

Transcript of Interview with Sa’Ra Skipper by Shonda Nicole Gladden

Interviewee: Sa’Ra Skipper

Interviewer: Shonda Nicole Gladden

Date: 10/06/2020

Location (Interviewee): Indianapolis, Indiana

Location (Interviewer): Indianapolis, Indiana

Transcriber: Lily Crigler

Abstract: In this interview, Sa’Ra Skipper discusses her role in activism during the Black Lives Matter movement that occurred in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout 2020. Sa’Ra is an active member in her church, is involved with Faith in Indiana, and paints subjects involving Black Lives Matter in her free time. Sa’Ra discusses how her family, friends, and community were affected by the pandemic and also discusses her future plans of obtaining her law degree and working in the Statehouse in the future.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:01

Good morning. Can you see that we're recording?

Sa'Ra Skipper 00:03

Yes. Good morning.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:04

Okay. Today is Tuesday, October 6th 2020. It is approximately 9:51am in eastern daylight savings time. I am Shonda Nicole Gladden, and I am here with me, state your name for the recording.

Sa'Ra Skipper 00:23

Sa'Ra Skipper.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:25

And where are you located?

Sa'Ra Skipper 00:27

Indianapolis, Indiana.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:29

Thank you so much. I want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gift document that you reviewed and signed. This interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project. And... this interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic. During this phase of the project, our research group is focusing its energies on collecting oral histories that speak to the experience of racial justice and racial justice movements in the context of COVID-19. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recordings, the demographic information that you share, and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the

Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive, and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions that I can answer?

Sa'Ra Skipper 02:04

No, I do not.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 02:05

All right, so I'm going to go through just a few, a few consent statements that I'll need you to respond to, and if you'll mute yourself until you're answering a question, that would be helpful so that we reduce the background noise. And these are the same consents that you have given in the document that you reviewed and signed, and they will simply be recorded for the purpose of tracking it in the archive. So taking part in the study is voluntary, you may choose not to take part or you may leave the study at any time; leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded, and a digital video and/or audio format and will be transcribed. The recordings and the transcriptions of our interview, copies of any supplementary documents, or any additional photos that you wish to share, and the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive, and the Indiana University Library System and will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

Sa'Ra Skipper 03:48

No.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 03:50

Okay. And also, let's see, in addition to your signed document, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Sa'Ra Skipper 04:03

I understand and agree to these terms.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:06

I'm also asking you, verbally asking that you verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available under the following licenses. The Creative Commons Attribution non commercial share alike, 4.0 International CC BY and CSA 4.0, and the COVID-19 Oral History Project, the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive, and the trustees of Indiana University acting through its agents, employees, or representatives having an unlimited right to reproduce, use, exhibit, display, perform, broadcast, create derivative works from, and distribute the oral history materials in any manner or media now existing or hereafter developed and perpetuity throughout the world. You agree that the oral history materials may be used by the COVID-19 Oral History Project and IU, including its assigned and transferees for any purpose, including but not limited to marketing, advertising, publicity or other promotional purposes, you agree that IU will have final editorial authority over the use of oral history materials, and you waive any right to inspect or approve of any future use of the oral history materials. Moreover, you agree that the public has the right to use the materials, under the terms of

fair use, US copyright law, Section 107, of the US Copyright Act. Could you please confirm that you agree to allowing us to share your interview under these licenses?

Sa'Ra Skipper 05:59

I confirm and agree.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 06:02

Finally, this is the last one, I want to ask for a verbal confirmation that you agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately.

Sa'Ra Skipper 06:13

Yes, I confirm and agree.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 06:16

All right. That's it, so we now get into the actual interview, and I'm going to start with some background questions. Then we'll talk a little bit about your personal and your community context. Then we'll shift and have a conversation about racial justice movements, thinking about Black Lives Matter, protests, protest actions. Then we'll think about your leadership and the future, and anything else that you'd like us to talk about. And so you've committed to about a 90 minute time, and so we spent about 30 minutes in housekeeping, so this interview should take about 60 minutes. So tell me a little bit about yourself. What are the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis? For example, what is your job? What are your extracurricular activities? And how have they changed since the beginning of COVID-19?

Sa'Ra Skipper 07:10

Well, I'm a bookkeeper. I work for one of the trustee, the township trustees office, so since COVID has hit, we've been working remotely. One of my extracurricular activities, it includes being pretty involved at my church, but due to COVID, we haven't been able to really meet regularly like that. I'm grateful that, you know, I'm, I sing on the praise team, so I'm, I'm grateful to be able to at least convene with the praise team, but I definitely miss being at church. And other than that, I'm, I'm just pretty much a homebody, so pre-COVID, I really, I mean, I really didn't go to many places other than work or church, or to my mom's house or anything like that. But just, you know, just regular day to day things like going to the grocery store has just changed completely the whole experience and then also being high risk, I've really been kind of glued to home outside of earlier in the summer. But yeah, that's pretty much it. I'm pretty much a homebody, I'm active in my church, and I just go to work everyday.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 08:30

Well, I want to press a little bit on a couple of those things that you did because you say high risk, can you speak a little bit more about what high risk looks like, what that means, particularly in the midst of COVID-19?

