

Transcript of Interview with Laron Anderson and Shonda Nicole Gladden

Interviewee: Laron Anderson

Interviewer: Shonda Nicole Gladden

Date: 2020/10/14

Location: Indianapolis, Indiana

Transcriber: Michael Wohl

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:01

Do you see the button up top that says that we are recording?

Laron Anderson 00:05

Yes.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:06

Do I have your permission to record?

Laron Anderson 00:09

You do

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:10

Alright. So today is Wednesday, October 14 2020. It is approximately 12:47 in the afternoon, I am Shonda Nicole Gladden and I am here with please state your name for the interview.

Laron Anderson 00:24

My name is Laron Anderson,

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:27

Here with Laron Anderson and where are you located?

Laron Anderson 00:30

Indianapolis, Indiana.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:33

Alright, I want to briefly review the informed consent and the deed of the gift document that you signed the interview this that you were doing now as for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is associated with the Journal of the plague year, a COVID-19 archive. This is being done as a rapid response oral history that's 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've 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. And this study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us to better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time, the recordings, the demographic information you share and

verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the plague year, a COVID-19 archives and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Laron Anderson 01:53

No.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 01:54

Okay, so we have just a few consents that I'll have you audibly share your consent for, they're the same ones that you signed. 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 interview will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled, your decision whether or not to participate in this interview 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 in digital video and audio format and will be transcribed. The recordings and possible transcriptions about interviews, copies of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you wish to share, and the informed consent and deed of gift that you signed will 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?

Laron Anderson 03:05

No.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 03:07

All right.

Laron Anderson 03:07

Can you hear me though?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 03:08

I can hear you.

Laron Anderson 03:09

Okay, making sure.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 03:10

In addition to your signed informed, can you hear me?

Laron Anderson 03:14

Yeah, just I it was a moment of interference. I want to make sure it didn't go out. I was just looking at my mixer but we're good. Sounds like we're good.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 03:20

In addition to your signed document, will you please offer verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Laron Anderson 03:29

Yes, I understand and agree to those terms.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 03:31

You are also verbally confirming 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 and the COVID-19 oral history project, 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, perform, broadcast, create derivative works from, and distribute the oral history materials in any manner or media now existing or hereafter developed in 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 assigns 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 the 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 107 of the US Copyright Act. Could you please confirm that you agree to allowing us to share your interview under these licenses?

Laron Anderson 05:00

I can I can confirm that I agree to allow you all to share my interview under those licenses.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:05

And finally, I want to ask for a verbal confirmation that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately?

Laron Anderson 05:14

I do agree or have agreed to that. Yes, I consent to that.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:20

That is all of the consent questions. And so the balance of the interview, we had set aside 90 minutes for our time together from the time we began with our housekeeping up until I think you gave us until 1:30.

Laron Anderson 05:36

Sorry about that, however long you need, and however long you're allowed to go. Housekeeping was a little rough.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:45

Try to get 60 minutes in. And so if you can sit until 1:45.

05:50

You know, you have me as long as you need me, it's really up to you. I know you have probably a strenuous schedule. So

Shonda Nicole Gladden 05:55

I have another interview at 2, I tried to

Laron Anderson 05:58

You fit me in right after our first malfunction, which was mine. So yeah, however long you can go to have prep time and set up and not mess up your whole day. Sorry about that. If you need to add an extra section later. Let me know.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 06:11

Thank you so much. So if you don't mind, tell me a little bit about yourself. What are the primary things that you do on a day to day basis? For example, what is your job? What are your extracurricular activities?

Laron Anderson 06:25

So I run a company, a media company called 80's Baby Media. We focus on content creation, give people internet based solutions for their companies. As far as you know, websites marketing, social media marketing, we also run Black Indy Live, which is a local, national, I guess, these days Independent News Source based on information and news in the African American community, you know, the greater community of Indianapolis, the state, you know, we've been doing a little bit more national news here recently. So media marketing news, stuff like that. That's a good answer to start from I know it's broad.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:04

So I want to encourage you to give your answer I won't give you a valiative statement of whether or not it's good or bad, it's your answer. And I want you to feel very comfortable and confident that there are no wrong answers. There are no trick questions. This is not this is not a community attempt to come against anything. This is

Laron Anderson 07:27

No gotcha moments. This is just

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:29

No, absolutely no gotcha moments.

Laron Anderson 07:31

You're just documenting history.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:32

Absolutely.

Laron Anderson 07:33

Oral history.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:34

And so I hope you can feel very comfortable and confident that that is all this is. Okay?

Laron Anderson 07:40

Now, how plainly have people spoken to you during these things is, you know, as far as just language, you know, just a general, loose, you know, that's the word?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 07:51

Again, it's, it's for history, it's for the research for the database. And so be yourself, inasmuch as you want history to remember who you will be,

Laron Anderson 08:04

Okay, sounds good.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 08:06

So you shared a little bit about your job, any extracurricular activities?

Laron Anderson 08:11

I mean, my extracurricular activities really have died. Since I've done more things in community, you know, my extracurricular activities involve keeping my sanity, so I can still do what's needed to do so. You know, I like to just be outside I recently took a cross country road trip, you know, just to you know, see life outside of this, you know, kind of crazy bubble we have here, in Indianapolis, which is crazy.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 08:40

When you say crazy bubble, can you speak a little bit more about what that means?

