

Transcript of Oral History of Sha-Nel Henderson
Interviewee: Sha-Nel Henderson
Interviewer: Emily Leiserson
Date: September 28, 2020

Abstract: Sha-Nel Henderson is an IUPUI student and the president of the campus's Black Student Union. Among other things, she speaks of her experience as a Black woman, a student, a leader, a community member, a protestor, and someone who appreciates the arts.

Emily Leiserson 00:01

Alright. We are recording. Okay. My name is Emily Leiserson, and I am here with Sha-Nel Henderson. Thank you so much for being here, Sha-Nel.

Sha-Nel Henderson 00:16

Thank you.

Emily Leiserson 00:18

It is Monday, September 28th at 10:47 AM, and we're doing this remotely, but we're associated with IUPUI and the Indianapolis area. And I'm going to start us off before we get into our main question set by reviewing the informed consent document that you signed. So this interview is for The COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is part of The Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 Archive. It's an online digital archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history, and it's focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. And right now, during this phase, our research group, which is associated with IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute, is focusing on collecting oral histories that speak to the experience of racial justice, the Black Lives Matter movement, and other racial justice movements specifically during the context of COVID-19. We've designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create or upload their oral histories to an open access and open source database, so that in the future, anyone who wants to collect these narratives or understand more about COVID-19 can do that - can understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. The recordings and demographic information and transcripts from this interview will be deposited in The Journal of the Plague Year: A COVID-19 Archive and in the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions so far about that?

Sha-Nel Henderson 02:28

I do not.

Emily Leiserson 02:30

Alright, awesome. Next section. So taking part in this study is completely voluntary. So at any point, you can choose not to take part, or you could leave the study at any point. And if you left the study, there would be no penalty or loss of any benefits to which are entitled. And your decision whether or not to participate has no effect on your current or future relationship with

Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in the project means that the interview will be recorded in a digital video and audio format and may be transcribed. It should be transcribed, if all goes well. Two, the recordings and transcription of the interview, copies of supplementary documents, or if you want any additional photos or anything else you want to share and the informed consent will be deposited in The Journal of the Plague, A COVID-19 Archive and the IU library system. So that will be available to researchers and the public. And your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions on that?

Sha-Nel Henderson 03:50

No

Emily Leiserson 03:51

Thank you. And then in addition, to your signed document, could you please offer verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to those terms?

Sha-Nel Henderson 04:05

I do understand, and I do agree to the terms.

Emily Leiserson 04:09

Thank you. And then I am also asking you to verbally confirm that you agreed to make your interview available under the second license on the informed consent. So I'm going to read that one. It says The COVID-19 Oral History Project, The Journal of the Plague: A COVID-19 Archive, and the trustees of Indiana University, or IU, acting through its agents, employees, or representatives, has 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. I 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. I agree that IU will have final editorial authority over the use of the oral history materials, and I waive any right to inspect or approve of any future use of the oral history materials. Moreover, I 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). Does that [audio cuts].

Sha-Nel Henderson 05:45

It does, since I agreed to it.

Emily Leiserson 05:47

Okay. Thank you so much. Alright, and could you just confirm that your agreed your interview will be made available to the public immediately.

Sha-Nel Henderson 05:58

Yes, they will be made available to the public immediately.

Emily Leiserson 06:03

Awesome. Thank you so much for going through all of that with me. And so now we can dive into the real set, the real meat of this. So tell me, first of all, to get us started, just tell me a little bit about yourself. That could be things you do on a day-to-day basis. And/or how that's changed since COVID-19. Basically anything you want to share.

Sha-Nel Henderson 06:32

Okay, basically I am a senior at IUPUI studying communication, and I have a concentration in theater. And since COVID started all of my classes are remote now. And so it makes things- it's a change. It's a shift. Where typically communication classes are in person, they are remote. So, they- it's okay. Outside of that I am the president of the Black Student Union on campus, where I mentor students as well and help them navigate their college careers and get to where they're trying to go. And I am excited to be here.

Emily Leiserson 07:22

Is all of the stuff you doing remote, or is some of it in person?

Sha-Nel Henderson 07:30

Most of it is remote. So we still are able to have certain on campus, as long as it follows the COVID regulations. But most of everything is online.

Emily Leiserson 07:45

Yeah. And you said it's going okay. Do you have...?

