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Interviewee: Long, Nigel

Interviewer: Leiserson, Emily

Date: 2020-10-16

Transcribed by: OtterAI

Edited by: Leiserson, Emily

Byline: This interview was recorded as part of the COVID-19 Oral History Project, a project of the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute and its Cultural Ecologies Program.

Nigel Long works in education and volunteers his time as a community organizer in Indianapolis, Indiana. He speaks about organizing food distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic, working in civic education with young people, and organizing racial justice protests.

0:03

Leiserson, Emily (Interviewer)

Hello, we are recording. So, my name is Emily Leiserson. I'm here with Nigel Long, and it is Friday, October 16. We're both in Indianapolis, Indiana, although we are doing this remotely, obviously. So we're gonna get started by just reviewing the informed consent document for the project. So I'm gonna read that out to you and then you can just- there'll be a few opportunities where you can jump in if you have any questions about it, Nigel. That'll take about five minutes or so,

0:42

Long, Nigel (Interviewee)

Okay, great.

0:44

Leiserson, Emily

Thank you. So, this interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is associated with The Journal of the Plague Year, A COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. And right now this research group is focused on collecting oral histories that speak to the experience of racial justice, and racial justice movements and protests in particular, in the context of COVID-19. And when I say this research group, it's the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute research team.

We've designed this project so that professional researchers and the public can create and upload oral histories to an open access and open source database. That's called the Journal of the Plague Year. And the study is intended to collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19, as well as to help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. So these recordings, the demographic information associated with them, and the transcripts will be deposited into The Journal of the Plague

Year, A COVID-19 Archive, as well as the Indiana University Library System to be used by researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions so far?

2:22

Long, Nigel

No. Sounds cool.

2:24

Leiserson, Emily

Great, thank you.

2:25

Long, Nigel

Sounds like a virtual time capsule, a little bit.

2:36

Leiserson, Emily

Yes, exactly. It's a really cool project.

2:34

Long, Nigel

Definitely.

2:35

Leiserson, Emily

Taking part in the study is completely voluntary, so at any point you can choose not to take part. You can leave the study. And leaving the study would not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you're entitled. It wouldn't affect your current or future relations with Indiana University, IUPUI, or the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute. And participating in the project means that your interview will be recorded in digital and audio, and it will be transcribed. And so the recordings and the transcriptions, like I said a second ago, as well as any supplementary documents, if you want to share them, and the informed consent document that you signed will be deposited into the Journal of the Plague Year, A COVID-19 Archive, and the IU Library system, where they'll be available to researchers and the public. And so that also means that your name and other means of identification won't be confidential.

3:45

Leiserson, Emily

Any questions on that?

3:46

Long, Nigel

Makes sense.

3:47

Leiserson, Emily

Awesome. Thank you. Okay, so in addition to your signed document, could you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to the terms in that informed consent?

4:08

Long, Nigel

I understand and agree. Or do I need to say my name and like, hand up?

4:12

Leiserson, Emily

Oh no, that's fine. Thank you. And then, along with that, there's a license that's part of the informed consent. So you checked off a box for which license you preferred. And it looks like you checked the one that's more explicit - the second one. And so I'm just gonna read that one out loud.

4:41

Long, Nigel

Yeah, it was kinda long.

4:42

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, it is. Let's see how I get through it. So, the COVID-19 Oral History Project, The Journal of the Plague Year, 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 in US Copyright Law Section 107 of the US Copyright Act. Could you please confirm that you agree to allowing us to share your interview under this License?

6:06

Long, Nigel

Yes, ma'am. I agree.

6:08

Leiserson, Emily

Awesome. Now, that being said, I will try to share everything with you before it goes live so you will

have an opportunity to see it. And then finally, you said that you agreed to have your interview be made available to the public immediately. Could you just verbally confirm that as well?

6:32

Long, Nigel

Yeah, yeah. I do. I didn't know which one - I didn't know. I was like, "oh, whatever."

6:41

Leiserson, Emily

Almost everybody does that. It's just every once in a while there's a situation where someone wants to wait for a certain amount of time.

6:52

Long, Nigel

Makes sense. I'm nobody. I'm just Nigel.

6:55

Leiserson, Emily

That is not true, otherwise we wouldn't be interviewing you.

6:58

Long, Nigel

Right, right.