Laron Anderson 08:47

I mean, like, Indianapolis is a [unknown], that, you know, people, if you don't know much about Indiana, you know, you really don't know much about it. We have we have sports teams and sports, this that, as far as the actual community, what we are experiencing now is not normal in Indianapolis, like we didn't even riot when MLK got killed, you know. They actually made a memorial out of us not rioting, you know, the only major city in America with a black populace that didn't you know have any type of uprising. So I mean, just the fact that you know, we are now not only kind of in the whirlwind of the social justice movements, but like this is, epicenters. With what happened, you know with Dreasion, it is, it's crazy, it's different. I think it's kind of uncharted territory for the city, especially our black community as a whole.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 09:42

Um, so thank you. So you mentioned protests. So let's talk about what that means. What for researchers and historians that may have no context but your own. What does that look like? What does that mean? What, where does protest live in the life of Indianapolis people in 2020?

Laron Anderson 10:06

I mean, cuz that's, that's a really hard question to answer because like, What does protest me it's like, we're in the middle of this now. And you know, everybody has their ideas of you know, what protests and riots and uprisings and you know, everybody has idea, but I think we are still, as a nation defining what it means to really rebel, you know, because you would think, you know, with the history of America, and just the rebellion, uprisings, things of this nature, will kind of be seen as American, you know, you know, that's kind of how our country was founded, you know, in a lot of these confrontations throughout history, it could be seen as riots. But you know, I think during this time in 2020, we still have a large segment of the populace that is looking at this, like, these are almost invaders, like, how dare you come here and not be happy with the situation? You know, so I think we are still almost defining as a country as a whole. What is rebellion? What is writing to me? I see people on the streets, and you know, I see the tear gas, like, I've been tear gas, I've been in Indianapolis, I've been in Kenosha, and stuff having I've been in Louisville, I've seen different things in each place. And I felt different things in each place. So like, I can't even really define what it is because I'm still learning myself, like, what is all of this? Like, what are these emotions? What are these feelings? And not everybody's operating? Under those same emotions? And a lot of those people are what are making the headlines about what is defining the movement? I don't agree with that. So I myself, I'm still trying to define the moment. And the actions that are happening, and it's just I don't have that is my explanation of that, I guess.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 11:50

Yeah. Talk a little bit more, if you're comfortable about the emotions, you've mentioned that people are saying, and people get the headlines. But let's, let's narrow in on you. What are you saying? How are you feeling about the moment?

Laron Anderson 12:10

Um, I am feeling like, I am concerned about the mental health of many people in our black community moving forward, I'm extremely concerned. And I don't feel like I've been in it any more than anyone else, I don't feel like I'm like, have a special place. I feel like I've just been through it like everyone else. So I know some of the things I feel. Other people feel too in, like, once you go to a certain amount of these protests or gatherings or you see things, it, it doesn't go away, it doesn't go away. And then you realize that this is not something that will ever go away. Because the solutions or the answers or whatever we're seeking right now, we're not going to get it or we're not getting it right now in the road to get it will be a long process. So we're gonna have to learn how to deal with these emotions and stuff. And we don't have the capabilities right now to address the amount of post traumatic stress. people going through these right, not even the people on the streets, protesting people just living through this and having to turn on the news and read the articles and just deal with it. Like, I'm worried about people's mental health. I really am. So

Shonda Nicole Gladden 13:27

yeah, thinking about people's mental health, how has what you have witnessed and what you are feeling, how have these things changed since the beginning of COVID-19.

Laron Anderson 13:42

I mean, I think COVID-19 has forced people to deal with themselves. And not only deal with themselves deal with the people in their immediate surroundings, as in the family, the people you will be quarantined or shut in with and you know, some people are not comfortable with themselves, a lot of people knowing not more so comfortable with themselves, but comfortable with how the world can make you feel this before 2020 or COVID, or anything, but the fact that all of that kind of has been, you know, magnified throughout this process. And now with you know, the black community in particular, we're experiencing the social justice unrest and just affiliate of almost, you know, hopelessness, which I don't want to describe it as that because I think we're in a, a, a place we need to be at right now. Not a good place. at places a bad place, but I think we're maybe heading in the right direction. But it's it is people are having to deal with everything really hard right now. And then the presidential election. people's money situations have been the greatest people's employment situations haven't been the greatest people's health situations have been the greatest social justice situation is not the greatest, you know. People are having to deal with issues they're not equipped to deal with and they've never had to deal with it before and they don't have the mental they don't have the patience. People around them to give them the mental support and emotional support they need. And I just see a lot of people possibly drifting, trying to survive through 2020. But after 2020, drifting, wherever that may be if they don't get the right support.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 15:17

So, thinking about the demographic categories that are common, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, other common demographic categories, how do you self describe,

Laron Anderson 15:36

I self described as black now, ideally, in the day, I could leave it at that. But you know, for the purpose of you know, people in the future may be hearing this, I am black as in my family, both sides of my family are descendants of slaves, I can trace my family's ancestry back to slavery plantations, and that my identity is a man, a black male. But importantly, I believe my identity is in the American Foundation that black people, and our ancestors built this country. And everything that's great about this country is black and black American. And I want that is what I tried to lift up. And my closer identity. So I mean, straight Sis, wherever people want to call it. I heavily say I'm black. I'm a black man in America. It's pretty much pretty much it.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 16:31

And where do you live? I know you say Indianapolis, Indiana, but what is the name of your neighborhood? What do you call it? What do other people call it?

Laron Anderson 16:40

So I mean, I'm from 62nd, in Michigan, which we didn't have, like any names growing up, like, that's where I grew up my entire life until I like went to college. Um, I guess that could be considered cricket Creek. It could be considered Gyan guy, and I think is actually what it's called on the map. So I mean, I'm the new Augusta area could be that too, you know, northwest side. So I guess, new Augusta? So I think Yeah, no, gusta cuz there's two schools that are in pintastic called New Augusta. And I think New Augusta is actually one of the areas I don't I'm not heavily 62nd in Michigan. So there you go.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 17:18

And what do you see going on in your neighborhood?