Sa'Ra Skipper 08:43

So I have type one diabetes, which is a chronic illness, you know, also meaning that my immune system has a deficiency, and it's not as strong. And I also have a few other chronic illnesses, so it makes me more susceptible to the virus, and being out in public or gathering in crowds that I wouldn't really be concerned about, has definitely placed some anxiety through this time.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 09:16

And also, I'm curious, because you said you're very active in your church, but COVID-19 has changed how active you are. Can you speak a little bit more about the ways that COVID-19 hasn't affected your faith life?

Sa'Ra Skipper 09:37

Well, it hasn't affected it in a major way because we still have virtual worship, and like I say, I can still go to choir rehearsal, but being in the actual building and being able to worship freely, I mean, I guess I can worship freely in my own home, but it's just something so different when you can gather together with like-minded people and to be able to, you know, have that spiritual claims and just to be able to release and give God glory and having to do that at home, it's not the same as being with my church family or my choir ladies or you know, things like that, so my faith, it hasn't been, you know, shaken or anything like that, it's just, I have to give God glory in a different way now.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 10:25

Thank you for that. Thinking about the categories of race, gender, sexual orientation, social economic status, and other common demographics, how do you describe yourself?

Sa'Ra Skipper 10:40

I am, I guess I'm a heterosexual female. Can you repeat the last part of the question?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 10:52

I'll repeat the whole question. Thinking about the categories of race, gender, sexual orientation, social economic status, and other common demographics, how do you describe yourself? And you can think back to the pre-interview questions that you answered before the interview?

Sa'Ra Skipper 11:13

Right. So I'm a black, heterosexual female. My social economic status, I mean, I think I'm broke. I don't think that I make enough money, especially since you know, I just, I took a new job last year, and I was my previous job, I was in a stressful environment, but I feel that now I'm even more strained because I took a \$2 pay cut. So I'm kind of kind of like a rock in a hard place right now, because the work is way less stressful, but I have needs that need to be met, and yeah, so that's where I'm at.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 11:58

Thank you. Where do you live? Your neighborhood? Your city? What do you call it? And what do other people call it where you live?

Sa'Ra Skipper 12:07

I live, so I live on the far east side of Indianapolis. I live off, I live in a neighborhood off of 38th and Post, so I'm kind of like off of the 36th Street area. I believe we, our area's called Tudor Parker, or we're outside of Tudor Park.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 12:28

And can you tell me what you see happening around you and your neighborhood.

Sa'Ra Skipper 12:33

Um, a lot of violence. A lot of deaths, a lot of hunger, a lot of... I mean I really feel like I see a lot of lost souls, almost. Just people, they get in their corners, they're part of, you know, the world, and this is like a part of the world that people really don't leave; it's just, you know, people are kind of complacent with being here. We live in a food desert, so people are hungry. I see people just really out here just trying to get it by any means necessary, and I see a lot of young people dying, unfortunately. But I feel like being in a food desert, not having affordable housing or, you know, a job that pays you well enough, I mean, it'll... those factors, I feel like they contribute to violence because people are just, they're so consumed with material things, it's just like, well, they get to hold on to some money or, you know, they got these drugs or whatever. And they feel like somebody is coming in and trying to impede on their whatever they tried to do with the drugs or the money or just even just street cred in general, and then they feel like they have the right to take a life. And I just think that is just so crazy because it's like we're glorifying the demise of our own people in the music that these people listen to, or, you know, my counterparts, I don't want to say these people because... but I mean, it's just kind of crazy to see how it all plays out. And just to see like the cycle it's been in because I know these people have been relying on like government assistance. These are like generations of people relying on a system that they don't even see that the system is not for them. So it's like they see they get the food stamps, they get the section eight or whatever, but you still are making a, you're at a job where you're making like \$8.25, you can't really live your life. Yes, they're covering your rent, but you can't do nothing with your kids, you can't do nothing with yourself, but you're okay with that because your rent is paid, and you know, you have lights and you have..., but that's not, I feel like, a good quality of life because you're you're still gonna be struggling day-to-day.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 14:53

So thinking about COVID-19 then as it relates to what you're seeing in your neighborhood, have there been any changes?

Sa'Ra Skipper 15:05

I don't think so. I personally have been going up to the gas stations and you know, giving homeless people masks and sanitizer and things like this, because I mean, people don't have access, they just don't have the access to it. The gas stations that they begging for money, that they're outside of begging for money, you have to pay \$5 for a mask. I mean, we're in the middle of a pandemic, and it's just like, their price gouging on essential things, and I don't think that there's been a change. And I know, especially in marginalized communities, black people and Latinx people, like they're being hit super hard by COVID. And I don't think that there's been any change. I mean, I've seen at a pharmacy, one of the pharmacies, they have a new drive up, drive thru testing for COVID, but I mean, what are you really doing? I mean, how does that really help people if they don't have insurance, because a lot of these testing places are not free. So it's just like I said, these people are just stuck, you just get kind of stuck, and I don't think there's been any real progress made. Every day I get a notice from my phone how many people are dying from COVID, or how many new cases the state has, and those numbers may vary, but there's not a zero. There hasn't been a day where we haven't had any deaths from COVID or a week, or 24 hours or 48 hours, so I think that also it's important for people to really pay attention to the information or if it's even real information that's being put out there on our news feeds of our social media, and just on the news, period, because people are, I feel like they're easily influenced if they feel, if they hear well. It's a steady decline, but I just feel like that's not enough for me to still not want to wash my hands, wear a mask, social distance or anything like that. And then I feel like in my community, people have just already been through so much. They're looking at COVID like, I