7:02

Leiserson, Emily

Awesome. Well thank you so much for going through that. So that's it for the informed consent, and now we can dig into the real interview. So let's get started. Just for the beginning, could you just tell me a little bit about yourself? That could be what you do on a day to day basis, where you work, what extracurricular activities you like.

7:29

Long, Nigel

Oh, for sure. Yeah. I work in education. I work for a company called Crossroads Education, which I think actually started, or got the origins of what the company does at IUPUI. So, do you know the MAC Center [Mathematics Assistance Center]?

7:48

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah.

7:50

Long, Nigel

So that's the origin; my boss created that. I work for that company, so I'm kind of tied to IUPUI in a way.

8:00

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, that's awesome.

8:02

Long, Nigel

For sure. Yeah. I love advocacy, and making sure that people are being spoken for. Community. I'm just really involved with anything that's a community, especially within the Black community. I think it's important that our young people see positive role models of all different kinds. So, I think a lot of times we see people that have went to college, and we're like 'okay, you know, that's what we want to do,' but I think kids need to understand that even if you don't necessarily go to college, you can still be a functioning member of society that gives back to the community. So that's kind of what I do. I'm that. Obviously you always encourage kids to go to school and to get whatever education they need. But I definitely think that a lot of the experiences I've gotten, especially this year, have been more impactful, and I've learned a lot more firsthand than some kids. As far as experience, when it comes to engaging communities, engaging kids where they are, engaging just people in general. I've just learned a lot about that. And I think that experience, definitely, I don't want to say it's better, but I definitely think I've gained a lot of experience in that this year. So that's a little bit about me. Into basketball. Into sports. Music is a really big thing; I DJ sometimes, getting into that. Learning and doing some events as well. But yeah, mainly focused on advocacy, youth, how can we provide youth with opportunities to advocate for themselves. And when can we listen, how can we create spaces where they feel okay to say what they need, so that we can do whatever it is. So that's a little bit about me I guess.

10:04

Leiserson, Emily

That's awesome. Yeah, that's a lot of things, and there are a few things I want to circle back to in a second, but can you tell me how your activities have changed to since the pandemic in 2020, if they have changed?

10:25

Long, Nigel

Yeah, it has. Everything's changed. I mean, obviously, being someone who enjoys engaging with students, it adds a layer of difficulty to that. Just because it's hard to- I'm a firm proponent of loving on kids and showing them that you care about them and showing them that whatever the adversity is that they face inside their normal everyday lives, that there's bigger things, and that they can overcome those things. So it's created several barriers within that for me. It's also created - I don't want to say opportunities - but I also have the chance to help do some really amazing things for our community because of the pandemic. And it brought to my attention issues that have already been existing and underlying in our communities. But they were complicated times ten. You know, when you're in the

middle of a global pandemic, and then we're also in the middle of the largest civil rights movement in the history of the world, you know, that also happened this year - it's hard to remember all the things that have happened.

So I mean, I think that to kind of say what I said earlier, I think like I gained a lot of skills out of this that are going to be translated, because we don't know how long this thing's gonna last. We don't know how long COVID is going to be here. How long will - you know I think now as of October 16, we've become very lax about things, almost to an uncomfortable level. But I think once the election is over and stuff happens, we'll slow back down.

But to answer your question, I would say it's changed a lot for me in good ways and in positive ways and in bad ways. Like I said, I think it brought my attention to some problems in our communities that were compounded by COVID, but then also I had really awesome opportunities to engage the community and help in the best way that I could. And I mean that felt really good and awesome too.

13:02

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah. So, would you mind telling me what your current projects are? Or even just one example of a current project with the kids that you're working on?

13:16

Long, Nigel

Well, so earlier in the year, when school let out - I think it was like the third - or not let out, school shut down. A week before our spring break. Or no, the Thursday before spring break. We were about to go - it was a Thursday, I remember, and we were about to go on spring break, like that Friday and be out of school for two weeks already. Or no, I can't remember. I'm sorry.

13:48

Leiserson, Emily

I think that's right. Yeah.