Sha-Nel Henderson 07:52

Yeah. Communication can happen anywhere. Okay. But communications studies between students that are learning the discipline I believe is best perfected when we're in the classroom with an instructor or with the professor. That type of intimacy and the information that is gathered that may not come up if we're remote. Students – and there are studies on this too – students tend not to be as focused when they are studying or when they're in class remotely versus if they were actually going to a physical classroom. So I prefer to be in a physical classroom. I prefer to be around the energy and the people and having that college experience. Not suggesting that remote is not a college experience. But it's more difficult because we have to be self-led, most of my classes are self-led. Instead of having to go to a physical location and have things actually be there, stuff like that. So it's a difficult transition.

Emily Leiserson 09:00

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Thank you. Well put. So if you think about demographic categories: age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, any other common demographics. How do you prefer to describe yourself?

Sha-Nel Henderson 09:20

I am a Black woman.

Emily Leiserson 09:27

Thank you. Perfect. And where do you live, what zip code and neighborhood, city?

Sha-Nel Henderson 09:34

I live in the Marion County. Zip code 46208.

Emily Leiserson 09:38

Okay. Thank you. What is your neighborhood like? Where do you see happening around you? And how has it changed, if it has changed, during COVID?

Sha-Nel Henderson 09:52

Oh man. So there are a lot of changes happening in my neighborhood. One, it is currently being gentrified. And families are being displaced and businesses are being torn down. And surprisingly, with COVID that hasn't stopped. So the developments, the new developments that were taking place prior to COVID are still happening. And I believe this is causing families more distress, especially the particular zip code being in a food desert. And so there are a lot of socioeconomic things that are being affected with COVID because families did not have the access to fresh fruits and vegetables in my neighborhood. But with COVID it is a bit different- it is even more difficult to get to those items, to grocery stores because of that. There have been programs and developments that have taken place to try to fill that gap. But it's not the same as those food sources.

Emily Leiserson 11:03

Yeah. So that leads, I think, into our next question, which is what issues have most concerned you about the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sha-Nel Henderson 11:22

Wow. Okay, so first I'm concerned about the retention rate of black students. And being able to attain their degrees. Especially access to technology because of the changes that have happened. I believe some people may not consider this a big deal, but access to internet and there are a lot of other things that COVID has brought upon that would be a distraction to education. And black students typically have four things that are already posed as issues - which are all surrounded around finances. So we have housing, food, how to pay for college, and transportation. So those things are even more of a scarcity now with COVID. And so I am concerned about the retention rate of black students. On another level, I am concerned about families and youth being able to get quality education with COVID. And there are families being affected by the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh food, but also their livelihoods- how they're able to sustain themselves. With COVID that's a concern. And then the next thing I would say is that we have the elderly that had to make severe changes, particularly in our neighborhood, because they're at high risk. So we have to be extremely cautious about how to better serve them and being able to make sure they have the things they need - we're talking about medication, food, and whatever else they may need - toiletries - to go about their day to day lives. And then the last thing, I'm concerned about the medical care that black people are getting in the pandemic. We are dying at alarming rates. I refuse to believe that it's because of anything that is - it's not solely because of pre-existing conditions. There are a lot of other things that I believe contribute to that. So those are some things that I am most concerned about.

Emily Leiserson 13:25

Yeah. That's a lot. And I want to follow up on a couple of those. So you mentioned your concern about black students. Is that something that you saw - I know you work with the Black Student Union at IUPUI. Is that something that you're addressing through your work with the BSU?

Sha-Nel Henderson 13:54

Absolutely. We are working with students to see what their needs are and how we can best meet their needs. And I'm talking about from food to needing a laptop; students are in need. And sometimes it's hard to tell people you know, that you're in a needy position. You may feel embarrassed or you may feel like you may not get the help that you need because of, for whatever the situation may be. And then sometimes you feel embarrassed because you don't want to disclose that information, but we work to be as confidential with students and let them know that you know whatever it is that they need, we try to work to get their needs taken care of.

Emily Leiserson 14:38

That's awesome, good for you. So, have you seen people around you changing their opinions or day to day activities or relationships in response to the pandemic?