mean, this is just another thing. This is just something else that you know, we gonna get through, but their family members are dying, like they're dropping like flies.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 17:25

So do you personally know people who have died from COVID? 19?

Sa'Ra Skipper 17:32

Yes, my boyfriend's uncle passed away from COVID. I have a really close friend whose mother passed away from COVID, and it really hurt my friend when her mother passed, I was really just shocked like this, this virus really, you know, it's for anybody, anybody. And then when my boyfriend's uncle passed away, I was just like, this is really, this is really real, and you've never know who you know, I mean, it may not be a direct connection, but you know somebody who knows somebody who has been affected by this, and to see, like, you know, to kind of know, like, the backstory, I won't put, you know, my friend's mom's business out there or whatever, but just to know the backstory of how she was treated and how my friend was treated, and in like, the last moments that she didn't get to spend with her mom. Like, they text her, they didn't even call her, they text her let her know that her mom passed away. And it's just like, I get it, that we're in a pandemic and everything like that, but still, where is the morality? Where is the empathy? Where is the decency in all of this?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 18:44

So, have you seen the people around you change their opinions or their day-to-day activities or their relationships in response to the pandemic?

Sa'Ra Skipper 18:58

Well, um, I have on my mom's side, like my maternal side, I have a lot of older cousins, like 80/90 years old, and my one cousin, she does not like to be at home. She's 92 years old, and she just does not understand why she can't go to the grocery store, or why she just can't drive all the way, you know, go around, but it's just like, you're 92 years old, and you're just high risk for this. And I have an aunt who is 80 plus, who's also asthmatic, and she is just, I mean, my family, we like to be together, so it's just, this has just been a tough time and just in general for my family, so to put COVID on top of that, like we've really been restrained from, you know, coming together in mourning with each other and just going through things, you know, that without COVID, we probably would have been together probably every weekend or every month or you know, at least once a month. But I know with my my aunt, it's taken a toll on her because she's just used to everybody coming by, and sitting on the porch with her, or coming in getting something to eat, and then my cousin, it's the same way, she just doesn't understand it. But younger people, though, it's been bothering me how people are, they just don't take it serious, almost like, "oh, I don't need to wear a mask or I don't this, I don't that." But the thing is, we don't know the real... we don't know if we have been told the truth or not, so my thing is, why not take the precautions? Why not... why not just wear a mask? It's not like you have to wear it all day; you're going into the store, you're coming out. But people are making this such a big deal, and I just think that I mean, nobody really cares about each other anymore, honestly, it's kind of like a every man for themselves, narrative now. We're so... the country is so divided anyway, but it's like COVID has really divided us even more, so people, like my brother, he's just been at home this whole time. He has not left the house, he's not taking any risk any chances. And then my sister who is also a type one diabetic and a social butterfly, she has just not been feeling it and not feeling the restrictions and stuff, but I mean, she's had to take, you know, more, better care of herself and things like that because she is high risk, but she's ready to get going and on the move. So, I mean, it just, to me, personally, it's just on, I guess the age group or the

generation because one part of my family is masked up, washing hands, sanitizing, and then the other half is I mean, they still sanitize, but they're not really feeling the mask, so I know who to be around and who not to be around.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 21:53

So what issues have most concerned you about this pandemic?

Sa'Ra Skipper 22:02

I think what has most concerned me, the top thing is how much money that has already been, of our tax dollars that have been placed into a vaccine that we, the people whose money that has been used to create this vaccine, or that's been the money that's been passed around to these big pharmaceutical companies to create a vaccine, like we don't even know if it's going to work, we don't know the side effects of this. And I think another thing that has concerned me is just people not taking this serious, like people are dying, I mean people die every day, yes, but this virus has, it has shook the world. This is not just the United States of America issue, like this is a global thing, and just to see how nonchalant people are acting about it, it just really concerns me because it's just like, "okay, you cannot be concerned for you, but what about the other people in the world?" You know, you're not wearing a mask, but you're talking to somebody you don't know if they live with their older grandparents or if they have children at home or anything like that, so why can't you just put yourself aside and just wear a mask? That's it. It's just that simple. Just wear a mask.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 23:24

So, before we shift, how does this pandemic, compared to other big events that have happened in your lifetime? How old did you say you were?

