saying. Like, it's, like, I see like, in schools too. Like I feel like Scotia have like, more teachers of color. Because more of this, like the students in New York are mostly like people of color. So like, when you don't see like, a teacher who's like a person of color. Like, I feel like you wouldn't connect with them. Yeah. So yeah, I agree with you. Have you have the past past few months have change how you think about police and racism in the US?

LM (43:50): No, I always felt like the way how I feel now. about policing.

CR (43:55): About polices?

LM (43:57): About policing?

CR (43:58): Yeah.

LM (43:58): And about Yeah, I always like, is a racist system. It's a structural racism. That has to change. It's just me it just the things that have happened, has validated more my ideas about it more than anything, but yeah, has not changed.

CR (44:16): So like, what do you say like, after, like, did you learn more about history about racism in this country since a process started? Or you already know, like, or you already know, on some stuff?

LM (44:29): No, it's just validation that something needs to be done. You know, when your person or when you're a person of color, especially if you're a black person, you walk it you walk in the world, and you navigate the world very differently. And you know, like, I'm always concerned about my brother, who drives and, and always gets pulled over and I'm always like praying that he doesn't get killed, and those interactions for police and even though he knows what to do, like, he tells police He's doing all this other shit, excuse my language, like, I just don't want him to get hurt, you know. And so this is nothing new is just what's powerful about this moment is that we're able to record it and send it, distribute it so other people could see it, you know, we're able to like, you know, like this happens, this whole thing happened with me, may he rest in peace Dante wright you're 20 years old Sunday died has a one year old, I think. And we're able to know immediately that this was happening, we're able to act immediately. 20 years ago, we wouldn't have been able to even know about that unless we sorted the newspaper. And you know, and now we were able to document these injustices, and we're able to kind of collect ourselves and add together. So I just feel like this stuff has been happening for a long, long time. And our history is not like, you know, we come from a history where we enslave people. And so it shows like, it's just, it's just confirming what I always felt about police and policing, and the structures, the racist structures.

CR (46:16): Did, many of your peers inspire you in some way?

LM (46:22): what you mean, they?

CR (46:24): They inspire you about black lives matter? Or, like your coworkers inspire? are like more? Or maybe you like your friends that are on book writers? Like did they inspire you?

LM (46:44): Yeah, I think for me, I want to know more about abolition, abolition, teaching abolition in general, like abolition of, of abolishing, like the jail system and all that stuff. And I think, yeah, I want to know more about that, and how would that look like? And, you know, other ways of policing? How to make that, like, more? Like, how to how to even how to dismantle that. And so for me, yeah, in those ways, I have some colleagues that are maybe more versed than a lot, but just some colleagues, some black colleagues that are more versed than me in that. And, you know, like, I feel like, Yeah, I definitely want to learn more about abolition and what does that mean for me?

CR (47:33): Yeah, so you're telling me that they inspire you by talking to them?

LM (47:39): No, they inspired me, by them, pushing the issue of why abolition needs to be needs to be done, you know, like, we need why we need to get rid of jails and why we need to kind of have come up

with other solutions. And you know, like, police brutality and just all of this is related to like, also like, the prison system and how, you know, the most people that are in prison are people of color, black men. That's like the new Jim Crow. Crow law. If you ever seen a humanities, but there was a book called The New Jim Crow law.

CR (48:30): Yeah. I think the somewhere Yeah,

LM (48:31): I you seen it because it was everywhere Yeah. Teachers obsessed with that book, was hard to read, but it was teachers obsessed with it. And I feel like in those ways, my colleagues definitely inspired me, the black ones for my black colleagues.

CR (48:52): So let's go to our next question. What do you think there's so much backlash towards black lives matter movement?

LM (49:07): I think it's because of privilege. I think people who people don't want to lose their privilege, white folks don't want to lose their privilege. And that's why there's a lot of backlash. I think, I think, you know, to be white, and to be male or to be white, and to be a woman and it very, you know, you have a lot of access and you have like a spectrum of privilege, and it's hard for people to look at let go of that. Right. So I think that's probably why this backlash,

CR (49:46): like what do you say it was a it has to do with like people looting and destruction of property that took place during the protests?

LM (49:55): I think that's very different. I wish I could show you a video where we can do that. I think Before I used to have this whole thing about looting and all that stuff and looting as wrong, but in reality, I feel like, you know, I feel different levels. There were people who were protesting right peacefully, there were people who were looting. And they came in many different colors. And then there were people who were rioting, but I just think that all of that is a part of it. You know, like, though, I don't necessarily feel a certain type of way because of people who were looting. I want to show I, I'll email it to you this video.

