

Transcript of Interview with Simone' Murray with Shonda Nicole Gladden

Interviewee: Simone' Murray

Interviewer: Shonda Nicole Gladden

Date: 09/23/2020

Location (Interviewee): Indianapolis, Indiana

Location (Interviewer): Indianapolis, Indiana

Transcriber: Lily Crigler

Abstract: Simone' Murray shares her perspective on life during COVID-19 as a black woman. She discusses being a mother, a Christian, a photographer, and an activist through her work with Racial Justice Alliance. Simone' talks about the Black Lives Matter movement as well as the role of black women and women of color in the work towards racial justice in the United States.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:01

Hello, do you see that we are recording?

Simone' Murray 00:05

Yes, I do see that we are recording.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:07

Outstanding. So, um, we are indeed recording. I am Shonda Nicole Gladden. I am here with please state your first and last name.

Simone' Murray 00:19

Simone' Murray.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:21

Simone' Murray. And today is Wednesday September 23rd, 2020. The time is approximately 2:24pm, Eastern Daylight Savings Time. We are in, where are you located right now?

Simone' Murray 00:38

Indianapolis, Indiana.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 00:39

All right. And so this interview is being conducted in Indianapolis, Indiana. So Simone', I want to briefly review the informed consent and the deed of gift document that you signed. I want to thank you for doing so prior to our interview; it's very helpful to have that housekeeping stuff taken care of. Before we do go over that, that document though, I do have on record your stated gender, as well as your racial

ethnic identity and your sexual orientation. Can you give that again, though, for the sake of the interview, if you are comfortable with having it included and part of your oral history archive?

Simone' Murray 01:22

A black woman.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 01:24

A black woman. All right, thank you very much. So the, this interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project. It, which 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 on and 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 own history to our open access and open source database. You read a lot of this in the informed consent, but 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. These recordings, the demographic information that you've just shared, 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 about the project that I can answer?

Simone' Murray 02:41

I have no questions.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 02:42

Wonderful. So I do want to share that taking part in this study of course 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, there are no benefits related, other than having your story as part of the archive history and to perpetuity that researchers going forward will be able to know more about who you are, and the life experience of you and those that you connected to during this COVID-19 pandemic. The, your decision whether or not to participate in the study will not affect your current or your future relations with Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that you will have your interview recorded in this digital video format, and it will be transcribed. The recordings and the transcriptions of our interviews, copies of the supplementary documents or any additional photos that you may wish to share as we get into the interview, we'll talk about additional things that you may bring up related to your experiences that we may ask for permission to include additional documentary witness, such as a photograph or a written note or piece of something related to the story that you share. We'll get there when we get there. But all of these things will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year: a COVID-19 Archive and the Indiana University Library System again 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 on that part?

Simone' Murray 04:30

I do not.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:32

So in addition to your signed document, would you please offer verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Simone' Murray 04:39

I understand and agree to all of the terms.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 04:41

So I am asking that you verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available under 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 in perpetuity throughout the world. Do you agree that the oral history materials may be used by the COVID-19 Oral History Project and Indiana University, including its assignees and transferees for any purpose, including, but not limited to marketing, advertising, publicity, or other promotional purposes. And do you agree that Indiana University will have final editorial authority over the use of these oral history materials, and that you waive any right to inspect or approve of any future use of the oral history materials, that 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. Do you confirm that you agree to allowing us to share your interview under this license?

Simone' Murray 06:11

Consider it confirmed.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 06:13

Outstanding. Finally, this is the last verbal confirmation before we get into the actual interview. I want you to verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available to the public immediately.

Simone' Murray 06:27

Agreed.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 06:28

All right. So now that we have all of those formalities out of the way, tell me a little bit-

Simone' Murray 06:34

You adressed that [laughter].

Shonda Nicole Gladden 06:37

-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? How do you go about your day to day life?

Simone' Murray 06:52

Um, it depends. I am a mother of three, single mother of three children, school aged kids. One is 12, one is almost seven and then one is five years old. They are currently all e-learner, so we're all in the house. They have school every single day, Monday through Friday. I am a full time life coach at the Excel Center. So, I have my caseload is roughly 90 to 100 students where I serve as the liaison for, um, they used to call them 'at risk students' I, we hate that term. Um, that's my son. We, these are students who may have dropped out of high school for any, any reason one mo- [audio stops, long pause]. So my caseload is roughly 90 to 100 students. And they, like I said, they may have dropped out of high school for any reason. My role is to again serve as the liaison between the student and the teacher, but also professional development, emotional support, barrier removal, in their academics as it relates to their journey. They're kind of their journey. They're at the center. I am responsible for, you know, kind of watching them, monitoring them, and so on and so forth. Just to make sure that they are successful in the program. I am a caretaker of my mom who is elderly. I'm a photographer. I do some freelance photography, and I am also a, an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. So mi-, and ministry has not stopped, it looks different, but ministry has not ceased. So that's kind of, kind of what I saw, I wake up every day I go into the office from about eight to 12. And then I come home and from 12 to about a dependending, from 12 to four, I'm immersed in e-learning with the kiddos. Afterwards, throughout the day it kind of depends, my mom may need to go to a doctor's appointment, I might need to go to a doctor's appointment, all these folks might need to go to a doctor's appointment. Then it's you know, things of that nature. So that's kind of interwoven into each day each week. Seventh, my oldest is, she plays basketball, so, you know, basketball trainings, and things may come in just last night, and today she has virtual basketball training. So it just, it's the day that it depends. So that's-, but it's pretty busy. We, we there's always something to do here for sure.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 09:45

That sounds like a really full life. I'm curious. Was it as full in terms of the structure you just explained prior to COVID-19? And if so, how has it changed since COVID-19? What are the dynamics that make it different?