Sa'Ra Skipper 23:35

I'm 25, so this is like I don't know, to me, this is like the first biggest, like pandemic that I've really lived through? I don't know, I'm sure there have been other things, but this has just been, I guess since I'm an adult, I mean, now I watch the news on my own or, you know, this has just been a, this has just been a big crazy mess. And just to see again, just how it's every man for themselves, and I just don't understand how people just cannot, you know, care for your neighbor. You know, you wouldn't want somebody to be around your loved one and not take them into consideration, so why can't you do the same? But I can't think of anything else like another pandemic or anything like that there in my lifetime that has affected and shaped the world like how COVID has.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 24:37

Is there anything else about your personal background or your community experience or even your family that you'd like us to talk about before we shift to our next set of questions?

Sa'Ra Skipper 24:50

I would like to discuss protesting and COVID during this. Oh, are you already going to bring that up? Okay.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 25:00

That's where we're shifting. We're shifting to racial justice movements, and Black Lives Matter. So I'm going to ask that yes, please do share any thoughts you have about current movements focused on racial justice, such as

Black Lives Matter and anything that you want to talk about as it relates to protests. I'm going to put my questions aside for a minute, and let's just hear where your heart wants to go.

Sa'Ra Skipper 25:25

Well, I first want to start off with the protests, how they were just blown out of proportion, but it wasn't by the protesters. And it was amazing to actually see like, okay, yeah, it's like, 100, 200 of us out here, but a lot of people have masculine, a lot of people, I mean, we weren't necessarily shoulder to shoulder, so we were kind of practicing social distancing. But in a social justice aspect of it, I was hit by a rubber bullet, and I didn't understand how I was on my knees, and I had my hands up; it was like 20 others in front of the police, and they still fired at us. So my concern, or my question is, are the people... are the people really the problem? Or is it the people who are sworn to protect us in serve us? One night, I was out protesting, and it was the National Guard, it was like three National Guardsmen, standing in front of some monument. I don't even know who the man, the monument was, and I asked the man, I was like, "do you know who that is?" And he had no idea, so I just felt like, "what are you really protecting? What are you really doing?" And I also thought it was strange how nobody that I knew who was out there protesting, nobody has gotten sick, so that has also put something in the back of our mind. Like, what is the truth? What is really going on with this virus? Was, is this a hoax to put us all in an uproar? Or was this like a... is this a strategic thing? Like, what is it, but I know that it's real, because of the people that I know, who have lost their loved ones. So if it's COVID, Corona, whatever, whatever the name of it is, it's real. And just to see people out there still fighting for what they believe in and still wearing a mask, it's just like, how can you call these people thugs? How can you call these people hoodlums or whatever it is because we're out here protesting for our human rights?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 27:44

So thank you, when you speak of the protests, and you say that they are blown out of proportion, can you speak a little bit deeper in terms of what do you mean by that?

Sa'Ra Skipper 27:56

So I feel that they were blown out of proportion just because I was out there for 10 days straight. I was in Indianapolis, and I went to my hometown of Anderson, Indiana, and we held a protest there, but the difference between the Anderson protest and the Indianapolis protest, the Anderson protest is, it's still a small town, so it's not what you know, it's who you know, so I feel like, you know, the police may have been in, you know, they may have just been chilling that day. But to have been out 10 days straight here in Indianapolis and to see, like, I didn't know, I felt like I was in a war zone almost, like, I don't know how to describe it other than that way, because to come out there with the intention of being peaceful, which we were peaceful, every single night that we went out there, but it was almost like a flip had been switched with the police like they just turned up on us out every night, every single night. Out of nowhere. We were tear gassed. We're walking in the street, not locked in arms, but I mean, we were lined up like, you know, I mean, just walking, singing, saying chants, and the next thing you know, we're being tear gassed. The next thing you know, everybody's running and ducking because there's rubber bullets flying. We're looking up top of the buildings just to make sure like, you know, they don't try to get us from above or anything like that. And every day on the news, it seemed like they tried to downplay the protest like it was the protesters' fault that it turned, but y'all are out here protecting property when lives are literally being lost, and we came out here with the intention to be peaceful. So I feel like that's why downtown looks like how downtown looks because we we're the I mean, not to... we're the little people in the situation. The police, the government, the legislators, they all have some sort of power, but all the decisions and everything that they do, it

affects us. So I just feel like we're the people who put you all in office, and we're not getting what we want. We tried to be peaceful. Y'all turn up on us, so how do you not expect something in return? But I don't think that it's fair that they were enticing us and, I mean, I don't know if you poke a bull, what do you think is, if you keep poking, what do you think is going to happen? So I just think it wasn't fair how I don't know... I just don't think it was fair how they tried to call us like animals and thugs and stuff like that, because we were out there hurting like there was seven year olds out there. There were children out there, and they tear gassed, not just grown people, but it's babies out here. And then people were like, "well, why do you have your children out here?" Because their lives matters. And we're protesting for their futures, so that this stuff stops here.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 31:11

So I heard you say, "this is why downtown looks how downtown looks." For historians and researchers who are unfamiliar with the current state of downtown Indianapolis, can you give a little bit more context?