Sha-Nel Henderson 14:59

Absolutely. Absolutely. Community is a vital part- it is the vein in the black community. It's how we connect to one another. And so with regulations we have had to be creative. We've had to be very creative about how we build our relationships. So that is remotely. And when the pandemic first happened it was- no one wanted to be around anybody. Because we were like, oh my goodness, we don't know what's gonna happen, we don't know what this is. There was not a lot of information out about it. Since then we have been able to be creative with how to social distance ourselves, wear masks, jogging in the park, things like that, having picnics, making sure that we are being safe, but also gaining that in-person community. Because it is important. Being remote, even in classroom settings, is not the same. It's not. It is a form of connection, and we are grateful for it, but it is not the same as being in person. And so relationships have had to be reframed and restructured in a way to where we can be able to get our necessities met, as a community, but also be able to be safe while doing it.

Emily Leiserson 16:09

Yeah. Have you seen any groups, kind of leading that effort? I mean, of course, you mentioned your own. Are there other groups you see, leading the effort to recreate virtual or socially distanced forms of community, or community events?

Sha-Nel Henderson 16:31

That's a good question. From my understanding, almost every organization. So on campus I've seen- so BSU works to be in connection with the other black student unions within the state. And so they're doing things virtually. They also do some on campus, because our regulations on campus are a little different. But they are being virtual and they're working to reframe how they do things. Anything that I'm going to - so whether it's an open mic, a book club meeting, it's all

via Zoom or Facebook Live, platforms like that that are building community through other measures.

Emily Leiserson 17:15

Yeah. Are there other community groups, you're a part of, you know, churches, Neighborhood Associations, anything like that?

Sha-Nel Henderson 17:20

There are, but I would rather not disclose them.

Emily Leiserson 17:25

Oh, that's fine. Of course, no problem. So how would you say the pandemic compares to other big events that have happened in your lifetime?

Sha-Nel Henderson 17:44

No comparison. None. At all. I haven't had anything beside this be able to make me have to re-evaluate things, emotionally, physically, socially, spiritually. This is the first time in my life where we're all experiencing it together. And it is forcing us to have to be patient with the changes that are happening, with the new norm that's being created. I have, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that compares to this. And day to day life, or day to day living is different. It's, in some ways it's difficult, because you would imagine that if your work was from home and school is from home, then that would be, you know, easy access to be able to live life. But I don't know if I myself even, personally – and I pride myself on interpersonal communication, okay – I don't know if I really understood how much value there was to be able to go somewhere and be somewhere and be with people, even people that I didn't know, you know. I think we think of our friends and family, but I appreciate being around strangers now, you know. And so really looking at how things are changing just on that spectrum, all the way to missing, you know, previous college life - just regular, what we would call “stud-ying.” [Pronounced like student-y-in.] You know just doing – it's not a proper word, but anytime you go home, you're packing your bags, you pack your lunch to go on campus, to be with your friends to study, to - that's, you know, what we would think college life is. And that has been completely restructured, and I don't think that I paid attention to the psychological thing that that was doing and being for me, you know, being able to - the clarity that I was gaining from that, the connectivity that I was gaining from that, the being out, and being free and being, you know, open and vulnerable and meeting people. You know, I don't know if I paid attention to the emotional and the spiritual aspect that I was getting from that. Now I'm able to. I think we all have some time to sit back and think about how I've been affected and have seen others be affected as well.

Emily Leiserson 20:09

How would you say your feelings and thoughts on that have evolved over time? So it's been six months or so now since we first shut down.

Sha-Nel Henderson 20:20

How have my feelings evolved

Emily Leiserson 20:24

Or maybe it's not. Maybe it's the same.

Sha-Nel Henderson 20:29

I have hope. I think before I was hoping it'd be quick. You know like, okay, hurry up, we can hurry up and get back. But the way that- the numbers and people were dying at alarming rates, and the spread and - it made me think, okay, you know, maybe this isn't going to be fast. And so emotionally, I have evolved into thinking okay this is not going to be quick. So what are some things that I can do to sustain myself within this time? And if things are actually working for me, how can I help others? And give and take, too, you know, learning from others, too. What are they doing, how are they- what are some things that are helping them? To possibly help me. So as far as emotionally, I think that I have gotten over the fact that this is something that's going to be fast. This is something that's going to be with us. And even when it is not with us, if that is ever a time, we won't- civilization or society will never be the same.

Emily Leiserson 21:28

Yeah. Well thank you, that's very well put. Okay, so I'm going to switch gears a little bit to talk about racial justice movements and Black Lives Matter. Um, have you personally attended any protests?