Laron Anderson 17:22

Well, that's very interesting, because our neighborhood if you're not familiar with the soul, Dreasion Reed that is a gentleman who was murdered by MPD officers. He was on Facebook Live when it happened. And that is like the social justice movement that set it off in Indianapolis as far as like us having a response of people on the streets that happened on 62nd and Michigan Road, like that happened in my neighborhood. Not only did it happen in my neighborhood, I was at my dad, I can't remember what I was doing my dad at that moment, but we were outside. And we heard the gunshots. We heard the gunshots and we were like, what? I thought it was a car misfiring. And then my dad, we were at the front, and he walked kind of like towards where the mailbox was. And we noticed police were right down at the Michigan Road Library. So it's probably like, less than a block away. No, not even half a mile. So we're just looking, I get the citizen app. That's the app on our cell phones to tell us what's going on says shots fired. Um, I got out my phone and like, I had been I'm still Black Indy Live, I've been reporting, but like, I really wasn't reporting that moment, I was just hanging my dad, in my neighborhood. And I walked down there and went live with my phone. And then everybody started coming down there. And you know, like, the whole time I'm like, this is my neighborhood. Like I grew up here. People have connotations of the north side of Indianapolis being like the safe side, the side where rich people live and stuff. It's really not, like the north side is Carmel it's outside the city limits of Indianapolis. So I mean, but it's quiet, you know, in Indianapolis in general, I don't think has ever seen a response like the people on 62nd Street and Michigan Road and our outlying apartments and neighborhood like, the city had never seen that. So just the fact that like, in that moment, from the very, like, I heard the shots that killed him in my neighborhood, and I walked down there. And then it just life got out of control after that point. So I mean, it's all try to reflect on my neighborhood in general, I talked to my neighbors, I talked to a lot of people who grew up with me in that area who were there that night, like we've never seen anything like it and you know, it's weird. I don't want to talk about it like a badge of honor. But we're all proud. We're all very proud that we as a collective community came out that night and I've you know, conversations with people all over the city in politics and people who sit on boards and stuff and they said that the reason the city was so afraid or panicked is that they didn't know who was out there like they're not used to the social justice causes and stuff there. There are people at play who the city are very familiar with, the entities that run the city are familiar with. That was not the case with Dreasion. There were people just in the neighborhood just coming out upset, and then we stood off with police. And um, that was before the riots happened downtown. But stuff was different from that moment. And when I saw my neighborhood come out like that I knew it was going to be different with how the city reacted to this. That was before and that was before George Floyd. So the things would in Indianapolis actually happened before George Floyd and when George Floyd happened, kind of the energy that we had already had going in the city led to downtown and what happened those nights down there.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 20:41

Tell us a little bit more about what happened downtown and those nights if you can give a

Laron Anderson 20:47

oh man

Shonda Nicole Gladden 20:48

experience...

Laron Anderson 20:50

So it's really hard because all over the country there's been riots, uprisings, people burning stuff. If you look at 2020 in the history books, you will hear lots of towns burned. people died. millions upon millions of dollars of damage was done in cities across America. Now, Indianapolis, we're usually immune to that kind of stuff. You know, we've had people killed by police. We had Aaron Bailey killed in 2017. You know, back to I believe, Major Taylor back. I mean, there's been instances of police brutality and murder in Indianapolis that cause social, people being concerned but hasn't really caused a social uprising. I mentioned MLK, and we didn't actually have an uprising here, when almost every large black population in cities across America has some type of demonstration. But Indianapolis, we have the King and Kennedy Memorial because we didn't do anything. But not to get sidetracked, um, which I totally did get sidetracked the questions about what happened downtown. So when the George Floyd demonstrations kind of popped off across the country, we had two nights, two nights I like to be very clear, there were two nights of riots and I will say riots, I like to call it uprisings. But people were going to say the Indianapolis riots, I already see people referring to it as Indianapolis riots. Now, at that point Black Indy Live, you know, I was I had got the idea because before the live stream at the Dreason Reed protests. I've not really been someone to go live and just stream protests and stuff like that, because there really wasn't nothing to do. Now, we had a lot of protests and demonstrations here in the city, we have lots of groups doing that type of thing. But it just wasn't my thing really, to go out and do it, you know, you know, just wasn't me. But for this, you know, I was out there in particularly, um, I was out there both nights throughout, like the entirety of the nighttime riots, as in I was live streaming. Um, people got killed, round me, Dorian Morrel died probably like, less than 100 feet from where I was, I just happened to go the other direction. Um, I saw, I saw things. I saw things. Um, people told me what I did was not very smart, I don't think was very smart. And looking back at it, because I was very close to things. I was walking down alleys and stuff. I was trying to really experience it because I knew this was history. Like I knew. Not only was it history, it was not gonna be told what actually what was happening. So like, at that point, that was me just trying to show people what was going on. But yeah, I was pretty much like in the middle of everything those two nights. I had some people with me who got they experienced some things at night, too. We all got pepper sprayed, tear gassed, I got shot with pepper bullets, rubber bullets a couple times I got tear gassed while I was live streaming. A girl got a really bad cut, and like her leg was like almost cut off. It was really bad. It was it was just is I'm still wrapping my mind around the things that happened. And I don't even watch the video anymore. Because it's like it was different. And it was important. And I think people will try to erase what it was about. Yeah, there was a lot of damage done. And I think a lot of the damage was done by people who weren't really they didn't have they were either from outside of Indianapolis or they didn't have a real you know, stake in the community. But the people who were actually there like from the community standing together, even when the stuff got really crazy with the tear gas and stuff, like we all were like, I'm not a soldier. I try not to like equate stuff to war, but like we all like went to a battle together and some people didn't make it out. Like some people died those nights. And um, it's just crazy to me, it's just crazy to me. You know in Indianapolis, if you grew up here, that's not usually what people will think. We're like, Naptown,