Sa'Ra Skipper 31:27

Yes, I can, I can actually, I don't remember the street, but I can tell you when it all started. We were coming out of the circle, and I mean, we were coming out of the circle, protesting peacefully, singing, chanting, but it was like, the police were lining up, and they were like, coming towards us, like taking steps towards is taking steps towards us. And so it got to a point where people were just like, man, "what are just... what are y'all doing?" And so they started tear gassing us and stuff, so that's when people started throwing chairs through windows and busting out windows and doing all this stuff because people are tired, we're tired. And it was even to a point where my boyfriend, he tried to, this guy, he had a chair, he had a lawn chair or something, and he was about to throw it through the window, and my boyfriend was like, "man, don't do it. Don't do it." And he looked at, he the guy looked at Jeremy, like he wasn't going to do it, and then he looked back, and he threw the chair. And I just shrugged my shoulders, because I'm just like, I mean, look at how they came at us. What more do you got? What what what more do they expect? Nobody is just going to lay down and just take being treated in any old kind of way. So downtown was destroyed, and I don't feel that there was anything wrong with downtown being destroyed because you all again, you're down here protecting property, but you're you're missing the whole reason why we out here. We're out here because you're acting like our lives don't matter, and we're here to let you know that they do. But again, if you keep poking and poking and poking, what do you expect? So I think there was like, I don't know the exact numbers, but I'm sure it was like thousands and millions of dollars of damage done downtown, but to me, I don't think there was any problem of that because those businesses and those companies, they have insurance, but the lives that are being lost these people's families have to sell fish dinners to get them buried.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 33:38

So what motivated you to attend these protests?

Sa'Ra Skipper 33:42

Well, I want to, I'm gonna tell you, I'm gonna tell you what, what happened. It was May... it was no, it wasn't May. It was a couple of weeks after Dreasjon Reed had passed, and I was sitting out here, I was sitting on my patio, and I was painting. I was painting a Black Lives Matter thing or whatever, that's what I do with my free time, I should have said that in the beginning. But, and I hopped on Facebook, and I saw this crowd of people downtown. And I was like, I feel like I need to be there, and I was really scared because of COVID, and you know, I'm high risk, and I didn't want to get hurt or anything. I didn't want to get in trouble with my mom, first of all, so that was my main thing. I didn't want my mom to be mad at me, but I'm just like, I'm tired of this because

this is what my mom and my dad had to you know, had to go through when they, I mean they were kids when the rioting and stuff was happening in the 60s, but as my mom grew up, she was bused to school. You know, there's just other little micro things that just fired me up and fueled me up Like the KKK burned a cross in my grandparent's yard, because they thought that my grandmother was white, but she was just a fair skinned black woman. So I think just all of that and just, you know, the things and discussions that I've had with my father regarding race and social justice, that it just... the Dreasjon Reed kind of just, you know, that situation just fueled the fire. And I just felt like I just couldn't sit back anymore, and I also took into consideration that my sister was carrying, he's here now, but she was carrying my nephew, and that's really all I could think about was my nephew. And then so I'm like, his future can't be like this, the world can't be like this, it just can't be. So I did a lot of contemplating and back and forth, and so then my last thought, was, my kids at church. And I was like, "I gotta go out here." And that was, that's just what started it. I just thought about all the young people in the youth that were, that are in my life, and, and I just couldn't sit down anymore, so I just had to get up and go, so I did.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 36:11

So what did you and others around you do to protect yourselves from COVID-19?

Sa'Ra Skipper 36:21

We wore masks; we had a lots of lots and lots of hand sanitizer, but mainly just wearing a mask. And the only time we took it off because I was out there with my boyfriend, so we would be, it was like a space far away from other people where we would take our masks off, try to catch our breath because they maced, they did the tear gas or the mace or whatever, and we all had masks on. So... but it still went through, it still went through, so we all were like, we had to pull our masks down. People are throwing up and doing all this other stuff, so I don't know if that was safe, but I know it probably wasn't. Just all the germs and all this stuff, but it's just like, y'all did this. So we really just stayed with our mask on, and I had a whole thing of hand sanitizer with me.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 37:17

So are you a member of an organized Black Lives Matter movement chapter?

Sa'Ra Skipper 37:22

No, I am not a part of a Black Lives Matter chapter. I just believe that black lives matter.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 37:34

And what would you say? How do you perform your activism? Are you a part of any organized racial justice movement organization, or do you do this independently? What does your activism look like?

Sa'Ra Skipper 37:54

Well, I work with a organization called Faith in Indiana. I work with Faith in Indiana, that is a group compiled of the largest denominations in the state, and we work with, it's a faith based group, and we work with family first issues, immigration, fair housing, you know, affordable health care, just human human rights issues. But when I went and protested, that was independently, that was, that was just, that was just me. So I work with Faith in Indiana, and I've worked with like the social action part of my commission of my church. I'm working now, this week, I'll start working with Real Indy News. They have a project going on with a food bank, so I'm starting to, I'll be a volunteer with their food bank this week. But yeah, that's, if it's not Faith in Indiana, then I'm just me.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 38:57

So I heard you say that the Dreasjon Reed death was a period of time that impacted you, or compelled you, motivated you to attend the protests. What I also heard you say is that you were painting on your patio when you saw something on Facebook that motivated you to attend. Can you tell me about the role of art in the movement for racial justice or Black Lives Matter or in your activism?