Sha-Nel Henderson 21:46

Absolutely.

Emily Leiserson 21:47

Can you tell me a little bit about what those have looked like?

Sha-Nel Henderson 21:51

Um-hmm. They are a little different. I've put some on and I've attended some. So there was a protest on campus, Juneteenth, that I helped organize with some fantabulous students. And that was very symbolic, a representation of the freedom that black people would like to think that we are moving towards - liberation, on a smaller scale, for our students. And our voice, and being able to structure that protest helped us also show others the solidarity that we stand with other organizations within the Black Lives movement. And that we are not okay with what's happening. In the height of everything, which was in May or so, it was a lot - very overwhelming. You know downtown, because I live in the close downtown area, there were a lot of different things that were transpiring, right? So we've seen that there was a [race war?], we've seen rioting. We've seen, oh my goodness. The National Guard was down here, and then on top of that, there's the pandemic. They're closing highways down. We've got curfew. So the protesting was all in that - was all immersed into that - and so that was a new experience for me, might I say. And within the pandemic of course you know we have to think about safety, and we have to think about like how we how we can be safe. But like we just cannot not fight. We have to fight, we have to fight for equity, we have to fight for justices, and we have to make our voice known. [recording unclear...] We're going to structure our skills to make sure that we are organizing and mobilizing others to be able to get those things done that we say that we want. So whether that's a restructuring of wealth, whether that's power with that's poverty. If it's medicine and equity and making sure that we are getting the things that we need as black

women, as black men, young children – education. The systemic racism moves all over, so the protesting was just the symbolization of things that that would be taking place, politically and socially and economically. I don't know if I answered your question.

Emily Leiserson 24:14

No, that's great. Thank you so much. You mentioned a lot of things: wealth, power, politics, medicine, equity. I don't want to put words in your mouth, so let me just ask this in an open ended way. How do you, How do you personally feel that those line up for you? Are they all intersecting, and at the same level, or are there some that kind of rise to the top in terms of priority?

Sha-Nel Henderson 24:55

As a student, or as a Black woman, or...?

Emily Leiserson 24:59

Any way you want to answer.

Sha-Nel Henderson 25:03

Okay, well as a Black woman, because that's to me primary, because I'm you know I'll be a student for sure for a time, but I'll always be a black woman. They all have some type of intersectionality with me, but as far as prioritizing, what's very important to me as a black woman is sustainability and being able to use the skills that I have to be able to sustain my living. In ways that maybe I have never tried before. And also being able to have equity in the workplace, with things that I don't have to necessarily worry about. For example, I don't know if you know this, but the hair - black hair - is not accepted and can be discriminated against. In this state. Not in California because they just passed a bill. But to know that in Indiana, I have to either do something particular to my hair, that grows out of my scalp, to make it look presentable, is worrisome and bothersome to me. That I cannot show that I have skills, you know I have a skill set that I can bring to a company, without changing my outer appearance to be more palatable. So things like that are something that I've been considering lately, and how to be able to change those things. I'd rather not go into the topic of politics, but I do like to sit around those that are – that are making those changes, and to be well informed and educated. It goes with some of the first things that I would prefer to be - educated on what's going on. I like to know how I can help, and the things that I can't, and the capacities that I have. And so as a Black woman, there are things that I'm going into the workforce, that I do stop to worry about. That I've always known, but it's really to the forefront now that change is happening. And when change is happening in some spaces, it makes it a little tighter. Because institutions like the way that they're operating, they like way that things are going, and they don't want that change - some don't want that change. And even though they are moving in that direction, there's some pushback. So that's one thing. Another thing I will say, because I can say as a Black woman, that I have not been listened to [by doctors]. And that when I go and tell them that I have an issue or something's going on, that I am assumed to have a higher pain threshold. That you know there are certain things that do affect me personally. My family, my mother, my sisters, my cousins, they have had experiences where they'll say "I told them I'm having this issue," and they'll go "it's not a big deal." And so I'm thinking about these things and how I can be able to assist. And the best way I believe I can use this is one educating myself so I can help

educate others. The second is communication. Right, having the access to this information, and being able to spread that information for me is one of the best ways to be able to address some of these issues as they are able to be worked out.