CR (50:34): Yea yea.

LM (50:35): This woman's talking about looting and talking about the different types of protesters and how, like, how she doesn't care about looting target, because they're the ones, you know, they're the ones like, exploiting her anyways, I don't know. I have to show it. I have to send you the video and it changed my mind about looters and looting. So I just think that there's an injustice. I mean, we think about looters. Somebody who's willing to go through like a broken glass window to get like, a bag or some shirts or whatever. That's, that's crazy. Like, I definitely wouldn't want to go through some anything

broken to get back. There's reasons for that. So I just think, no, I think that I think I think there's a lot of racist people. And I think that there's a lot of people who benefit from, from things staying the same.

CR (51:30): Oay,so what would be your thoughts? Or your response on the black letter? Black Lives Matter with all lives matter? Like, what do you think about that?

LM (51:40): I really want to talk about that. Because that doesn't even that's not even. That's not even a thing. I mean, it's a thing, but it's not a thing. Black Lives Matter is saying that is, is a direct response. Because our because black lives usually don't matter. So I remember the three woman but three black woman who created the Black Lives Matter movement, and how they went back and forth about what to call the movement, and essentially in Black lives, because the whole point is that black lives don't matter. That's what it is. All these that why George Floyd happened an that what Dante wright, because black lives and in our communities or in our in this country doesn't matter. And that's why the movement is called Black Lives Matter. I mean, look, I'm simplifying it. But all lives matter. I don't even want to speak on that. Because that's not even. I guess what I'm trying to say to you is that all lives matter is the same as talking about reverse racism. There's no such thing.

CR (52:46): Okay. Yeah, I agree with you. Because I remember I think we were talking about it, and I guess, Dorians class. And I think, one time you told us, if you agree with it, and like I said, I feel like I don't agree with them or something like that, because I feel like most Black people, I feel like they get targeted more than other. That's what I that's what I remember. I told him, that's what I said.

LM (53:14): Yeah, it's crazy. And people, some people will say, All lives matter. They don't necessarily understand why that's so racist. That's a racist comments to say, you know, they don't always understand it, but still is racist. It's like saying reverse racism, you know, like reverse racism, like, yeah, you're white, and you're being, somebody is being racist against you, because you're white, that does not exist. That is not a thing. reverse racism is not a thing. All lives matter. It's not a thing. Because the whole point is that all lives matter. But the Black lives don't matter. And that's what is Black Lives Matter. So it's just it's like, it actually makes me angry hearing that term. Just so like, I'm just telling you that.

CR (53:57): Yeah. So that would be led to our next question. How, how, how the uprising across the country shift, how you think about your necessity, identity and your, your place in the US, US society.

LM (54:27):I feel like I'm thinking more about protecting myself and more about self care. I know you asked about that earlier, like I do for self care. And now I feel like, you know what, I want to write this book at the end of this year. I want to focus on that I want to focus on you know, I want to focus on journaling. I want to like I want to graduate grad school. All right now, so should be doing homework, but I'd rather talk to you but I just, I think that I want to I want to focus on finish. Seeing those things like getting my administrative licenses, you know, like, focusing on me protecting myself protecting my energy. And, and that's really what my focus is I don't, I feel like I know everything that I need to know

about my city, and about how you can discredit me and I don't want to like be like, under my bed crying every day I just there's so much there are so many beautiful things I have to unlearn what society tells me about who I am and just all the resilience and the Black joy that is out there. That's really what my focus is right now.

CR (55:44): Do you have any stories or willing to share that about your encounter with on racism or police?

LM (55:56): No, I mean, I still like I encounter racism all the time, but I don't really want to....I don't want to talk about police right now. But I just I have an income I have encountered. We're gonna have but it hasn't been like, I mean, I'm alive. And then in terms of racism, I counter racism all the time. But I don't want to get too too deep into it right now. I was in a situation where I think sometimes I was like, What can I say? What can I say what I'm, like feeling so horrible after this. But like, I think I've noticed sometimes students react towards me different because of the racism,

CR (56:56): Wow!