Sa'Ra Skipper 39:35

I feel that, I feel that black art is a movement within itself. Nobody can tell our stories or our pain like us, and I feel that it's super important with our music, with art, with, you know, poetry, with everything. I mean, I think that those are outlets to I guess is to just like, release our anger. That's why I picked up the paintbrush because it was just too much going on in my mind, and I just needed to release. And I think that release is critical, and it's super, super important for people to feel our pain because if you're not going to listen to me, while I'm peacefully, I'm on my knees with my hands up, but you still shoot a rubber bullet, well maybe if you look at this painting, or listen to this song, or hear this poem, or listen to this person speak spoken word, then maybe you'll be able to feel it differently.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 40:36

Thank you for mentioning again being shot with a rubber bullet, can you speak a little bit more about that experience?

Sa'Ra Skipper 40:43

I couldn't believe it at first. It hurt. It definitely hurt, but it also opened, it removed a veil, I feel like. I feel like it removed a very thin veil that I had because my grandfather, he was one of the, he was like the first black, I don't remember his ranking, but he was like the first black, something of the Anderson Police Department. So and my father, he used to be a corrections officer at the juvenile center, and I have cousins who work for IMPD. So I mean, you know, the police, I've never been like afraid of the police, and I've never really cared for them either, so in that moment, I realized my life didn't matter. And it wasn't that my life didn't matter, but all those people who were behind me, who were picking me up off the ground, who were to the side of me, who were you know, none of our lives mattered to them. It did, that I mean, that's really the only way that I can put it, it's just, I just felt worthless, and not just worthless, because I don't, you know, I have loved my family and you know, things like that, but just worthless in the sense that he's got this uniform on, and he's got a badge and he's got this tactical gear, and he could do whatever he wants to, and he did. And to know that, like I said, we.. I myself had just walked up to the front line, I just walked up there, I took my fanny pack off, and I had my hands up, and I got on my knees, and I was just like begging just to please stop like, do y'all not see that our lives matter just as much as yours? And y'all are out here, with y'all whatever the air guns or whatever guns it was pointed at us, like, we're criminals or, or whatever. And then it was like, as soon as I stood up on my feet, that's when he fired. And so we just, we just all started running, and it was hectic, because after they... it was like, it was like the rubber bullets were releasing ma- not mace, but it was something was coming from it. And so I kind of stood there in shock for a brief moment, but I'm like I got, I gotta go because they about to keep firing. So we just started running, and eventually, we found a spot to catch our breath, and you know, a lot of us were coughing and gagging because like I said, the rubber bullet released some sort of agent, and it was just really bad.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 43:33

Can you describe the different kinds and types of protests and protesters, the bodies of the people who have been alongside you through your 10 days of protests?

Sa'Ra Skipper 43:48

Well, I can say that there, like I had mentioned earlier, there were people of all ages. I mean, there were middle aged people, people my age. I mean, and there were babies out there, but one thing that I did get a little nervous.... we got to one intersection, and there was a circle, literally like a circle of white allies. And they were just like "get in, get in the circle, you know, we'll protect you or whatever." But I'm like, dang. So what does that, what does this even mean because you're basically just saying, ya'll know they're not gonna shoot us because we white. And to see all of those, all of those white people, literally it had to have been like 40 or 50 of them, in a circle locked arm with all those black people in the circle, people holding onto their children, I couldn't, it was just something, I mean, it's like something I can't explain. So we had, there was white people out there. We blocked the street a couple of times, there were people in their cars, who had their fist up, I mean, smacking they horns so hard, and just like, you know, "black lives matter, black lives matter." And there's this one person in particular that I remember, I could just see tears rolling down his face, and he wasn't out there marching with us, but he was in his car, and he was just, I mean, he was flooring that horn, and he had tears coming down his face. And so we just had people of all different, you know, shapes, sizes, and colors out there, but I was concerned because I have seen where there have been some protests where there are white people. They're doing property damage, or they're shooting in the air, or, you know, they're causing things, so I... that moment, I was a little nervous, but after that, it was, it was it was just good to see that all of these people are out here because they think that my life matters. They think that all of these black people's lives matter. I mean, their lives matter, too, but I'm sure that they probably had a different upbringing or something of some sort. And they're probably just tired of it, just like we all are, so it was good to see just the different, it was like a spectrum, a different, different array of people.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 46:19

And what can you tell me about the organization of the protests? How are the protests organized? Is this word of mouth? Is this social media? How did you know to be there?