we're the sleepy town that doesn't do anything. Everybody's behind. Nobody cares. And like I'm, I'm proud. I'm proud about that. Oh, you know, despite what people will say what the damage is, like, I'm proud of how we responded. And I only wish we could keep up the same energy because it's not over. We still need it. But it gets confusing. You deal with the National things going on here too.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 25:18

Oh, I'm curious, would you be willing to provide any of those clips for the archive?

Laron Anderson 25:26

Absolutely. Every clip is on my Black Indy Live Facebook page and that's absolutely free use, public use, fair use, downloadable use, you know, credit me if you are kind enough to do sThere on there, unedited. Um the language is very open, there are things there's things being looted, things burning, like you said, a young lady like almost to me bled out. I heard um, you know, we didn't see Dorian get shot, but it happened, like while I was out there very close to me. This just is a very raw video. And like, I don't know what I was doing. Yeah, should not have been out there by myself. Like that. But like, I felt like it was important for me as someone who had the capability to document stuff like that to the people out there to be there. So

Shonda Nicole Gladden 26:12

so for the archive, we prefer that you submit what reflects your

Laron Anderson 26:18

Oh yeah, there's two videos, I mean, over those two nights, there's probably like four or five videos because I had to stop and go live again a couple times. But yeah, it's good. You know, and I was I was reporting as and I was walking around I didn't I don't consider myself part of the protest when I am live streaming now because I try to just document what the people are doing what is going on around me the feel and I try to stay away from that which is very hard because obviously I very strongly align with a lot of the protesters and why they're out there. But I think as a news representative and media I have to be able to in some way, shape, or form disassociate myself when I'm out there. It's extremely, extremely hard [laughter] but

Shonda Nicole Gladden 27:01

and what were the dates that we're thinking about?

Laron Anderson 27:04

I don't even know the dates what May? May, some March, early? Honestly, I don't know. I can pull it up on my other computer. But um,

Shonda Nicole Gladden 27:14

We can get that at a later date. So you mentioned Dorian a few times. Can you tell us a little bit about Dorian

Laron Anderson 27:25

So Dorian Morrel was a kid he was 18 he was out there protesting on the second night, I believe, and his situation is hard to describe because we thought it was one way at first and turned out it might have been the other way so Dorian got shot and killed that night or the second night I believe. His killer was described as a, Dorian was black 18 year old kid. His killer was described as a white man named Tyler, um Tyler Newby. And initially Tyler was arrested and charged with murder of Dorian. So that night there are videos Black Indy Live actually has that video too. It was the aftermath of Dorian on the ground getting shot. It was off the circle, they were trying to get attention from the police. So what happened was Tyler has since been released on bond. You know, which is a little bit concerning. But what is more concerning is myself we had two other Black Indy Live reporters out there, and a couple of other unrelated people who were still there filming protests. We believe that Tyler Newby didn't kill Dorian Morrell. We believe that he was hit with a sniper shot or somebody shooting from the parking garages because we noticed on both nights people had the parking garages and it's in the footage hopefully if you footage there's one time when they tear gassed the crowd and a lot of people they were dispersing obviously, because it burns you don't want to bring the tear gas and they try to go and we tried to go in the parking garage. There was a group of white guys stand out. They're like no, you guys can't go up here. You can't Baba blah, you know, and it seemed like they were a property owners but just looking back at the aftermath, we noticed that there were people on parking garages and rooftops that were not police, in our, in our, to the best of our knowledge. And in the aftermath video of Dorian being shot when you see people attending to him. It wasn't like get Tyler. He shot him get the police, that guy just shot him. It was like, "What just happened?" Like he got shot. So I mean, we believe that a sniper or someone who was not the guy who was directly confronting him shot and killed that 18 year old black guy and we believe that if there was a any type of thorough investigation from IMPD that this will be clear. There was video cameras, there's eyewitness testimony. There's ballistics and IMPD, right now they're not cooperating any of the cases they do as far as presenting, providing public evidence being transparent. This goes from Dorian to um, Dreasjon, um, another man Chris, I think Chris Doaty, he was killed on the circle that night, I think on night one too. He was a business owner that was down there, you know, and I think all these murders are unsolved right now. There's no reason that young black men lost their lives. And there's questions about what really happened that night. They're worried about the property damage and the broken glass and you know, on the damage that will be repaired, we have people who lost their lives that night. And we don't think that it was just an accident, we think there may be some malicious attempt behind possibly all of them. So I mean, there's just questions that IMPD, nobody's helping us get answers. So you know, you have, that's a whole extra layer of stuff, personally, and I was out there recording the filming, I just want to try to do everything I can to help those people get any type of justice, you would think.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 30:50

So, while you were out in the streets for the two days, and we'll get the dates. Were you concerned at all about COVID-19?