LM (56:57): Like, meaning like, I think that like, I always have an intention from I always want to, especially when it comes to, because I have a class on race. So that's why I'm kind of oversaturated with talking about race, but I, I always want to help students able to navigate the world out there and able to, like, get the most out of it out of life. And sometimes, like, you know, our ethnicities are barriers. And I always want to share what I noticed students are so for me, I think it's painful when I want to do that. And sometimes students, they see my color, and they don't see my heart. You know, like, I had a really horrible situation with a student incident with a student a couple of weeks ago where student, like, literally sent all these horrible things about me in a virtual classroom. And I was co teaching with other people. And it was just really awful. And, and then I had another situation where a student the other week, where I mean their was other teachers, they kind of cursed me out. And it was just awful. And it's related to race. And so I just think like, I think sometimes it's tough, but I feel like I'm just trying to focus on enjoy right now you know.

CR (58:27): Okay, yes. Um, the Oh, you already talked about a thought? I don't want to say that question. Um, do you think that? Do we in New York is diverse?

LM (58:43): That's a complicated question. I don't know how to answer that. But what I do know about the deal with EA is that in terms of their students that go there make the deal we meaning the public schools most kids that go to public schools, and the DOB are kids of color. So like 85% of students, including Asians are kids of color. And only 15% are white students. And so I think that the, I don't know, like that question is too big for me to answer. But definitely, in terms of, in terms of the teachers that are teaching those kids of color is not diverse. Most teachers. Most teachers nationally, I think 84% of teachers are white women. And then in New York City, over 60% sometimes somebody told me 70,

close to 80, but I'm like, Where are those numbers, but most teachers are white in New York City in public schools. So in terms of teachers is my diverse now, in terms of my students is I guess not Diversity either. And then in terms of the staff outside of teachers, like outside of principals and stuff, I don't really know how that looks like, but I'm assuming that it's probably also mostly white.

CR (1:00:11): Like I was, I like already talked about it. Like I said to you like, um, when I was like, in middle school, most of my teachers were on white teachers. And they mostly came from Long Island. And they told us that they came here because they just wanted to have the benefit or like what the Department of Education gives them because I think the benefits from Long Island are different from the New York City for like our like rules or something. So they so they come to teach here because they just want the benefit that all I remember what like one teacher told me that

LM (1:00:50): Well, that's that's that's madness. Definitely, most teachers are white and most administration is white, and humanities humanities was the only school that didn't have all white a ministration because it was Rob, remember?

CR (1:01:04): Yeah. yes Rob.

LM (1:01:06): HisJamaican, right. And, but there were six schools and humanities was the only school where they had a Black person who was in administration, everybody else, their administration was completely white.

CR (1:01:22): Well, I didn't I didn't know that.

LM (1:01:25): Yeah, so definitely, in terms of staffing is not diverse.

CR(1:01:30): Okay. Yeah. Well, I didn't, I really didn't know about it. But so that would go to our second topic. 2021. Oh, what was what was going through your mind when you first heard about the US Capitol was Invaded?

LM (1:01:50): Actually didn't understand what was happening. I was like, what it was, I remember what it was when I first I think I in my phone, it came up or something. And I was just like, I didn't even think that was possible, to be honest. Even though I feel kind of like, we're not even talking about it. I will say this. No, I didn't think that was possible. Because it's like the capital No, like, it's like, Don't they have police and security? And I just, I yeah, this that I was really confused and shocked. And sort of like, what? Thats my first Initial my impressions.

CR (1:02:27): I think, Yeah, me too. Like, I didn't believe it, too. I was like is that joke. I thought I was like, something like it wasn't real, because I will see in there like in the news, and I'm like, What is happening? I don't I don't know what was happening. But then, like, it was real. I was like, What the

heck they are like they're in the like, the capital of the United States. And I'm like, I was like, really surprised to and what what do you think people, people that let this attempted to overthrow the government violently?

LM (1:02:56): Yeah. I mean, they wanted to have a cool. what do they call it? I think I'm calling it wrong. Yeah. I mean, it was horrible as their violence and it was, I don't know if you can hear me, right. could hear me.

CR (1:03:13): I could hear me. Yes, yes.

LM (1:03:14): Oh Okay. There were violence and scary and white supremacists. And they wanted to take they wanted to, like, take back the election. I guess they wanted Trump to be president again. It was really I felt like, once I completely understood what was happening, I feel kind of scared. And then I felt like it really happy to hear the United States. I mean, that's what stuffs happens in honduras. No seriously like one of the presidents in the middle of the night. They went to get him on his house and stuff. And he ended up in the UN. I don't know. But you know what I'm saying like that, that kind of stuff. what? Thats Like did that happen her?. So for me, I felt like that.