Sa'Ra Skipper 46:36

Well, it was word, the first few days definitely word of mouth. Yeah, because like I said, I just hopped on Facebook, I don't even remember whose video it was. It wasn't a... or I know, it wasn't a particular groups video. But the first few days, it was definitely word of mouth, but as things started to die down, they started to become more organized. But it seemed like, I don't know, it was just... it just seemed like if one person says, "Okay, y'all we meeting up here at six o'clock to do this, this and this," it would be another person coming in and just kind of like, "well, we gonna do this this way. I know, you planned it this way, but this what we gonna do." So I ended up getting into it with a guy one day, because a particular organizer, he was just like, "alright, y'all, I told the police like we will be gone by this certain time. If you here with me, you know, we heading out or you know, we're leaving or whatever." And this other guy, he was like, "man who made you the boss, who made you the leader, who made you..." And I'm just like, this is the problem right here. I'm like, "do you not see that this is what we, I mean, we need a leader. We can't just be out here willy nilly." And so we went back and forth and exchanged words until I got pulled away because that was, you know, that's, that's not being productive. I mean, what's worse, I mean, I'm just feeding into it now. They, they already want us to go against each other. Now it's a black man and a black woman going against each other, so I just, I just had to walk away. So I feel that in the beginning, it was definitely, you know, word of mouth, and there have been a few organizations who have held

some really successful protests and marches, but there's always a gray area. And I feel like the gray area is that's the pool of people who are out there just doing it for clout because I can recall when we went to the governor's house, I think, this one particular organizer was hugging the police, and the organizer who had organized it was just like, "that's not what we came out here for. None of our demands have been met, like, what are you doing hugging these people, like this is a photo op." And so I think that the gray area, the gray area folk, they kind of caused a little ruckus, they caused a little ruckus, but there are definitely some organizations out here who are you know, trying to keep it tight.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 49:23

If you feel comfortable, would you share the names of some of those organizations that you would say are keeping tight?

Sa'Ra Skipper 49:32

The one organization, I believe, they are called Black Women in Charge. They had a really big turnout. They, they had, they held a protest downtown and on the side of the statehouse, and I know they were able to get the mayor to come out there. They had Congressman Carson come out there, and I think it was like they said, 1000, maybe 1500 people had showed up, but I don't know. I just felt like a little ant because it was so many people out there. And then I'm trying to think, I believe there's, it's called Black Indy 10, they've held some, I know that they did, they did something really cool. They pulled up to the mayor's house and did like a wake up call. And they were like, honking their horns and like, "wake up, Mr. Mayor," or whatever. And then I believe the other organization, I just don't want to get the name wrong, I think it's the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance, but I think they formed like after the protests and stuff like that, but they, they're still doing work, so those are a few of the groups.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 50:52

Thank you for that. Is there anything else that you'd like to share about protests, racial justice movements and Black Lives Matter?

Sa'Ra Skipper 51:01

I would like to share the issue within our own, with our people because all what is it... is it all skin folk ain't kinfolk? And there were a lot of people who I thought it was bad enough how the media tried to, you know, make us seem like even like I said, thugs or whatever, but then it was just people like, "Y'all ain't no real protesters. Y'all didn't, y'all didn't..." I think somebody said, "y'all didn't steal no police cars," or just hearing different things, and it's just like, that's not it. That's not what we were down there to steal police cars; we were down there to make our presence known and to let these people know that this is not what we about to continue to keep dealing with. And I also ran into a senator when I was protesting, and I was like, I really appreciated seeing him down there, and he, because he said it himself, he was like, I thought he was a part of the senator staff, because I saw his lanyard. And I was like, "do you work with the senator?" And he was like, "no, I am a senator." And he was just like, "I had to come down here because this BS has to stop, and it starts in my office, and so I just need people to know, like, if you're not contributing, and trying to be productive, just keep everything to yourself, keep your comments to yourself, keep that energy to you. So because there are people out here who really want to change, and who are really on the front line to try to make sure that you and your cousins and your granny and all them got affordable housing, got access to food, and a lot of other things."

Shonda Nicole Gladden 52:48

All right. So we have about 17 minutes remaining. I want to shift to a conversation about your leadership and the future and then some closing questions unless there's anything else that you'd like to share about movements for racial justice and Black Lives Matter.

Sa'Ra Skipper 53:06

Oh, the last thing that I would like to share. Another thing that kind of hit home was my cousin was, my little cousin was murdered over the summer. And when... after he passed, I couldn't believe that I had been out there marching, and saying all these people's names and doing all this stuff for it to come around full circle and to be right at my front door. So for people to, you know, undermine and say, "well, I don't understand why y'all out there." I mean, you just never know when it could be you, your family...

Shonda Nicole Gladden 53:45

Thank you. If you would like your cousin's name to be part of the archive, please feel free to share it. Otherwise, we'll continue with the interview.

Sa'Ra Skipper 54:04

We can continue.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 54:05

Okay, so let's talk about, and thank you for being vulnerable enough to share that moment of grief. Has your experience transformed how you think about your family, your friends, the community, and the society?