Laron Anderson 31:00

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Um, I think that it is important when you're at these protests, as you're already going to be in danger. In some type of way. I've seen that you take the absolute highest precautions not to do things negligently like not wear your mask and be in crowds. And even though I've been filming, it's hard. Because yes, I filmed lots of protests. I've been in lots of large crowds. I do

my best to social distance, I always have my mask on. Like I said, me being able to step outside and film means I'm not necessarily like in the mosh pit, or in the you know, the crowd of people. More so on the outside. But yeah, going into it, you think about hey, I would hate to catch you know, COVID at one of these things, but you know, once there's tear gas, and rubber bullets and actual bullets and people getting shot, like that kind of dissipates away.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 31:50

So, have you seen people around you change their opinions or their day to day activities, even their relationships, in response to the covid 19 pandemic?

Laron Anderson 32:00

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. The assistant editor for Black Indy Live, who's like one of my closest friends, she hasn't seen her family, probably, you know, almost a year, I guess she's somebody, well, not almost a year, since the beginning of this year, since Covid started because her immediate family has, you know, underlying health issues and she has underlying health issues, and she takes it very seriously. So it goes. That's not the only person who has had to stop the basic interactions with their loved ones and family that they normally have on a day to day basis to help them get through things. You know, and I personally, even though I feel like my family recently has been doing more things. I had a wedding here recently that one of my family members did that I did not attend to because they did a bar crawl. And you know, they were doing bus rides and stuff. And you know, I think it's very real. And I think that, you know, that's something that at least we have control over, you might not be able to control like a police officer, you know, doing what he does to you in an interaction, but at least you can wear your mask, you know, and not do things that will make you like, way, way out there for COVID. So, people are just kind of weird right now, but I've seen people have to stop human interactions and just really be hermits. And like, I've been one of those people besides the filming of the protests and stuff I do, which makes it seem like I'm out there. But other than that, I don't do much. You know, I don't try to go out there unless I feel like there's something I have to film or document or cover. I mostly stay to myself these days.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 33:32

So, how does this pandemic compared to other big events that have happened in your lifetime? How old are you?

Laron Anderson 33:40

I'm 32 for a few days.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 33:42

32 you said for the next few days?

Laron Anderson 33:45

Yeah, I turn 33 October, end of October this month. so you know...

Shonda Nicole Gladden 33:48

Happy early birthday.

Laron Anderson 33:50

Thank you. Thank you.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 33:51

So how has this pandemic compared to other events in your 33 years of living?

Laron Anderson 34:00

I mean honestly this is the biggest like climatic, wherever momentumist, I don't know the good words. I'm not good with words. It's a big moment of my life as far as like a something that happened that was like beyond just like a singular event and in the moment. Um, I think with 2020, and COVID in general, is like the year of reckoning like if you were not strong and comfortable in yourself, or able to navigate or deal with the mental health like it was a very easy year for you to have a mental breakdown or spiritual breakdown, or you know, no financial breakdown and I think it was a year of being like who you were. Now it's almost, like I feel bad sometimes I don't openly say this, like to me I thought it was one of the best years of my life only because I was able to professionally, I was forced into a situation where I did things different professionally and allowed my business and like my platform to grow like massively. And then like, because of that I had to get away because I was experiencing mental ill, illness, and stressors and things like that. So I traveled the country and I don't travel a lot. So like I went to Arizona went to Colorado, and we went to New Mexico, I've been to New York City like I traveled, I was forced to do something I didn't normally do, because I had to get outside of the 2020 Indianapolis COVID bubble. Because of that, I feel like I gained more experience. And so like, it's almost bad feeling like I had a good year. But I thankfully, I think was in a position where I was able to navigate through the year so far knock on wood, but a lot of people weren't a lot of people weren't. So you know, looking back is gonna be like 2020 was like the year that like defined you in some type of way, either emphasized things that you need to do better, or you were able to like make your work somehow, which I think will be a badge of honor one day.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 36:01

Well, let's shift and have a conversation about movements for racial justice and black lives matter. What thoughts might you be able to share about current movements for race that are focused on racial justice, such as black lives matter?

Laron Anderson 36:15

I think the racial justice movements have to come back to race. It has to come back to race and more specifically has to come back to black people, more specifically has to come back to African American descendants of slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, you know, the people who have had the entire country, and the systems that you know, govern this country built on racial oppression, I think it's easy to say racial justice, you know, even in 2020, or in the future, and maybe forget what are racial justice movements? Yes, there are many different races and groups who have come here, and they all have had to, in their own ways attempt to find justice, in a white supremacist society, I truly believe, but I believe racial justice with black people that we are the heart of when we start fighting back, and when we have a revolution or uprising, it is the blaze that catches fire for everyone else, you know. And sometimes I don't think we're able to capitalize off of that, and it gets it becomes a racial justice, you

know, a, a mixed pot where us being black doesn't matter anymore, you know, because we're just another minority. So I know, I hope that black community, in the racial justice movements, we're able to recenter ourselves, in the spirit of you know, we have to not, you know, just say that we're a colorless society, but we have to honor everyone's cultural heritage, everyone's ethnicities, everyone's history. And black people in America specifically have a very strong and storied and proud history in a nation that we've built. And I think in the racial justice movements and social justice movements, and just race in America, in general, that gets easily lost. So I hope that it comes back to race, the race, the black people not you know, "the race" as in a superior race by race, you know, this being specific for us so people can hopefully look for solutions that are specific to us, which will help everyone else at the end of the day. So, yeah.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 38:21

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

Laron Anderson 38:29

I am not? I'm not.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 38:32

What, well how would you describe your relationship to the Black Lives Matter movement, specifically?