13:49

Long, Nigel

Something like that. But I'd already been talking to some parents - or students, or not parents - parents and teachers about how we could figure out ways where we can make sure that kids were going to make sure they had food over fall break. I'd been working really closely with the social worker at the school that I had been working at, which was Global Prep Academy, over on Sugar Grove - 22nd and Sugar Grove. I had been working there, and me and the social worker had been talking about 'okay these are the families that need to be receiving food, we'll send them home with gift baskets, so they have food over the two week break.' you know that, And so we were planning to do all that on like Friday. We got the message that school was going to be closed after all the kids had already left on a Thursday. And so for me that was just like, I think at first it was like 'okay cool.' And I don't think I even

really understood how serious COVID was at that point in time. But it was like 'okay how are we going to make sure these kids get fed?' So it was almost like 'okay, great, we're out of school for a couple extra days, a week early, and then we got spring break, so this is going to be awesome.' And I think by that Thursday afternoon or that Friday I was already just like, 'oh my gosh, like how are these kids going to be able to eat. And what are we going, you know, what are they going to eat?' Not only do they not have - not all of them but - not only do they not have to they have issues and food insecurities, you know, during the school year, when we're in school, and when we're able to help and provide resources for them. But now the one time that we were able to give them those resources to be able to make it through a break, we didn't have that opportunity! And so my mind just was running, and just like how can we try to figure out what we can do to make sure some of these kids get fed.

So I think I hit up maybe 10 of the people that I know within the community that were either doing urban farms, or that had experience with food insecurity, because I really wasn't- I knew it was an issue, and I knew it was something that was happening in our communities, obviously, because I was helping try to make sure kids had food, but I don't think I understood the magnitude of it, and how many people it really affected, especially being in a neighborhood that is smack dab in the middle of one of the largest food deserts in the city. So, through some conversations, ended up at Flanner House, and we're like okay. And with a couple community partners, Mat Davis with Axiom Collective, the Near Northwest Faith Partners, we all kind of were like 'okay what do we do?' [And the?] answers that I've gotten back from a lot of community partners was, 'Oh well, you know, Indy Parks is doing this meal thing where people can come and get meals.' Or, you know, 'you can go and get a meal here.' Or 'if you're under 18, you can go get a meal at Indy Parks.' And it's just like, 'okay, but we're really not solving the issue, especially if we're talking about kids here, who are at home, parents are still going to work at this point in time, because, you know, the government hadn't shut down.' So we're looking at thousands of kids being out of school, a percentage of those kids being in food insecure households, and then them being told 'Hey, you can go pick up some food from the park. You know not every one of our kids is within walking distance from a park. So, we're hanging out in this space, and 'hey if you're hungry, come and get it.'

And for me that's just not equitable. That doesn't solve the issue. And so, at the beginning of it, Cleo's Bodega is where we housed our operation at first. Like I said, we had some conversations with Flanner House, had some conversations with them. And we're like okay, what can we do? At first we were passing out snacks. Like ravioli and granola bars and stuff. And I'm just like, 'Okay, well this is what we have, we have to take whatever the amount is to families. And at that point we had probably 60 families that we kind of identified that were food insecure at Global Prep. It's probably about half and half, between Black and white, and Spanish-speaking households. So that kind of complicated things as well, trying to figure out where those families needed food. Like I said, I already had an existing relationship with the social worker, so we were like 'okay, you can help me identify which families need food; these are the families that you help anyway, and then we'll also just kind of put out messages to see what other families need food.' Like I said, we kind of compiled a list of about 60 families at that point in time. Cleo's said, 'Okay, well what we'll do is we'll shut down the grocery store and give food to the community, give our inventory to the community.' And so me and several teachers that I work with at

Global Prep, including the social worker, we decided that we're just going to load our cars with this food and take it directly to the families doing no-contact deliveries.

And, those are the things that, that's like a hero. When you think about it, you know. We always think about Superman or Batman, but those teachers are the people that were like- because I was kind of just like quarterbacking, like 'okay you go here, you go here, you go here.' But those teachers were the ones that really kind of put their- all of them were younger, lived by themselves, weren't at high risk, so they were like 'okay this is what we got to do. These kids need this food. This is what we have to do.' So we did that probably for about three weeks. We added another school. We reached out to all the schools in the area. So between George Washington Carver, Ignite Achievement Academy, Riverside High School, Vision Academy, and Global Prep. So there's like six schools right in that area, and we're like 'okay, what, what families need this help?' Obviously, and this is another conversation for another day, but the schools in that neighborhood aren't all just neighborhood schools anymore. So they're charters, innovation schools, and then a couple of neighborhood schools. [

21:30

Long, Nigel

[To cat.] Bro, you've got to go. That's not what we're gonna do. [To camera.] I'm sorry.