Sa'Ra Skipper 54:27

Yes, it has made me want to hold onto my family a lot tighter. I would, probably a couple years ago, would have said hold on to my brothers and uncles and my dad a lot tighter, but to see that this isn't just a one gender issue. I mean, this is men, women, whatever, everybody is affected by this, and I just wish that I could just move my family to a tiny little island, and we can just all be safe, but this whole experience has definitely been life changing. I mean, I've kind of been in a dark place since my cousin passed, so I feel that I have been delayed, and, you know, I've been caught up in my mind, in my own mind with trying to start, you know, new initiatives and start new things. But I know that God is still God, and I know he's working on me, and I'm just, I'm ready to create a change, and I hope that people, and the young people who have seen all of this havoc and madness going on within just this year alone, I hope it sparks a, spark something in them to want to, you know, fight for what they believe in, and, you know, just inspire them to do better and to, you know, let them know, you deserve better.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 56:02

So you spoke briefly about seeing a senator out at the protests. Let's talk a little bit about how have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

Sa'Ra Skipper 56:18

Well, I know a few state representatives have been, that represent like the marginalized areas, they've been real big on, like letting people know, from what I've seen on social media, posting different testing sites that are available. But... so there's been some posted about testing sites, there's been some that have been trying to work with the, there's like a new police ordinance that we're trying to get taken care of like the police Review Board,

we're trying to get like community members on that, so I've seen representatives post about that. But in regards to COVID, I just, I mean, I don't know, I just feel like I should be seeing people out here, passing out masks and like, it shouldn't be on us. I mean, if we put you in office, like just do what you, just, just do your job. I mean, just do your job. I know that you don't have to, you know, you don't, you're not with the common folk like that, but the common folk are the reason why you have your job. So I would love to see like more, you know, interaction, but you can't do too much because of the virus, I guess, but I mean, I guess they doin, look, I guess they doin what they can... I guess

Shonda Nicole Gladden 57:45

So what do you imagine your life being like, in a year?

Sa'Ra Skipper 57:49

In a year, I see myself operating my own business. I hope to start a nonprofit, my own nonprofit. I kind of have literally the grassroots, the seeds, so in a year or so I just hope to be able to be able to help people who don't have like the diabetic supplies that they need, to be able to provide resources to people who are, who don't have access to affordable medicines, affordable food, even mental health services. In a year, I hope to be my own boss.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 58:39

Well, that's one year, let's think about five years. What do you hope to see your life looking like in five years?

Sa'Ra Skipper 58:47

Well, in five years, Lord willing, I'll be a state representative, but I hope in the next five years, I complete my law degree, I want to go to law school. So yeah, I hope to be a lawyer representing somebody's city council or a state representative or something. I just want to be at the Statehouse in five years, somewhere in the Statehouse.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 59:17

Wow, well, knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, and or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Sa'Ra Skipper 59:33

That we're all people. I mean, and we were put on this planet to, I mean, whether we want to or not, to take care of one another. And so when you have a position of power, please keep in mind of the people that you are supposed to be representing. Not all people have the same opportunities. Not everyone has the same opportunities are the same access to certain things, so I think that people should be very open minded and be very considerate of people's environments and the results of the environments because I feel like in my neighborhood, I mean, these people, they're, they just products of their environment, whether they could help it or they couldn't help it. So I think that being open minded, and not having the interest of self so much, I just feel like, like I said earlier, everyone is just for theyself, but nobody goes through..., and you may go through things alone, but like, you don't go through stuff alone. You have someone, there's at least one person out there, So I just feel that we should, for the future, take into consideration being open minded, and be willing to listen to the young people because this is their future; we're doing this for them. I mean, it's the same people who have been in office, but it's just like, you've been living on that good salary for about 25, 30 years, so you're not going to know what it's like for this, the single mother who has two kids, has to work two jobs, you know, the, the older kid is raising the younger kid because mama gotta go to work and, you know, just trying to make ends meet. So, yeah, I feel that people should

just, you know, be humble and be open minded, and just, you know, you're one snap of the fingers away from being in the same situation as somebody else.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:01:40

Well, is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

Sa'Ra Skipper 1:01:48

No, not that I could think of.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:01:52

Well, the last question, then, who else should we be interviewing in your mind, any people or groups or organizations, now that you've sat through the oral history interview? Anyone else come to mind that you think would have a compelling story or interesting interview?

Sa'Ra Skipper 1:02:12

I think the gentleman named Matt Davis, he's a prominent figure in the community. I would also say, I'm trying to think of the guy's name; I believe his name is Dee Ross. I think he tried, I think he ran for something. I don't know, but he's very familiar with like, the far east side, and this is, this is his neighborhood, so I mean, I'm sure he can attest to some of the things that I've said with the food deserts and access and just, you know, a young person from this part of town trying to get into politics and things like that. And also, Rosie Bryant, she is just the bomb. She's the lead organizer with Faith in Indiana, and I mean, she has a story too, so I feel that she would be able to attest to some of these questions as well.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:03:14

Well, I want to thank you for a wonderful interview and for you taking your time on a busy Tuesday morning to sit with me. If there are no additional comments or questions that you have, I want to stop the recording and bring this interview to a close. Okay, so today again is October the 6th, 2020. It is approximately 10:55am, and I am Shonda Nicole Gladden. I have interviewed with Sa'Ra Skipper for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, and this is the end of our recording. Thank you Miss Skipper.

Sa'Ra Skipper 1:03:53

Thank you.