Simone' Murray 10:02

Oh my goodness. So for me, especially, because I am clinically diagnosed bipolar. So my anxiety levels, my, everything has increased exponentially. My daughter is, and that's personal for me, but then my

children, as it relates to, they are no longer in the physical building. That has caused a lot of issues with my oldest who really, she's in the seventh grade. And she would much rather be inside the building with her friends and her peers doing all that, and she voices that often. It's a strain for her. But just in general, and then my youngest is a kindergartner. So I don't I'm, it's crazy, so I've never would have thought that he would have entered into school, his you know, kind of his formal structured school years at home with me. And it has been, it's extremely hard because I'm teaching, I'm teaching my own caseload of students, and I'm also teaching my children. Virtual learning has been quite, quite a mess, unfortunately. And we, I'm just doing my best. I do what I can, teachers are doing, everybody's kind of learning on the fly. Technology may or may not work one day, and we're literally just doing our best. COVID-19 has turned a lot of things upside down. There's not a lot of visitation from people, there's none of that spend the night over folks' house to even get that extra kind of interpersonal relationship type situation going. So it's, COVID-19 has been quite a mess. The biggest thing for me has been trying to accommodate everybody, cultivate their skills without putting them at risk.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 11:46

That is a lot that you've shared, so thank you. I wonder if we can talk a little bit more about your background before we jump into your personal and community conceptual experience.

Simone' Murray 12:01

Sure.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 12:02

You've shared your race is black, your gender is a... what did you share was your-

Simone' Murray 12:08

A woman. Yep, woman.

Simone' Murray 12:09

-social economic status and other common demographic categories, how do you describe yourself?

Simone' Murray 12:18

I would probably say lower middle class, [laughter] lower middle class. And I've failed, and I feel remiss in this, but I failed to mention that I am an organizer and activist in the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance, social justice group here in the city of Indianapolis. So please add into protesting and making sure materials and education is happening within the community, so that's also a part of my daily routine. Right now, we're immersed in campaigns for IPS school district board seats and members at large. So we're, and just today, I'm actually, I had to think about whether or not I even wanted to continue to do the interview today, considering the result of Breanna Taylor's case. And so yeah, but socio-economically, lower middle class. I guess a single mom divorced. I am divorced. I was, my two

younger children are from that divorce. Let me see. What else, what else, what else? What else would you like to know?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 13:23

We'll get deeper into the conversation, but you did make mention of Breanna Taylor, and today being September 23rd, 2020. Can you explain for those who may be watching this video at some point in the future, what does all of that mean? What is the significance of that person and this date? Can you give a little bit of a broader picture?

Simone' Murray 13:49

In so many words, Breanna Taylor was asleep in her home. And police officers targeted the wrong house for whatever raid that they needed to do. They went into her home, and they let out a barrage of bullets killing this young woman while she was asleep in her home. She was an essential worker in the city of Louisville, Kentucky. And just today, they, the grand jury found no one responsible for her murder. There were three, three or more officers involved in that particular case. One was charged with a very insignificant count of something, I want to say unwanted endangerment, I'm not quite sure, but overall, no one was charged with this young lady's murder. And as a black woman in America, it really just feels like I can do nothing to, to have someone be held responsible for if somebody was to murder me. So I am, I had to get myself together. I was crying right before the call. It is heavy because you know, as you know, we black people in general continue to suffer multiple instances of injustice as it relates to police brutality. And it almost feels like that this, this system, this police system, can't even be reformed at this point, cannot be reformed. So I'm struggling holding that today as just as literally as a black woman, having a hard time.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 15:31

Thank you for sharing that today. As the interviewer, I of course, am supposed to be outside of the experiences, and so I appreciate you sharing those sentiments today. And yeah, I just thank you for that. Well, let's, let's finish up the background questions. Where do you, where do you live? Your zip code, your neighborhood, your city? And what do you see happening around you in your neighborhood right now?

Simone' Murray 16:08

So I am a proud west sider of Indianapolis, Indiana, however, I live on, and I have lived, on the city's south east side since 2016, since we me and my now ex husband found this home. But again, west side is particularly Haughville here in Indianapolis, which is a predominantly black neighborhood. My children now and we live in the Warren area of the city. And this is, this is where we reside, and this is where we do our thing. We, it's a suburb, and I do have plans to move back into the city.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 16:52

Can you speak to your affections? Or what is it that has compelled you to say you plan to move back into the city? What is it about that, what about the city that makes that something that you plan to do?

Simone' Murray 17:13

I to, to, where I am right now is actually a pretty diverse neighborhood. We have, the particular suburb that I live in, it's actually filled, my, especially my street, we have people of all ethnicities and backgrounds on my particular street. I want to move back.... one, I want to be in a different school district where my children will, they'll be able to experience a more black, much more black experience to be quite frank. I would love for them to be able to attend schools where the correct history is being taught. And I say that, and I mean that to say I, I am not interested in my children receiving lessons that are whitewashed. So I'm trying, I need to position myself as it relates to where I live, so they can, not only myself, but they can have an experience as it relates to that.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 18:21

Well, thank you for those clarifying points. What do you see happening around you and your neighborhood right now? What are the kinds of characteristics-

Simone' Murray 18:33

Can you repeat the question?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 18:34

What are the characteristics that mark what your neighborhood experience is like right now?