Emily Leiserson 28:08

How do you feel the protest-. Well, okay, let me stop. Could you share any thoughts on how the movement has evolved in 2020? Because we know there were already racial justice movements prior to 2020, you know, but how do you think that that has changed this year, during the pandemic or because of the police violence that's happened? What do you think has, has caused- Have you seen changes, and what do you think has caused them if you have?

Sha-Nel Henderson 28:53

Yes, I've seen changes. I have seen changes. The changes that I have seen are people that maybe didn't think that they had a voice to say something, to do something, are being a part of activism and advocacy, which is excellent. That's white folks, Black folks, Hispanics, I mean people are really coming together to fight against racial injustices. The changes that I think have contributed to that are our cellular devices. We, as the Black community, know that this has been happening. Police Brutality is not new. It is just an evolution of Klansmen, literally. And so this phone, and the access to being able to put videos on the web, and people can see with their own eyes what is happening, has been a blessing and a curse. It's been a blessing because people have been able to see, and have felt in some ways violated, that this is happening, and they're appalled. And then it's a curse because it's almost like the Black voice was invalid until they see the video recording. And then the uprising. And so I do think that the different videos that we have seen - we've seen George Floyd, we've seen other - and heard audio clips of other things - that have spearheaded and put some fire underneath the Black Lives Matter movement. Or I'm not going to say fire, what I'm going to say is - excuse me, that's not the right verbiage - it has intensified the movement, because it is always - it has already been happening. The only way that we can call it a movement is not because it was birthed out of this video recording; it's because there had to have been other work prior happening. And some of the most work happens in between the uprisings. So, this is what we're seeing actually come to fruition, which means that whatever work has been happening - whether that is fighting for equity, whether that's fighting for, you know, inclusion, diversity - and whatever spectrum we're talking about - because it's on multiple levels - it has now been brought to the forefront. And so the common man, the common person, that wouldn't normally have the interest, or didn't know what's not averagely being put on television is now being in our face, because it is something that's undeniable. And it's all because people are being able and being brave enough to put the to put the video out there in different ways.

Emily Leiserson 31:46

Yeah, absolutely. And so you mentioned it was very overwhelming, early on, you know, in May or in the summer. How are you feeling now in late September?

Sha-Nel Henderson 32:02

The same. The same. The same. Traumatized. Traumatized. Oh yeah, because, you know, we have the pandemic. But racial injustices haven't stopped. It's almost like they've intensified. I'm on campus, and I can say that I can tell like if I'm wearing my Black Lives Matter shirt, or I'm

wearing a wristband, that I'm getting looks. And stares. And we can feel when someone is bothered, you know, by just the stance of a shirt or headband. And I can tell that it is tensions that are rising on campus. And that's in our own backyard, that students, freshmen students, say that they feel hatred in the classroom. Because of the movement, for just simply being black. You mean to tell me in a pandemic, where most of - 60% of classes are online - the 40% of the classes that students are attending, that they can't even get rest in their classrooms, to learn, because students are unhappy with the positions that they take, or just because they're black. Doesn't this sound like 1960s? Sounds very familiar, very familiar, to I don't know Malcolm X or Dr King. But it is true. And I think that because we do live in a democratic society, people are able to express themselves, as they should be able to. But I will say that, emotionally, the pandemic is adding on a different type of stress, because we have to restructure how we live. But we also don't get to change that we're Black. And so when we see a verdict, such as Brianna Taylor's, transpire, we're like "Wow." So, there are not the type of changes that we're looking for happening immediately. So, it does make me a bit uneasy, and a bit, I can say I'm unsettled. Yeah, yeah.

Emily Leiserson 34:23

Yeah. Understandably. So one thing that is striking me, I'm just going to ask you. As you talk, you know I'm struck by kind of the physicality of all of it, your hair, your shirts, you know, the- I'm wondering if the protest is, or the movement that's happening- is that giving you an outlet for some of the hurt? You know, anger, maybe, whatever emotions you're feeling, based on that, you know, physical discrimination. Does being able to physically be there at protests, allow you to kind of reclaim space in a way?

Sha-Nel Henderson 35:29

No. That's work. It's work.

Emily Leiserson 35:30

Yeah, yeah.

Sha-Nel Henderson 35:37

I mean that's not an outlet. An outlet is sitting with my family, being able to have a cup of coffee and just breathe.

Emily Leiserson 35:43

Yeah.