Laron Anderson 38:38

My, I believe in black lives matter as the idea as in the hashtag, as in Black Lives Matter, 2014 Michael Brown since then, I believe. Since then, there have been some mixture with things on the political side that I do not endorse, I really don't endorse anything politically, I will work with all sides and whatnot. So you know, I try not to join any chapters, organizations, so I can report fairly from, you know, an unbiased standpoint. I agree with the idea. I think the Black Lives Matter movement has gotten lost a little bit. I think the majority of people right now who get camera time or airtime for advocating or being out there protest for Black Lives Matter, are not representing the heart of the black community, because it's just not black people anymore. You know, I don't necessarily think that just because it's non black people that it's bad people, but I think for a movement to truly be about us, it has to have us as a heart of it. And I see the Black Lives Matter 2020 movement, a lot of other groups have taken it as an opportunity to advocate for their own agendas. And those are a lot of people on the streets in Portland, in Seattle, every day who people are saying aand re rioting causing trouble and all Black Lives Matter, you bad people!" And it's like it's not even us anymore. It's not even us anymore.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 39:59

So, what have you seen as a news person being covered in the media? And what important issues do you feel the media is not covering? I mean, it's all about riots and rampage and destruction now, and it is hardly ever and I watch a lot of news. I watch people who stream I watch other streamers, I watch other mainstream media, it, we've stopped talking to the people. We've stopped talking to the people most affected by systemic racism and police brutality. Like, why are we doing this? Like why? And I get to the point where I don't want to explain to people I feel like if they know, they should know, but I think there is a concerted effort to misrepresent what this movement is actually about. I don't know if it's for now or for the future. But I think it's important that we as black people are able to articulate when we're

in situations that Black Lives Matter is like a hashtag its an idea. But more importantly, it is just a like, a lever is just a building block or a bridge from the idea of systemic racism, police brutality, you know, economic inequality, you know, Jim Crow, no segregation. The idea, you know, police brutality, of course, police oppression is heavily, you know, that's what the Colin Kaepernick kneel movement was about. But we can't let it be pigeonholed into just like one little segment, we have to always bring it back to this is a unjust society, specifically, and especially for black people in it and all rules of governing, whether it's no religion, religion is based on white supremacy, you know, economic situations are based on white supremacy, our social situation, our financial situation, like it really it rules America as a whole. And I hope and I think people are getting more comfortable with at least saying the word white supremacy more so than they were before. But there is still a very hard conversation about how really, it has a iron grip on all facets of life that we have not been able to have yet. So until we were able to identify it. We're gonna be kind of stuck in this revolving door of Oh, you guys do rise and protests in the 60s, okay. 50 years later, you do it 2020 we're gonna do 2017 you're gonna be watching this interview as you guys do rise. And Rachel, you know, injustice, protests, stuff to like, is ridiculous. At some point, we have to get to the root causes and root discussions to really identify solutions, and how to repair the damage is going to be done. It's gonna get worse. You mentioned Mike Brown. You mentioned George Floyd, you mentioned of course, Dreasjon Reed. I did not hear you mentioned Brionna Taylor.

Laron Anderson 42:47

Brionna Taylor. And that is obviously a very bad thing for anyone to do because Brionna Taylor right now is the heart of our movement. And it's it's hard for me to speak on Louisville right now because recently I've been in Louisville quite a few times, at least four times live streaming and live broadcasting. Um, I've been at the Brionna Taylor Memorial. Filming by myself. It hurts Brionna Taylor hurts. It hurts so much. It hurts so much because when I go to Louisville now, it's like, they feel defeated. Like they feel hopeless. And all these other protests are going on around the country. I see people criticizing Louisville like oh everyone else is carrying on you guys should burn down Louisville. But like people haven't been down there. It's different down there. The police, the Allen PD have demoralized the people of Louisville, they are arresting their leaders. They're like they're co opting their protests. They were trapped. I was down there a couple of nights ago they had people trapped at a church begging to walk home. Like in, it hurts because like the spirit protests I feel like is I might go to jail. I might get shot I might die, like what's gonna happen is gonna happen but like and I will say this like is a slight towardsds them, it's like they've been drained. And then the ruling came out, um, we're finding out they didn't even give the fair shot to have you know, prosecution. It's like they have drained the heart and soul out of Louisville. And I I want us to learn, but it's like what is there to learn? Like and I stand at the Brionna Taylor Memorial, it's the saddest place in the world. It's the saddest place in the world because it's like they want to do something. Like Louisville is like a sister city to Indianapolis. I feel like we are very, as a city in Indianapolis we should be looking not only closely what happens in Louisville, we need to be helping them like it's us like we want them to help us for Dreasjon because like at the end of the day, people look at Kentucky and Indiana like y'all, y'all, just out there y'all around white people so like I was very it was very important to me to go to Louisville for Brionna Taylor but it hurts it hurts to talk about because I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. Now I feel like Indianapolis we're almost gonna be in the same situation with Dreasjon because they're gonna release the footage, they're gonna release the ballistics, whatever. And it's like, they've already concocted it in

a way where we're going to lose. So like what's left? And at the end of the day, nobody wants to burn down they city. Like we love, like we love where like, I have pride of the city, Indianapolis. I know it's racist. I know it's bad. I know we have our issues. I have pride. I know the people in Louisville have pride of their city. But what's left besides burning the thing down, like what's left, what's left? And not speaking on Brionna Taylor is really something I did not want to do. I think I just I'm still in avoidance mode, because it hurts. It hurts what happened down there. And it hurts that I see a city so close to Indianapolis in demographic and location and just people this demoralized, I feel like we could be next. Like we're trying to keep our movements going, but they've kind of like, put a blanket on it. It's like what can we do? What can we do? I don't know. You feel the spirit, you feel the spirit people like I felt into it. And it's like that spirit. I don't know what it is. I don't know if it's anger or revenge. But it's, you feel something different at those memorials. And I don't know what people are going to do. I don't know.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 46:22

You have shared with me being present at protests as a media producer. And thinking about that, and what you've just shared, how have your experiences transformed how you think about your family, your friends, your community, and the society?