Simone' Murray 18:39

Right now, we don't, we aren't outside a lot, there's not a lot of community- there is also COVID-19, so there won't be a lot of that. But they're, community looks different in different areas of the city. I would much rather be able to maybe travel five to ten minutes or so to an event that is, has social distancing guidelines in force, where I can see people that look like me. And we are, you know, engaged in activities that, that are closer to my preferences, but will also kind of expand my thinking. So for example, going somewhere where there is not just black folks, but... [background talking]

Shonda Nicole Gladden 19:28

I want to acknowledge that I am noticing your children are coming in, and if you would feel more comfortable continuing the interview at another time, I want to acknowledge that that is an option. Are you okay with continuing right now?

Simone' Murray 19:42

I'm okay if we continue. I don't want it to be a problem with, are you okay?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 19:48

I'm absolutely fine.

Simone' Murray 19:52

Okay.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 19:52

But I do want to make sure you feel comfortable.

Simone' Murray 19:57

I'm comfortable so long as you are, 'cause this is my everyday; I don't know....

Shonda Nicole Gladden 20:03

Yes, ma'am. I just wanted to make sure that-

Simone' Murray 20:05

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 20:08

No problem. So you're saying that there's not a lot of outside happening because of COVID-19, of course, and social distancing is something that you like to be able to engage in activities with social distancing being in place. So let's talk about your personal and community context a little deeper, what issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Simone' Murray 20:37

You said what issues were...

Shonda Nicole Gladden 20:40

What issues have most concerned you about the pandemic?

Simone' Murray 20:44

It's really for us because I'm so, I'm so, I'm so responsible for so many people, and I don't want to put anybody at risk. There's been issues as it relates to my schedule at work, and what, because the, the particular organization from the executive leadership, local leadership in my building, my particular director, he's, my director, has absolutely been- [background talking, audio stops]

Simone' Murray 21:12

I'm responsible for a lot of people, some of which are here. And they're, in particular, like my schedule, they've not, I was going to the point where the executive leadership of the organization has not been very accommodating. And I have voiced a whole lot of things to, to my, my director, so he could advocate for us, and some of that is, has a lot to do with, you know, just our differences. I said, you

know, for instance, for example, I said you're a white man with a family, you have a wife, and you've been together for quite some time; I'm a single black woman. And that already in itself, is that, there's some differences there, I have to be with my children to do their e-learning, I don't have any help or support in that. And I can't, and because that we are so disproportionately affected by this thing called COVID-19, I have to be extra careful, because again, I'm a caretaker for my mother, I have three children here, and I'm being forced to go into a building to do work with people. There is this, this, a narrative that you know, you can be asymptomatic and pass this virus onto somebody, so I have to be extremely careful. And a lot of the times... so safety is one of, that's really one of the, my main issue is just been keeping the folks that I come in contact with, contact with on a daily basis safe, and not, you know, without having proper accommodations, I've been at risk of losing my job already. I've been at risk of, you know, ministry duties that you know well if you can't, are you doing this, are you able so, and I'm not able to, so I can't serve in certain ways because of who I have to take care of at home. And just having to be fully aware of the ramifications of this disease. Not, it causes additional stress, for sure, but I don't think you can be too safe with it.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 23:22

And so, I am going to pause the recording as I share that I would early on so that we can continue in just a moment. Thank you again, for your patience, and we were discussing the number of people that you have in your household and the people that you are responsible for and the ways that COVID-19 has certainly changed the ways that you engage one, with your employer and others around you. So can you talk a little bit more about how have the people around you perhaps changed their day to day activities, or their relationships in response to the pandemic? And if you can think of a time in history, that there have been other big events in your lifetime, is there anything that compares to this when you think about what you're experiencing right now?

Simone' Murray 24:25

Nothing compares to COVID-19. Absolutely nothing compares to COVID-19. And that's something that me and my friends and other peers and colleagues have discussed for quite some time. That's actually been a point of conversation as it relates to my job. I said there is stuff, I preached on it actually not too long ago, there is nothing that this par-, this generation can compare, can can draw an experience from because this is the first time we've experienced something like this. To go from, actually in the sermon, I spoke about, I said, you know what, I remember a time when I could go outside of my house without wearing a mask, something as simple as that. I can't hug the people that I want to hug anymore without asking for consent, making sure they're, you know, are you well presenting as it relates to do you have your mask on? I have to ask, can I hug you? Have you had any symptoms, you can't go anywhere, doctor's appointments, dentist appointments, things are pushed out months. So we, I've been subject to pain in my body because I cannot, I can't see my doctor until you know, an appointment a month and a half from now. People around me, absolutely, everything's changed. Some people are more loose than others, but the majority of people are in their homes or quarantining. You go to work, you go to work, you go to the grocery store. And then even, with even with that, people are choosing particular hours to

go because hopefully, there's not a lot of people there. You don't want to even come in contact with groups of people, celebrations of people, I, again, I'm a photographer, so I have to, you know, I still have to, I still engage myself in that work. But I have to say, you know, who's gonna be there? How many people are there? Are you all wearing masks? I have to turn down ways to make additional money as a single black mother, because social distancing guidelines may or may not be enforced. It literally is a, a filter that, you know, all of my decisions have to go through. And it is tiring to, to already not have a vast support system. And then for it to be literally just, it's gone. It's, it's no more because of COVID-19 and all of its symptoms and ramifications. It has been, it has been quite a storm. And I am, I am, I'm one of those 'we still don't know what it's doing.' We don't know how it's caused, and I'm watching news stories, how it's evolving. You know, the CDC has changed things, you now have thing, initially, we were getting reports from one entity, and now they're being filtered through, from what I would like to call, now we're filtering through a very much racist administration. So we don't know what to, we don't know what information is right. We don't, things are literally being amended in real time. But what we do know is that it disproportionately affects black people. So I know I have to be very careful because everything in my life has changed, and I am responsible for so many additional lives. There's no, there's no being too safe.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 27:54

Well, since you've talked about the relationship to, to your life and to black lives in general, would you share any thoughts you have about current movements focused on racial justice, such as Black Lives Matter?