Sha-Nel Henderson 35:44

Nah, that's work. And it- and the movement, because I think sometimes we also think that protesting and the movement is something that's interchangeable, and it's not. You know, you have the movement, and then you have things that happen underneath the movement. So we have the movement. Then we have protests there. And then we have political change, policies, and things like that. They have speakers that come and speak at the church and things. We have different ways of learning how to be sustainable in the community. You know, there are different things that may come out of a movement: literature, art, music - that may come out of

a movement. And the movement is only a movement because there are inner workings happening.

Emily Leiserson 36:31

Yeah.

Sha-Nel Henderson 36:33

You know, the protests just are added to the things are happening on the background. So I think that some people - and allies as well - they'll go to a protest thinking that that's the work that's being done. When really it's the symbolism of showing that the work is being done. In the day. You know what I'm saying. And so, for me, it is a way to have people come together on one accord, saying, "Hey, we are not happy about what's happening. We're not going to continue to be silent about it. And we're going to do something about it. And we're going to do something in the back, and we're going to do something in the front." And a lot of people only see that front. So they just assume that that's mainly what it's made up of. But after the examples that we've kind of talked about, racial injustices are happening in multiple areas, in multiple places. And it's layered because it's embedded in our history. So the protesting is an opportunity to see who is on what - it's an opportunity to visually see who is standing with it. And who is not. So that's not an outlet. That's work. My God, that's work. Mm hmm.

Emily Leiserson 38:04

Thank you. Thank you for explaining and clarifying all of that. I appreciate that. I am interested- you brought up, art, music, literature. Are there any pieces of art, music, or literature, or other things that are meaningful to you?

Sha-Nel Henderson 38:27

Oh my goodness, yes!!! I am seeing so much creativity birthed out of this. Okay? And this is really how it works. I don't know if you're familiar with the Black Arts Matter Movement, the Black Arts Movement? Excuse me. But it was birthed out of the time when Malcolm X and Dr Reverend Martin Luther King Jr were killed. Assassinated. And so we had a political reckoning, like, a political like uprising happening. And there were so much- so many writings and plays. We're talking about like Amiri Baraka, you know you're seeing Maya Angelou - you are seeing so many awesome writers and creators being birthed out of this era, and there's nothing different than what's happening here. Some of the most beautiful things are birthed out of the struggle. And so I can't - there's so many that I really - oh my gosh, it's so it's so hard to even name. Myself, I'm even being more creative these days. Because you know theater is one of our concentrations. So writing more and creating small vignettes around things that are actually happening. And then encouraging young folks to actually, you know, partake. And they write in chalk and do things like that. So, music and art are definitely something that is being birthed out of this. Because for artists, it is a way of expression. And it's a way of being able to bring the light to things that they may feel are things that are unsavory, or things that they find that are mirroring the same racial injustices that they're facing and those before them have faced. So, yeah, there's a lot happening. Even in our own city, we're seeing a lot of different things. We have different amazing artists. We have Gary Gee. There are - let's see here. Oh my goodness, there are so many. And even like food. So, we have Chef Oya. We have, I mean there are a lot of different things that are being birthed out of this movement that we are

seeing take place here. We have artists such as Mariah Ivey and the TribeSoul. So, we have a lot of different artists - classical musicians - that are black that are coming to the forefront. I mean there are a lot of different, wonderful things that are happening, that are a way of expression, expressing the pain and the trauma. That is a way, it is an outlet to be able to express truly what is going on. The best way they can from the inside out.

Emily Leiserson 41:06

Yeah, yeah. Thank you. Under food, you said – is it Shep?

Sha-Nel Henderson 41:12

Oh, Chef Oya. Yeah, Chef Oya, The Trap. She is phenomenal. She does work within our community as well, but she has brought, she brought some light to us through food, so we're grateful for her.

Emily Leiserson 41:33

Food is absolutely a creative outlet. So, just to kind of sum up this section. Is there anything else you want to tell me about what the movement means to you?

Sha-Nel Henderson 41:59

Liberation. One step closer to liberation. And maybe the liberation isn't for me; it could be for the future generations. It is for the future generations.

Emily Leiserson 42:14

Thank you. Has this experience changed the way that you think about leadership, for yourself or others?