Laron Anderson 46:50

I feel like my role in life is what I'm doing. Now. Um, I have had to acknowledge that sometimes I, I have accepted it. But it puts the people I love in difficult positions. Either they're having to defend me. My writing style and the way I bring about discussions or news, it creates situations where people I think can get attacked from associating with me, the way I have recently been streaming things as far as protests and demonstrations in danger. It makes people concerned for my safety. My loved ones have been on my stream, tell me to stop and go home like for real, um, but what I try to tell people is like, in those moments, I don't worry, because it's not that I feel safe, because it's a dangerous situation. But like I am in my purpose. And my purpose, I believe, because of like how I grew up. And the abilities I have was to able, to just document news, to be able to speak to have the gifts to you know, do media stuff and create platforms and like, I am oftentimes in situations where if I don't do it, like it just that moment will get lost forever, or it will get misrepresented. So like the danger and stuff, I try to play it off. But like it's hard, because people do worry about me. They don't like that I put myself in dangerous situations, they don't like how I report things that could you know, expose things and make people unhappy. But this is a very important year to document everything that happened. We have to learn the lessons, we can't be going through this stuff anymore. Like we have to operate differently. We have to see how things happen. And we can't let the media misrepresent the way things happen. And we have to talk to the real people who are involved, we have to write the stories. And sometimes you know, the mainstream news doesn't write or get the footage that they're just not going to show you anyway. Um, I believe what I have started will live beyond me. So if an idea can be stopped by one person, like what good was it for? So I believe as long as you work hard to like, build something that's like bigger than you. Then if your heart was in the right place, it'll go the right way. So I really hope that people like just get through this year because it's been really tough, but the fight is not over. And that's the scary part. I've been drained of energy. I've seen people around me drained and it's not over. So like we are going to have to like pull from each other. And you know...

Shonda Nicole Gladden 49:37

no, go ahead.

Laron Anderson 49:38

No, I say it's just that's why I said about mental health at the very beginning. That's why I worry about people's mental health the most because it's gonna take a lot. it's gonna take a lot. it's gonna take a lot and we're going to be constantly hit with things that are going to break us and tear us and make us rethink and they're gonna gaslight us and stuff is like I really hope that our community has a heightened sense of focus on the need for mental health services and treatment and therapy, whatever you need, because a lot of us gonna need it. Shoot.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 50:05

So, so, we have about 10 minutes left. And so what are the lessons you mentioned that you hope people learn coming out of this?

Laron Anderson 50:17

I mean, I don't know, because that's such a hard question. Because what're the lessons? I mean, racism is bad? Like, the Constitution was written specifically said, you know, all men are created equal, you know, that we are supposed to have the equal right to be anything, the American Dream should be for everyone like it's, it's hard giving the same lesson or the same class over and over again. But it's like, until we really accept that we have to deep dive into everything, the foundation of this country, and not only acknowledging it with things like reparations, but you know, actually repairing it, repairing it, not just saying, Oh, we did those bad things to y'all, we're sorry, we're good now. But we then have to not study too hard because people get caught on studies, but we have to be able to quantify the damage in some type of way. [inaudible] protection, something, we have to start repairing, we started, we have to we have to bridge we have to make the gap smaller. So you know, apologies doesn't make the gap smaller. So right now, we're at the point where we have torn, I guess, another tear, we have these tears every few years, it seems like every, you know, 30, 40, 50 years. But it's important that we do different from the civil rights movement is in we don't set the stage for people thinking racism is gone. Because I think that's what happened. I think we had generation who they watched their parents, or as young children, they watched their elders fight the civil rights movement in the 60s, and you know, they were younger, and then when they became adult age, in like the 70s 80s, young adult age, they you know, they were kind of appeased like, man, our, my people beat, my grandparents beat racism already, you know, then it was kind of party time, party mode. And then, you know, I don't say that, again, to reflect necessarily negatively on that generation. But then I think we have another generation now around the millennial whatever, post millennial ages, like, it's not all is gravy is the scene, you know, and I think you had it had to skip a generation because we had to have a generation kind of enjoy the fruits of the elders' labors. And then we had to have another generation be like, well, there's not really that much to enjoy. Like, we had to experience both sides to really get to where we are now. So I think it's important that we take a step up with whatever we do now. So we don't have to have this same battle. 50 years from now for our grandkids and our kids. That's ridiculous. We have to stop this now. Somehow.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 52:40

How have municipal leaders and government officials in your community responded to the outbreak?