Simone' Murray 28:10

Absolutely. Black Lives Matter is a movement started by an amazing group of black women. And is, it is a necessary movement, I believe, for such a time as this. And it's been, it is a movement, but it is also I would say a mantra. So there is the formal organization in itself, but it has been so powerful that people have literally just adopted it as their own way of life, and, um, and I think that a lot of people get those two, those two things misconstrued, and they put everything together not withstanding, one of the, there is, there's literally a formal entity and organization that is, that is the Black Lives Matter movement. And then there are, there are just people who agree that black lives matter. It's a beautiful movement. And it has, I don't think it will ever, it will never, it won't ever die off because it's a matter of fact. So the organization in itself is needed and then the i-, the ideology around it is needed, in my opinion.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 29:25

Can you speak to or unpack what that ideology looks like what it means?

Simone' Murray 29:32

So, frankly, and just in simply, a lot of the times, we talked about just putting the word, "too," on the end of it, and that for me, explains it - Black Lives Matter, too. We're not saying or the organization when they, when, when it was, when it was you know, when it was started, was not saying that we matter

more. We just mattered too, and there is, there's, there's this notion that, and there are people who hold the belief that we don't, and it is simp-, and it is as simple as black people deserve fair-, fairness, as it relates to all things of life, and more specifically, in the court of law. Our Constitution and the laws of this nation, do, they, they are not, it's almost as if they don't matter when it comes to black men, when it comes to black folks. So that for, that is how, that is what I, what I feel, and that's what's raised for me, when I think about the Black Lives Matter movement, and those who are allies of this movement also understand that. So yeah, that pretty much kind of sums up what I think about Black Lives Matter.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 30:43

So have you seen any changes as it pertains to the Black Lives Matter movement and other movements for racial justice? Have you seen any changes since George Floyd's death, and as you mentioned today, since Breonna Taylor's death? And since, are there other deaths that have given a rise to any new developments in the racial justice movements in the movement for black lives mattering?

Simone' Murray 31:10

So yes, there have been, one of my things, so we have, we have our George Floy-, we have another, a local case here, Dreasjon Reed. Ahmaud Arbery, of course, we talked about for Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Korryn Gaines, Philando Castile, Sean Bell, Aiyana Jones, Alton Sterling. I cannot, what I, I, it does not feel as though the justice system, the needle, as the voice of the justice system has moved at all. But I do have hope in that this particular generation of activists, organizers and allies will have, will have their chance to move into these these positions of power, more specifically political roles. And eventually we'll be able to come from the top down, right now it's an uprising. And there's more of a grassroots effort as it relates to educating. While I haven't seen widespread enhancement, as it relates to the justice system, we have had a wave of beautiful black women and other people of color who have been, who have entered into the government roles, in these political roles in our Senate, and our, you know, House of Representatives and things of that nature. So I think the change is slow, as it relates to the top down, but it is happening. I would, I would like to believe that the education as implicit bias, anti-racist work is, is getting better. I do also believe that there is this niche of racism that is co-opting the anti-racist and implicit bias work, and is now monetizing it. Unfortunate, however, I do think that there is a sect of folks who are actually doing the work. And they, and we are, we are gaining a better knowledge, and particularly white folks or I have a barrage of white folks that I can, I talk to. And we you know, we have conversations, and they get it, and they and they are folks who would have been quiet two or three years ago are very loud now as it relates to their allyship, and the work they do. They are, they're doing tangible things. They're acting on what it is they believe, so there's some hope in that for me.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 33:45

So have you attended any protests?

Simone' Murray 33:52

Absolutely have attended protests. We're actually planning literally, there's a protest on the circle tonight more than likely, Circle City. The Circle City's the nickname for the Indianapolis, the city of Indianapolis. And I believe that, I was checking my, my group with the, with the folks that did my organi-, that the, you know, RJA, the Racial Justice Alliance, there were more than likely, 100% be a protest tonight in regard, in response to what happened in Louisville on behalf of Breanna Taylor,

Shonda Nicole Gladden 34:21

And will you attend that protest tonight?

Simone' Murray 34:24

Yes, I will. My children won't go. I will go. We the art RJA itself actually has, we raised funds to have a local seamstress here to make masks for our organization. So we'll be masked up, we'll be out, and we'll be down there protesting for sure.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 34:43

And so are you concerned about exposure to COVID-19?

Simone' Murray 34:48

Yep. And that is kind of the duality of black, my black womanhood that I, that I kind of hold every day. It's, it's, it's difficult, and it's hard. So what I do, will go to the protests, I'll come home, I'll take all my clothes off when I get home. Those things will go directly in the washer, I will go immediately to the shower, won't touch anybody, won't touch anything. And I also because I'm overexposed, I get tested often, and usually get tested every three, every three weeks just to make sure because I am aware that you can be asymptomatic, and I don't want to pass anything to my mom or my kiddos. So far, I've been tested four times, you know, gratefully and by God's grace, I've not, I've not tested positive.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 35:36

Well, so you are a member of you've said the Racial Justice Alliance.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 35:42

Are you also a member of any organized Black Lives Matter movement chapter?