21:35

Leiserson, Emily

You're fine. no it's part of life, right?

21:40

Long, Nigel

Sorry. But we bring- okay, what, families, do you need? And like I said, those schools are charter schools, integration schools, and so those families don't always live right in that neighborhood. So it ended up being that we were delivering food across the city at this point. To different families. We ended up getting to create some really really awesome partnerships with some really awesome organizations and public partners in the city. So between Gleaners, Midwest Food Bank, and IndyGo, we were able to form a partnership. And so, with IndyGo, we were able to use- because obviously they had stopped to transit on their buses, so we were able to use IndyGo buses to deliver food to these different places, to these different families. To the point where- and I won't, I'll let you ask me questions, I'm sure you have some at this point. But, we started at Cleo's. Once we got a little bit bigger and our operation expanded, we ended up over at the Bradley Center over at First Baptist Church. And at the peak of it we were delivering 500 meals a week, between three or four schools. And then we were also doing hot meals that people just in the community could come and get. I mean, we're talking about not just like- when we started it was like spaghetti and meatballs and chicken pot pie and chicken and rice and tuna casserole. So we were giving people food that they could eat there for lunch, but then we can also give them food to take away for dinner, and so at the height of it we were feeding almost 1,000 families a week, between the families that we were - or not families - families and people. So we were doing seniors, we're doing you know people that were



just kind of out and about, that, really, at this point it's like COVID. If you're outside at this point, it's just like, 'okay, you probably need some kind of help.' So we did that. Was able to help to assist a coalition of churches, called the Near Northwest Faith Partners, and we partnered with them, and they were doing- so at six different churches throughout the week, they were doing meal cups and food box pickups that you'd come pick up. So I mean between partnership- I mean like truly the definition of what it means to take care of a community at that point in time, and not, you know there's a Bible verse that says 'when I was sick, you helped me; when I was hungry, you fed me; when I was not clothed, you clothed me.' You know, I'm not sure. But there's a verse that says that in the Bible somewhere, you can look it up. Don't quote me on which one it is.

Leiserson, Emily

25:02

I will. I'll look for it.

25:06

Long, Nigel

But seriously, I mean just really a true definition of what it means for a community to stand up. Between partners in faith, area, the education area, and then in just the community development- community area. You know, we were able to really step up and not just help the community in that immediate area, which was the near northwest side, so Martin Luther King over to Kessler down to 16th Street up to 38th street, that was the neighborhood that we kind of started in, but I mean it grew and became a city-wide thing where we were feeding families from as far west as Avon to as far east as Shadeland and Post Road to as far north as County Line Road and as far south as Beech Grove. So like, I mean, so many people that needed that extra assistance and that help, we were able to give them that help. Obviously, with food insecurity, but we were also able to try to help connect people with resources on how to keep themselves safe with COVID. We developed a way that we could do no-contact delivery, so it wasn't like we were going to drop off the food and like knock on the door 'hey we're here.' I mean literally, we would call and say 'hey we're about to drop your food box off.' One person on the bus passing the food box to the people, someone going running it out, putting it on the door, and we're getting back on the bus and moving on. I mean we got it down pat. I think that

I learned skills about logistics. And this is when I was talking about like I learned all these skills. I mean like, logistics, and understanding what it takes to feed a family. You know, like, you know, you don't want to give them all- you don't want to give people 50 packs of ramen noodles. You want to try to give them things that they can potentially make a meal with. And so like I spent a lot of time developing like, 'okay, we need a large bag of tortilla chips and we need some salsa, and we need some rice, and we need a....' Trying to put everything that they might need except the meat. You know what I mean? So that you they go and go get a meal out of whatever it is that we put in here. All they need to go get or try to find out is the meat, and then if they can't find the meat, then they can at least cook the things that we had put in the box. I know I've been talking for like 20 minutes. But I'm sure you have a lot of questions. That was the big kind of deal that I worked on this summer. And not only doing that but then also like kind of doing the social justice thing. And I'm sure you have some questions about that too.

28:00

Yeah.

28:01

Long, Nigel

Sorry.

28:02

Leiserson, Emily

No no no, that was fantastic. That's an amazing initiative, and it was great to hear how you tell the story. And one of my questions is, do you think that having that coalition that you had built and those skills that you had developed helped when you got into advocacy more, with the protest movement later on?