Sha-Nel Henderson 42:28

Yes. Yes. The pandemic and the racial movement that are happening. To me leadership is an opportunity to be able to serve. And to serve and use the skills that we have for common goals. To help people get to the goal which they are working towards. But it is a way of- leadership to me is a way of service. So, I've had to go inside myself and figure out what are some skills that I have, and what are some skills that I can work on, to be able to help others get to the goal that they're looking for. So, we have students on campus that may not feel like their voices are loud enough or clear enough to be heard. So, I have to as a leader say okay, "what can I do to amplify those voices but also give them the reassurance that without me, *you* can do it." And so with that, I think is history is a very vital part of that. So if you as a student, if you didn't know as a black student that are IUPUI and Indiana- that before there was IUPUI there was Indiana Avenue, which was some would consider the Black Mecca. And Black excellence that was happening and taking place, which was a product of Redlining, then maybe you wouldn't know the power that you had, that you're walking on. That the campus that you're walking on belonged to someone, maybe your very ancestors. And so having that at the forefront I believe of the mind gives some texture and some understanding that says, "Okay, you know what? We can, we can make some change here. And I can make some change here." And so, restructuring my skills like problem solving skills, time management, learning how to bring people together differently, remotely, you know on different spectrums. And being able to be clear and concise in speaking to people on the level at which they understand, because what is it to speak if

somebody don't know what you're talking about? So restructuring and changing those things and hopefully sharpening those. Those for me help mobilize students so that they know that their voices are just as grand and powerful without having me there. Because my goal is not to be at the forefront of everything, but it's so that students can know that that they can lead a movement. And that they have the power to do it. And I think that that can't be all based on emotion. You have to have some things and some concrete facts about how to push those things forward. So leadership is looking a lot different these days than what it did before and I am grateful for that.

Emily Leiserson 45:27

Yeah, thank you. That's a very clear and compelling vision of leadership. Do you have anything that you would like to say - up to you - about how leaders, or government officials at any level have responded to COVID and the happenings of 2020?

Sha-Nel Henderson 45:48

Yes. I think that government officials and our leaders have tried to make it seem like they got it all together. But as civilians that are paying attention to what's happening, *if* you're paying attention to what's happening, you can see that they don't have it all together. And they know just as much as we know. And they're trying different things to try to make those things make sense within the pandemic and COVID, and how to best navigate. But they're people just like us, that really have been devastated, their families have been devastated about what's been happening as far as COVID is concerned. The racial injustices that are happening, our government officials, I think, don't really know how to take it. And so, they sometimes either shine the light away from it - so like, "We have to focus on COVID, because COVID is what's killing people." Or they coin the word Black Lives Matter. Or they make it seem as if they embrace it. But embracing the terminology and not changing policy within the institution means nothing. So I think that when COVID happened, there were a lot of structures we've seen that we thought were unchangeable and immovable. You know, like something as small as free parking. You know, you mean to tell me we could have had free parking this whole time? You know, something as small as that. As something, that's finances that alleviate the pressure and the stress off people. Or something as big as "Okay you know what? Your landlord cannot evict you. Because of the pandemic." You mean to tell me he cannot evict me because we can't work? Really? Huh. There are things that we have been able to see have some moving, some movability, that I don't think that as citizens, we didn't really think it would come to. You know maybe we know there was always an inclination that there could be some leeway. But now we're able to see within the pandemic those changes. And so with those changes, as we tie it into racial injustices, that means that those changes that were easily made within COVID, you could make those changes. As far as racial injustices happening. And that's all we're asking for is that you make those changes. We don't want handouts. We're not asking that you give us something. But what we are asking is that some of those things that have been put in place to make sure that we don't get there, be taken down. So as we see COVID kind of changing and shaping and reshaping - Indiana is now open to Stage Five in some counties of course, with different regulations - we are seeing that we want to be able to be socializing, and make things happen. But it is going to be different. And since we're making those kind of changes, we might as well go ahead and make some changes in some other areas too. So that our Black and Brown brothers and sisters can feel like that their value and their voices are being heard.

Because they are and because we are experiencing injustice in places that particular people have been turning a blind eye to. And that's just got to go.

Emily Leiserson 49:09

One thing I think maybe I heard but I'm not totally sure is- there may be a gap between people who are really out there, striving to make change, and people who are saying they're in support of it, or releasing a statement in support of Black Lives Matter, but not necessarily putting their money where their mouth is. Do you have anything you would want to say to those people, or maybe advice for them, who are just doing the statement but not taking the next step?