Simone' Murray 35:42

Yes.

Simone' Murray 35:48

I support, um, I think Indy10 here, Indy10, ran by there's Leah, and Kira, and Jessica, some young ladies here have an organization affiliated with but not an actual formal chapter of BLM. I do support them, RJA supports them. We support each other in these efforts. So yes, there are a multitude, there's at least, I would say like, three to four common groups here in the city, who, who are doing this type of social

justice work, and they are out, we're all out, masked up doing the things that we, we, it still needs to be done even in the midst of this, which, you know, brings up other issues as it relates to us. But yes.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 36:40

So what can you tell me about the role of art in the movement for racial justice, and or the Black Lives Matter?

Simone' Murray 36:51

It's necessary. It's, um, just recently here in the city, we had the Black Lives Matter mural painted down on the street on Indiana Avenue, another historic kind of landmark in the, in the nation. Art-, black artists came together to do their work. They did some other things. It was eventually defaced as soon as it was opened, well actually, I think, I don't think it was opened to the city before it was defaced. But for me, and as a mother, and I think a lot of people don't quite understand or want to, for that matter, the role of art as it relates to activism. But art, art is resistance, and art is activism. How we get there, how it happens is another story. But at the end of the day, the product and what comes of artists doing and you know, putting their gifts out in this world is absolutely necessary. I cannot, I can't stress enough how, what it does for my young son to just, to stand in front of, or my or my daughters, for that matter to stand in front of pieces of art, ask questions. Who is this? What does this mean? Which gives me another opportunity to educate them. For those who may not be my children, but it could be you know, anybody in the neighborhood, it inspires people, and it moves people towards, um, it moves people towards wanting to know more and expansion of their minds. So I think it's a good thing in general, it's just a good thing.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 38:32

And what can you tell me about your personal participation in artistic expressions related to your activism?

Simone' Murray 38:41

I'm a photographer. I take pictures. Initially, so my photography, the name of my photography company, if you want to s-, I don't, it's a ministry for me. I don't, I don't do it for money. And a lot of my, to be honest, a lot of my work is free. And people who deal with me know that it's called Xival, it's spelled "xival." But it's Xival, and it's Xival, and it's based on a cheval mirror, that full length mirror that you can be able to see yourself from head to toe, the way God created you. I was not privy to have a lot of photographs taken of me when I was young. I don't know, I wasn't, I think that is an injustice, a disservice to, to me, but I've forgiven all of my family members. But I think that it is important for people to be able to see the beauty that is God's creation, especially black people, black families, the black experience. So there are a plethora of photographs that I have at protests, but then there are a plethora of photographs that I have of children in parks, of people just being. There's a saying, there's a common saying that blackness is not a monolith, and it's not. We look a lot of different ways, we do a lot of different things, we participate in a lot of different activities. And my goal, not just as it relates to

activism, but as it relates to humanity, [to her child] hold on black, hold on black child, as it relates to humanity... [background talking] ...is, it's vital, is vital too. And I think it's historic too, right? Hopefully, these, these photographs will last the test of time. [background talking]

Shonda Nicole Gladden 40:31

You want to grab that before I ask the next question you can or we can keep going. [Long pause] Okay, so you were mentioning your photography? And I'm curious, would you be willing to provide any of your photographs for the archive to accompany your oral history?

Simone' Murray 41:16

I would love to.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 41:17

Okay, wonderful. So we'll make note to make sure that we collect those, we already have your informed consent. And so the only other things that you'll be sending my way would be the photographs that you have chosen to accompany this oral history interview.

Simone' Murray 41:31

An honor, for sure.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 41:37

So in addition to your photography, and your protests, your planned participation in your protest tonight, have you attended protests in the past during COVID-19? And if so, can you describe the different kinds of protests and the protesters, the bodies that are there? The things that you imagine are motivating people to be there? Is that something you can do?

Simone' Murray 42:07

Yes. So I mean, there again, so I shared that there was a case, there was a local case, from a young man, Dreasjon Reed, who was murdered here in the city, so he's had protests. RJA does protests in general, around our demands, so we're often, we're often out, the bodies, the bodies. So RJA is committed to racial justice, not just for black people, but for indigenous folks, as well. So we've had different people speak at our protests as it relates to that. So you have you have a plethora of black, indigenous, and then people of color that are there. You have your allies who show up fully, fully garbed in in riot gear, just in case, because we've had instances where people were tear gassed, so we, they come prepared. They're, they're nonviolent protests, nobody is going to, nobody's inciting violence. We're literally engaged in our, you know, our constitutional rights as it relates to this place, even though we are not privy to the benefits of them on the other side, sometimes, but it's, it's a, it's a, it's a beautiful array of folks that show up in solidarity, but who are also angry about what's taking place. People do wear their masks, if they don't have masks, masks are typically provided. And fact-, the fact is, it's a protest, there is not a lot of social distancing, that happens. And that is, that's something that people have to decide for themselves,

whether or not they'll show up or not to participate. And I think injustice, right now, is, is also, you know, it's a double whammy for, us multiple jeopardies. But we think, a lot of us believe that, you know, we still have to do this work, understanding that we put ourselves at risk while we do it.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 44:19

So understanding that you're putting yourself at risk while you do it, as well as understanding that what I heard you say is RJA, has demands, can you articulate what those demands are? Again, what is motivating you to participate in the protests and the work that you all are doing?

Simone' Murray 44:45

Yes. So RJA is focused on criminal justice, immigration and then voting rights. [Talking to her child]
Yes. Can I take one moment, please?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 45:01

Absolutely, take as long as you need.