Laron Anderson 52:45

Oh, they're horrible. They're absolutely the worse people in the world. Now if you mean outbreak, like the COVID-19, um not bad like our Governor Holcomb is not bad. Like he's one of the best republicans as in he's not people, "oh, you don't have to wear a mask." Everything's opened up. He's been cool. Now as far as the Civic and community leaders responding to the actual outbreak as in the things that COVID-19 has brought: the economic disparities, you know, the job situations, the people the education gap that continues to grow. It's kids can't even get homeschooled properly. You know, it's been horrible. It's been horrible. You know, we just had the IMPD, or, excuse me, the Indianapolis budget hearing, you know, you know, a lot of people emphasize that we gave 200 plus million to IMPD. You know, and we gave less than I believe was 4 million to actually economic rehabilitation services into like mentorship, and funding for, you know, after school. So I think it's even less than that. Honestly. It's just, I think they have forgot that there's actual people out here, who, if COVID disappears tomorrow, like it just magically disappeared. We still have entire lives, we have to rebuild. And we have to have wraparound services in all areas, including back to it, mental health, again, which the city ignores resources, having something for these kids to do as they sit at home unengaged with their homeschool teacher who's have "a" in it" anyway, you know, it's it's gonna take a full community than our political leaders who are not only aware of these problems and able to acknowledge them, which we don't have, they're ready to take the next step with redirecting legislation resources to you know, correct these issues and they're not doing it. Our city council ain't doing it. Our mayor's not doing it. A lot of people aren't even really interested in the conversation. You know, we're worried about you know, IMPD, and the jails and the murders and stuff, which we should be worried about. But how do we really fix the root causes of why people feel so desperate, that they're robbing and murdering because they're hungry? Because they have no job prospects? Because there's no hope because their neighborhood is falling apart around them? Is it because they're terrorized by a police force who literally won't come there unless it's a murder, who makes no effort to be part of the community or learn and know the community, there's no, because there's no community youth development places for their kids to go, there's no after school programs, it's like there's a lot of these obvious questions or you would think that they would be obvious questions that our political, and legislative and city leaders have refused to answer, or even address for some reason is extremely frustrating.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 55:22

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

Laron Anderson 55:27

Um, it will be crazier than it is now, which is why I'm trying to center myself, I believe that, you know, I have the ability to take Black Media Independent News to a, a level that's not we haven't seen in our city, you know, with our respective recorder, you know, and in the social media age, I think it's important to establish a, a legitimate reputable black, news source in Indianapolis, but more so like in the Midwest now, and I'm seeing like, the like, yeah, I can travel, I can go places. But really, the message is always the same as far as you know, black empowerment, bringing, you know, solidarity to whatever causes going on in particular city, and being able to report accurate stories. So I'm always going to heavily emphasize in Indianapolis, but I definitely am expanding to grow here soon, you know, probably travel a little bit more, hopefully reach other cities that are close to us, I really want to reach Gary, I want to do some more things in Louisville, in like a little bubble, in our, our bubble of the

Midwest cities, you know, Chicago, get some type of collective where we can tell our stories together, you know, as a black network and grow each other, you know, journalistically, and things like that. So yeah, I'm excited for about there's lots of Indianapolis, so you know, I don't want to leave 'til I'm ready. But yeah, I'm gonna have to move on one day. So I'm trying to set a good foundation for it.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 56:49

Is there anything else that you would like us to talk about?

Laron Anderson 56:52

No, because I fell into I feel like I went through a wave of emotions. Anyway, like I feel like I talked about it all. So hopefully, I know I rant and get off track a lot. So hopefully, I gave you something to use, besides the audio issues in our hour and a half of maintenance, housekeeping time to setup. Sorry about that.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 57:11

Just last question, Who else should I be interviewing now that you have sat through the oral, oral history project? Are there other people or groups or organizations that you think have a compelling story that would make for a good historical archive?

Laron Anderson 57:27

I think that everybody would have a good story, but I think, I don't know who you've interviewed. So it's hard for me to say anyone who's actually been out there, like been out there. Like, I think a good litmus test would be like, have you swallowed tear gas at a protest? Because I think anybody at any point who's been out there, when people were getting tear gassed and rubber bullets, they're good people, and they probably have a good story. And they probably have a good reason to why they came out there in the first place. So you know, a lot of people have seen this and you know, gave their opinions, but only a few people have seen it, and experienced it. So you know, find somebody who's out there to probably have a good story. Any organization that was out there. There weren't many organizations out there during those two Crazy Nights. So other than that, yeah. Hey, don't have much don't have anybody in particular. Um, Wildstyle, that's it, you've probably done Wildstyle.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 58:19

Wildstyle?

Laron Anderson 58:20

Yeah.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 58:21

Okay. No other names?

Laron Anderson 58:24

Who are you looking for? Is this something? Are we still recording right now?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 58:26

This is again... this is not a gotcha.

Laron Anderson 58:30

Who do you want? What are you trying to hear? Like what perspective you just want somebody to talk like I talked?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 58:35

Yes, sir.

Laron Anderson 58:38

Honestly, I would try to get one of the politicians because there, they should have interesting take. Now, I don't necessarily think that whatever their take would be might or will align with a lot of the citizens or whatever. But it would be good to have a public speaker. So I'll go with Leroy Robinson. Maybe not you know he don't like the media, but maybe, you know, Vop. Keith Graves. I would try to get Keith is somebody who became a new city councilor around that time and was like kind of transitioning because he tries Keith Graves tries. And he might be able to give you perspective as like how the government and how the city council was trying to combat it. And then he also I think, is open enough where he will tell you the difficulties of the community side of the protests, and you know wanting to identify with, when he got sworn in, he wore the B, I think it was Black Male Lives Matter shirt in front of the judge. So he's open to address both sides and give you that political side that you may not have gotten from anyone else. So yeah, there you go. I'll recommend Keith Graves if he hasn't done it yet.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 59:39

Well, thank you, um, this, if there's nothing else that you'd like us to cover, we'll conclude our interview.

Laron Anderson 59:46

Okay, well, I appreciate it. I appreciate your, uh, the chance to do this.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 59:50

So and just a moment, I'm going to end the recording again, this is Shonda Nicole Gladden, I'm here with Laron Anderson. It is Wednesday, October 14, 2020 and the time is approximately 1:47pm Eastern Daylight Saving Time. Thank you so much, Mr. Anderson. I'm ending the recording.