CR (1:04:00): Were you surprised how they were treated by the police? Like, were you surprised how the police were treating them though? The people who were overthrowing the carbon or who were in the US Capitol?

LM (1:04:13): Yeah. I wasn't surprised because they didn't even call whether the National Guard of how it will look, you know, and so I was surprised that they didn't take the necessary steps to protect the Capitol because of who was cause rioting, that is rioting. That's like, you know, that completely is rioting. And that is actually violence. Because anyways, it's very different than a Black lives matter movement, I think, but I feel like if it was Black lives matter, it would have been the National Guard there and they would have been a lot more things, but because they were White. It wasn't that preparation for them. They just didn't want to treat them in a certain way, right. They don't want the optics optics

CR (1:05:00): Yeah, like, for like when the Black Lives Matter protests when it's peacefully like they have like, a lot of people, they have a lot of police they use a lot of violence towards the protesters, even though they're protesting it say peacefully, like I was surprised to I'm like, how come then are you also using violence when the US Capitol was being overthrown? So that didn't make really sense to me.

LM (1:05:25): Yeah.

CR (1:05:28): And there's been reports that members of the group that stormed the US Capitol, including police officers and elected officials and member of the US, US military. What do you think about that?

LM (1:05:43): I'm not surprised. I mean, I was surprised but not surprised. You know, like, Yeah, okay. Yes, that's what you really think. Yeah. All right. Noted.

CR (1:05:54): Yeah, I yeah. I was surprised to like, I mean, some police officer officials do agree with I guess, Trump's views or something like that.

LM (1:06:05): Yeah.

CR (1:06:07): What do you think about the President Trump or not? He's not the president anymore. But what do you think about Trump's reaction to the invasion invasion?

LM (1:06:16): I think that was completely unacceptable, and he should have got impeached.

CR (1:06:21): Yeah, like, what do you think about the impeachment trial of former President Trump?

LM (1:06:28): Yeah, it was bogus. I mean, people are starting to get impeached because I think the numbers were. I don't know. I think there were more Republicans. I'm not sure why he was not going to get impeached. But I think it was more Republicans. I don't remember the exact details. But yeah, yeah, he didn't get impeached, but he deserves to be impeached, and deserve never to have the opportunity to run again, especially after he incited, you know, instigated the whole thing, and encouraged them to do it.

CR (1:07:01): How do you explain the lack of hostile between two political parties, like the democrats and the republicans like what do they? What are your thoughts about them? Like how, like how they work together?

LM (1:07:15): Like, when?

CR (1:07:17): Do you think they work together? Good or like bad?

LM (1:07:25): Like during the during for January, 6 impeachment?

CR (1:07:30): Yeah.

LM (1:07:34): Well, I mean, I know that, that I, I listened to some testimonies of the impeachment. And the democratic side. They weren't Amazing, right? They would have proved they will organize. And then the Republican side. They weren't. It was by complete, like, they didn't even prepare. So I definitely feel like they weren't working together. And they're of post, you know, opposed to each other. They really wanted to protect Trump.

CR(1:08:09): Which side the Republicans, right?

LM (1:08:11): Yeah. The Republicans Yeah.

CR (1:08:13): If Trump was a woman or a non white, how would the impeachment trial have been? would have been the same or different?

LM (1:08:25): Um...I don't know how to answer that question. Because I feel like Clinton was the other one that was impeached. Was he impeached? They got to be impeached.

CR (1:08:38): I think he didThank you.

LM (1:08:39): I think so. Yeah.

CR (1:08:41): yes yes. He was one. I think he was a president who also got impeached. Yeah, yeah. Some sexual stuff about it. I don't remember.

LM (1:08:49): Yeah. I shouldn't know that. Um, I feel like, Look, I feel like this is Trump and he has a lot of power in the Republican Party. And he's white, and he's male. And that's all the privilege that spectrum of his privilege. He has a lot of privilege and access. He's rich. And definitely if it was someone else, it would have been very different outcomes, I'm assuming, right. But then it's really hard to be be a president if you're not white, and you know, I mean, that was Obama, which is awesome. I feel like if it was Obama, he probably would have done a impeached for sure. Yeah. Okay.

CR (1:09:37): Okay. So I think that all my questions. Thank you for the interview. Leslie.

LM (1:09:44): Your welcome

CR (1:09:44): It was fun interviewing. And I think that's everything. So thank you.