Simone' Murray 45:28

Okay, I apologize. So um, you asked about our demands.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 45:34

Yes, ma'am.

Simone' Murray 45:38

So our demands are to define law enforcement, to refund police programs and services, create community led external review boards, move internal review under external review board, and then have liability insurance for police officers. And that's under the, the criminal, the criminal justice reformation that we're trying to do. So those are, they're outlined pretty well, on our website. And that, those are the things that we, we're holding up, especially as it relates to all of the, all the police brutality and the killings that are happening. Yeah.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 46:21

What is your website address for the purpose of the recording?

Simone' Murray 46:25

Oh, sure. Indianarja.org.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 46:30

Thank you. So I want to shift now unless there's anything else that you'd like to share related to racial justice movements and black lives matter. I want to shift to leadership and your future. Are, do you have anything else that you'd like to share about the ra- [audio cuts out] for black lives matter?

Simone' Murray 46:52

I do not.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 46:53

All right, well, how has your experience transformed how you think about your family, your friends, your community, and your society?

Simone' Murray 47:05

Can you ask that one more time?

Shonda Nicole Gladden 47:07

Absolutely. How has your experience during COVID-19 transformed how you think about your family, how you think about your friends, how you think about your community, and society in general?

Simone' Murray 47:21

Um, so it has been a pleasure to spend more time with, with my family in ways that would not have been possible had it not happened. And I do believe that I can hold, you know, a pocket of joy even in the midst of some suffering. And that has been, that's been great to spend more time with them, have more conversations with them, and I'm speaking about my children, my three children in particular. And actually, my mom was living with us from January into July, due to COVID-19, so having her here, because she was she's got a lot of underlying health issues, and it was just not safe for her to be alone so far away from me and at risk. I needed to be able to monitor what, what she was doing, what other folks are doing. Let me go get your groceries, let me to do that; you're you know, you're in your late 60s, with so many elements, let, let me do that. So we've had some good, some good things come of it as it relates to strengthening relationships, and me being able to have a more hands on teaching experience with my kids, because it's not just school, right, it's other it's household things, they're kind of some, you know, wa-, you got to be a little bit more responsible, you all have to be helpful around the house with each other, how your interpersonal skills, how you treat one another, even when you're annoyed. So I've been able to kind of supervise and monitor that more. And kind of, I've been able to filter, [coughs] pardon me, much of my children's education. I can hear it at all times because we're doing virtual learning, and I can combat certain things as soon as they're getting off these calls, and actually have more communication with their teachers. And more than what I've, would have, what I would have had had it been in person, physical thing. So that's been a good thing. On the flip side of that, I've not been able to spend time with my friends. I have not been able in ways that we're used to right being able to come together and hug people. I think we've taken I've taken for granted hugs from folks and being able to just go somewhere and enjoy a meal with somebody, being able to go to the movie theaters or enjoy traveling, can't really quite travel, that is one thing I've actually had the opportunity and a little bit of discretionary, you know, income now, as [audio skips] because I save so much, and I've gotten to the point where I'm like okay, I can put aside a little bit [audio skips]. To that point this summer, after

literally seven or eight years, and I was like, I can take a trip, I can take a couple of trips this summer. No, you cannot. No, you cannot. So that was, that's disheartening, considering the mental health work that I've done for myself. And look, I was looking forward to certain things and having that stripped away, and then having to find other ways to cope, other ways to release other ways to do the self, the thing the, the self care thing, so. But yeah, so those are, that's kind of, those are some of the things that have been different as it relates to COVID.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 50:43

So, as it relates to COVID, as well, you've talked about how things have changed with your family and your friends, your community, what do you think has changed for society as a whole?

Simone' Murray 50:59

First is- a lot. It has brought to light, a lot of the, a lot of the downfalls of what America is. It has, it has highlighted and showcased a lot of the disparities that black people experienced on a day to day basis, it has highlighted how the infrastructure of this country has been terrible, it has highlighted how if we need money to fund things, we can find money to fund things. We found out, even in the midst of this, that while we can't, for whatever reason, find ways to pour resources in community, into communities that will help build communities, we can find millions of dollars to fund police departments. And we can find ways to do what it is we need to do as it relates to schools. But then we found out where you know, where the, where the importance lies. For my particular company in general, we shut down. But then it's like, well, we're going to lose funding if we don't open up in this way; we have to open up a little bit because we'll lose funding. So it has also, for me, unearthed a lot of ethical dilemmas as it relates to you know, who I work for, who I deal with, what's like, what, what schools, my children go to, where I want to spend my money. Because the ideas around, you know, what people place the importance on, is safety more important to you? Or is the, or is this, this income, this money more important to you? And that's been, that's been a thing. That, that, that society has, I've been able to really get a clear view on a lot of things.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 53:04

Yeah. So I am curious, have you observed that government leaders in your community, as well as nationally, have you observed how they've responded to the outbreak and what opinions do you have about how their response has been?

Simone' Murray 53:29

For example, one of the Supreme Court judges, RBG, just passed away. She passed away and almost immediately, this, this administration, this President has made, made moves to fill her seat. It took less than 24 hours for this man to do that. However, what we found out recently, and what we saw happen was no response to what COVID-19 could do and what it has been doing. We've, we've, we found out recently that this President knew of the repercussions of what this disease could do, sat on it for months, and didn't move on it, risked the lives of thousands of Americans. Literally people have passed away

because he did not move on safety measures for the citizens of this country. That is one of many things that showcases the lack of care, the lack of consideration for these, for the people of this nation. I think this administration is absolutely horrible as it relates to that, but specifically, [to her child] not right now. So specifically for COVID-19, there was, there was no, there was no care for this, for the country that he was responsible for. However, when it comes to making moves that will continue to oppress the same people, we'll make sure to do that expeditiously because now I have an opportunity to put somebody in place that will overturn, that will overturn decisions that have been made in regards to women's rights. And it's overtly done. It's been, it's overly done. So that is one way in which the government has failed, not just me, but the people of this nation. And it's disheartening to say the least. It does leave, it leaves, it leaves me depressed.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 55:50

As of the time of this recording, do you have a ballpark figure of how many people have died of Coronavirus in the United States?