Sha-Nel Henderson 49:54

Mmm. You know, how do you talk to somebody that ain't really trying to change? Let's have a meeting. Let's talk. You know, I think that sometimes people assume that it comes with this aggression. [Makes a raawwrrr.] But really it is the conversation. Because, I would like to know, what are you afraid of? Which fears that you don't want to change. Are you afraid the position will change? Are you afraid that money won't be distributed the same? Are you afraid that livelihood may shift and change? And perhaps it will. But it doesn't have to happen for the worse. You know what I'm saying. So I would like to say to them, whatever it is that you're afraid of, you probably should address that first. Whatever your personal biases are. It's important to address those parts. Because if you don't, you might turn into being in an illusion, thinking that you really are creating change when you're not. My father used to say, help should feel like help. And all that is is, Emily if you say to me "Sha-Nel, you know, I really just need you to pick me up from the airport. And you know you don't have to drive me out, you just have to pick me up, and I would really greatly appreciate it." And I say to you, "Emily, I can drop you off." That's not help to you. You didn't ask me to drop you off. You asked me to pick you up. That's the help that you need. I think that we have to start listening and being willing to open our hearts and minds to new ideas and new suggestions. And being willing to readjust those things so that we can really get down to the things that are bothering us on the inside. And that's what I was saying to them. When you think you're helping, ask the person you think you're helping if it's help.

Emily Leiserson 51:49

It seems so obvious.

Sha-Nel Henderson 51:53

Don't it though?

Emily Leiserson 52:00

Okay, so we're close to wrapping up, but I have a couple more questions. What do you imagine your life being like in a year? What do you hope it will be like? You know what does your imagination say about what the future is bringing?

Sha-Nel Henderson 52:23

Wow, I've thinking about that a lot. I would like to go get my Master's in Fine Art. In a classroom.

Emily Leiserson 52:34
In theater?

Sha-Nel Henderson 52:36

Yes, in theater. In a classroom setting, you know, or studio or however it operates. You know, I don't really know how it totally goes down. But I don't want to do it remotely. I don't want to gain that theater education remotely. Kind of like being a nurse online, I don't know. It has a stigma. So you know that's what I would ideally like. I would hope for. That I would be able to be moving in that direction.

Emily Leiserson 53:03

Oh, that's great. Oh, what a great goal, I hope that happens for you.

Sha-Nel Henderson 53:08

Me too.

Emily Leiserson 53:12

What would you like, if there's anything else you'd like to say on this. What would you like individuals or communities or leaders to keep in mind for the future?

Sha-Nel Henderson 53:25

Believe Black people. Believe them. Listen. Literally. I know that there are Black leaders and Black community leaders that do listen to their community, and they do meet their needs. I would ask that non-Black folks listen to Black folks. If you are working to do some type of change, even Allies, no one should be speaking on behalf of a Black or Brown person that is not Black or Brown. Because the experiences are not lived, and they must be lived to truly know how to address them. And so, I think that's very important. It's the listening. Active listening.

Emily Leiserson 54:18

Thank you. Yeah, that's very well put once again. Is there anything else that you would like to share? Any other questions that I haven't covered or comments?

Sha-Nel Henderson 54:32

No, you've been pretty thorough today.

Emily Leiserson 54:37

Thank you. Can you think of other people who I should try to talk to? If you think they would be willing to do this.

Sha-Nel Henderson 54:50

Let me see here. I do. I can. Yes, I can. Would you like me to send you their- like connect you two together?

Emily Leiserson 54:59

I would love that. Yeah, I would love that. So I will be doing these interviews through December at least, so there's plenty of time.

Sha-Nel Henderson 55:09

Excellent. Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Oh my goodness, do I.

Emily Leiserson 55:13

Oh good, I'm so happy to hear that.

Sha-Nel Henderson 55:15

Let me know what. Are you looking for one or two?

Emily Leiserson 55:20

As many as you want. As many people as- you know, let's start with one or two, but if there are more that you think would be great.

Sha-Nel Henderson 55:27

Absolutely, absolutely. For sure.

Emily Leiserson 55:31

Thank you. Yeah, I think that's everything. Thank you so much Sha-Nel.

Sha-Nel Henderson 55:44

You're welcome. Thank you for having me. I really appreciate this Emily.

Emily Leiserson 55:47

Oh, it's wonderful. It's a pleasure. I'm going to stop recording.