Simone' Murray 56:01

Oh, I, is it about, is it roughly 200,000? I'm not, I think roughly 2-, 200,000? If not more.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 56:12

I am simply asking for your ballpark figure. So I'm not confirming or denying, and I appreciate it. You said roughly 200,000.

Simone' Murray 56:22

Roughly, I'm gonna go roughly 200,000 folks have passed away and that's like, that is and since the quarantine, I want that, that equals out to about 30,000 people a month that have died. Yeah, about 30,000 people a month that have died if we, 200,000 is the, is the number, then roughly 30,000 folks have passed away since we've been in quarantine, and that number continues to increase.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 56:53

How do you feel about that?

Simone' Murray 56:55

I'm angry about it. I mean, it's, it almost leaves you numb, not shocked because I'm a black woman who's lived in this country, and I'm ever evolving in what I'm learning as it relates to leadership in government. So some things are just no longer shocking. It's a matter of how do we combat, resist, overturn, and tear up things, to be quite honest, and get, get, get new, get new methods in place. But it's still disheartening; I'm a human being, I will never be desensitized to death. It is, it is, one person was too many. As it relates to COVID-19 for me. One person who was too many, and to allow something to ravage a whole nation like this when you had, when you had inflammation to prevent things from happening, is absolutely despicable, it's sick. And it's mentally, I have to, you know I have to get up, and

I have to deal with it and have to work through that all while being, still maintaining all my other hats and wearing these other hats. So it's hard; it is hard.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 58:15

What are the kinds of things that you are doing to reconcile that or to navigate the hardness of which you speak?

Simone' Murray 58:26

So I, I go outside, and I just, and I [audio skips] I'll just put my feet on the ground, in the grass, and just stand there and breathe in just for a few minutes. And just feel the elements. And, and it's, it's actually, that even that in of itself I haven't escaped for a few minutes, right, haven't escaped for a few minutes. But now I'm working to, I have to work through not anticipating that time to end because I always know that that moment of release is going to end for me. So and I think that is, that's a mental, there's some more mental work that I have to do. And I have to allow myself to kind of escape a little bit so I can think more clearly and continue to navigate and do this justice work because it's necessary, and it's not, everybody's not cut out for it. And when you know you're called to do something, you know you're called to do and work in a certain way. It's important to stay rooted, so I'm trying to stay rooted. And I'm also trying to embrace those moments and pull from those moments when I feel overwhelmed.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 59:42

For researchers who fit outside of the language of being called to do something,

Simone' Murray 59:50

Yes.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 59:51

Can you unpack that a little more?

Simone' Murray 59:54

Spiritually, so I am, I, while I've had conversations with colleagues and peers, well, I think "Christian" may be, may be a word that I may have to let go of, but right now I identify as a black Christian woman. And in that, in that, in that religion, especially the black Christian tradition, you may be, you feel like you may be called to, so God has called you to a particular work. I feel that God has called me to do social justice work, to be a preacher of the gospel, and the gospel is that Jesus came to not just save us, but to be an example of the way in which we should live. And being called to that work, so specifically for me, I've had dreams, I've had dreams of seeing myself do this work. And often because I often pray about getting, give me more confirmation, am I really supposed to be doing this because sometimes I doubt the work myself, and it feels awkward. It's like, is this really real? So and it is, for me, it is real for me. So I do feel called to this specific work. So in order to continue to do this work ethically, morally,

spiritually, I have to, I have to find ways to remain grounded in the work that I'm doing, so I can think clearly.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:01:20

What do you imagine your life being like in a year?

Simone' Murray 1:01:25

I don't know. I don't know. We are, it is so... COVID-19 is such a dynamic thing. I don't know what next week is going to look like. I would hope that we've done, we've done the safety work and we've enforced, we've come to a point where we have enforced these things that we can now be a more a freer society as it relates to going back outside and, and, you know, commuting amongst each other. But as it relates to me, I know, I'll still be doing social justice work, I know, I'll still be a mother. I know I'll still be taking pictures and showcasing what is happening while I am in this space in time. I'll still be a daughter, I'll still be doing all the things that I'm currently doing now. I don't know if I may be working at the same place. That, that may, that may be different, but I do know that I still will be doing the work that I'm called to. And that is, all the things I just named and just whatever it's going to take to make the spaces that I enter in more equitable for folks.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:02:44

That's 12 months. Give me 60 months, what does your life look like in five years?

Simone' Murray 1:02:52

Probably the same. [To her child] Put your headphones on. Still, and that's the thing. I've, I've been doing this, it's always looked different, but I've been doing this. I'm, hopefully, because I am a student at Christian Theological Seminary, trying to finish out this Masters of Divinity program. I went and got a secular degree before I got my, before I started working on my ministry degree. But you know, I kind of regret that now, but this is where we are. Um, hopefully I may, I may or may not be in a an a PhD program, because I feel like that's another call that I have, that I'm really resistant and running from. I do not want to do a PhD program, but it feels necessary because there are people coming up behind me that, they will need my voice to, that will need what God, what I feel like God has, you know, deposited in me, and it's for them, too. I am a, I'm a self proclaimed womanist theologian. And I feel like that, and that's evolving, too, that's still evolving for me. And I, but I need to, I need to leave some things here for other folks. So that, that may be something, that may be something that may be different as it relates to five years.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:04:20

So... I wonder, as we are about 15 minutes away from the end of our time together that you've committed to, so I want to thank you for your time commitment, knowing what you know now, and what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

Simone' Murray 1:04:46

I think that a lot of the times people let, allow old things to determine what they'll do in the present day, and they, we have-, they have to remember that everybody is a person, right? These are, we are human beings. And I think people lose sight of, people lose sight of the fact that because somebody is different than you are, that they may or may not be worthy [background laughter] of the same things that you, that you're privy to. And that knowledge and learning, that all of that, all of those things are ever changing, right? It's all different, but I think it's important for us to get back to community, and just recognizing the divinity, that's in everybody. There is a certain level of, of humanity that I think government for sure, has, has lost, which is why I spoke to the fact that I love, and I love the fact that more black, black folks and people of color, specifically black women and women of color, are entering into these political roles in our government, because as a womanist, who believes that, especially black women can do, we can save the world. If you listen to us, we can save the world because we have the best interest of everybody at heart. So with these people moving into these roles, I think we'll, we'll be able to get back there slowly but surely, but and we, we don't have time, we, we really don't have time to waste, to understand certain notions about just people being worthy of respect, people are worthy of, of care, and people are worthy of living their lives without, you know, others in, you know, impeding on the rights. So there's, for me, it's a lot of just basics, these are basic things, but for some, these are not basic things. And that is, that is the part that I have faced every day that is so concerning to me, that someone would think simply because of the level of melanin in my skin, that I do not deserve. Breanna Taylor, to sleep in my house and then have my killers justified in that. That is, they're just some basic things that I think we got to get back to. So...

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:07:33

I want to thank you for a very rich interview. I hope that you have enjoyed this time together. In our last closing moments, do you have anyone else that you would suggest that we should be interviewing?

Simone' Murray 1:07:52

Oh, let's see. COVID... Oh, goodness gracious. Yeah. So everybody in the organization that I work with. [Laughter] They are awesome people, and I'm so sorry. That's, I mean, they are awesome people, and they all have, they literally have. I missed a beautiful array of backgrounds and experiences from those folks. And it's not just black, and indigenous, and people of color in the organization. It is, there are white folks, too, so you have Alexis Tardy. You have Matt Davis, you have Nigel Long, Aaron Bus, Carrie. Who else is there working? Oh, no. Like so, so the whole organiz-, Spencer, friends of the movement, like I said, Kira, Kira and Leah of INdy10. Um, let's see, let's see, let's see. Ebony Chappelle, Ray Kareem. Who's doing good stuff? And then, then, I won't say, I think that community members who we got to find, I would say find some folks who don't have computers, who don't have, who are not privy to Zooms. And this is, this is a kind of a foreign world to them, but they're, they're experiencing all of these things, their stories are going to be a lot different, a lot different to those because a lot of us we don't like to admit it, but you know, middle class black folks, there's some privilege there as well. And we have to, we're doing our best to make sure those who don't have access

to the things that even we have access to, so there's some gaps. So I would encourage you all to find folks who don't, who aren't tech savvy. Those essential frontline folks who are, who are really waking up every day maybe even struggling right now, struggling right now as it relates to this pandemic because I know parents who have to leave their kids at home. They gotta leave their babies at home because they can't, they can't risk their jobs, you know, they can't risk their jobs and, but they're also not going to risk the lives of their babies. So those folks are who I think about when it comes to this thing.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:10:21

Well thank you very much for this interview. I'm getting ready to turn off the recording unless there's anything else that you'd like to say in closing

Simone' Murray 1:10:33

COVID-19 has been a beast. COVID-19 has been something that obviously unexpected, unexpected, and it has, it, while it has been so detrimental to so many, especially black people, especially black people, it has given us an opportunity to really do a lot of self reflection, self reflective work, kind of redefine what community looks like for us, and how we are going to come out of this thing and who, who's really for us, because we, we've experienced a lot, people in general, yes, they've experienced a lot. But when you are a certain level in life, there are some things that just won't affect you the same way they affect others. And for us, it is affected us in such a way that it has, it has taken away so much of what we relied on as it relates to being around our folks, those areas in which we, we get our refuge, we find our peace, we get our strength, especially, for instance, communities of worship. Worship, yeah, church is a refuge for a lot of us. It's, it's a ref-, it's a refuge for a lot of us. And that's where we get our refill for the week, right? For some, not all; this is just an example, but we get what we need that week because as soon as we leave there, boom, we're back into this, this oppressive world, this nine to fives or whatever, whatever the oppression may be. We feel certain things at different places. But that's a place of refuge for us. But just to not be able to, like I said, I think I stated earlier, I took for granted how healing hugs were, and to not be able to get hugs from my folks has really drained me. I didn't know how much it filled my cup. So that's just one thing, and that is, that's kind of an illustration for what COVID has done in general. So that's it. That's all.

Shonda Nicole Gladden 1:12:44

Well, I want to thank you again, Simone' Murray, for taking this time to sit for this oral history interview. The time now is 3:38pm on Wednesday, September 23rd, 2020. And again, I am Shonda Nicole Gladden, interviewer at the Indiana University, IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute with Simone' Murray. Thank you.

Simone' Murray 1:13:08

Thank you.