28:32

Long, Nigel

So for me, I would say no. Just because I think for me, I was one of those kids that was 16 years old going to the school board meetings, disgruntled about certain things. Or where there was a time when- I've always been doing social action and community service. And, I don't know what to say, civil disobedience, I'll call it. I've always been kind of one of those rebels that's always kind of been into that. So when Dreasjon Reed died on March 6, or not March 6, it would have been May 6.

29:26

Leiserson, Emily

May 6, yeah.

29:28

Dreasjon Reed was murdered. Let me say it correctly- not died, when Dreasjon Reed was murdered by IMPD on [May] 6, by Dejure Mercer on [May] 6 of 2020, we were- it wasn't a second thought to whether we needed to jump into action and and do something and make our voices heard. So, for me, I would say, I think it might have just given me more of a passion, because you see the disparities that we face in our communities every day. We see how much resources go to IMPD every day, and for them to the people that are supposed to, are charged with protecting and serving us. When you see millions and millions and millions and millions of dollars go to an organization, or go to a public entity, not not an organization, a public office, a public space. I think it just kind of made me even more mad, or impassioned, about these things. You see where the need is, you see where we're leading. I mean even now on October 16, you know, we're at 180-something murders for the year. And when you talk about what does it look like to prevent crime, it's like well you know, how about we try to solve the inequities that people face on a daily basis, as opposed to continuing to kill? Regardless, right, wrong, or indifferent. You know what I mean, it doesn't matter. Even that weekend there was- I remember it like it was yesterday. May 6, May 7. It came out that there were three people killed by IMPD within a 24 hour time frame. There was Dreasjon Reed, there was McHale Rose, and there was a woman who was

pregnant. And so four people, because the pregnant woman and her baby got hit by a police car. So it's just like when that level of violence is issued against the community, and then, when I'm also at this point in time, I'm actually doing the work necessary to help to fight those inequities with little to no resources. You know what I mean. And then you see that IMPD is getting another \$7 million, or whatever it is. 200, you know, basically one third of our city's budget goes to IMPD. It's like well what do they do to prevent that crime? I guess I say all that to say, when I was working in that arena of really engaging our community, not just engaging like passing these people a box, but seeing where my students lived, you know really getting a true peek into what life my students, some of my students, go through and what they live on a daily basis. And I'm not even talking about being able to go into the - I'm saying, talking about walking, riding past the home and being like, 'oh my god like you, you live like this? I understand why you come to school and there's so many things that are complicated when it comes to you acting right.'

But when you see that on a daily basis. And then you were forced to switch gears almost, still thinking about this and still doing this, but you're captivated by the passion and the anger and the frustration that it is to see someone that is your age, your.... You know, I am Dreasjon Reed. [It's easy to see] Dreasjon Reed as anyone else. And so to see that, and to see the blatant disrespect of that person, for someone to say 'oh closed casket.' Or someone that's a paid employee, that is designed to protect that young man, stands over him and says closed casket. You know like, it's just like those kinds of things, it just, it does something to you to where it's- and I will, I will almost say that we become hardened to that. Or you know like it doesn't do anything. But because this was here, and because this was in Indianapolis, and because I had friends who knew Dreasjon personally, and to see how they were hurting, and to see his mother hurting, and to see just our community hurting, and there really to be a- I mean, even to this day, there's been a lack of empathy about that murder. The civil disobedience happened a month after Dreasjon Reed had died on May 6. you know, George Floyd died on, it was like Labor Day.

34:35

Leiserson, Emily

Right around the end of May. Yeah.

34:38

Long, Nigel

It was like, 'man!' I remember sitting with some friends and just like 'well did you see this George Floyd thing?' And it's just like, you know, and that's when people exploded here. And so to see that like that pain almost be ignored, which is the same pain that you know his mother felt, which is the same pain that George Floyd's family felt, which is the same pain that Breonna Taylor's family felt. You know, for all these things to continuously happen while I'm literally trying to actively engage our community in a more positive way. You know it's frustrating. I mean, for sure. I hope that answers your question. I don't know what else.

35:22

Leiserson, Emily

No, that's great. No, that was awesome, absolutely it answers the question. Yeah, one thing that other people I've talked to have said is that it's hard because in this moment that we're living in, you're both feeling seen and not seen at the same time.

35:43

Long, Nigel

Absolutely, yeah. There was an article in The Indy Star about all the work that we're doing, literally around the same time. And then someone that is just like me, that maybe doesn't, he was light skinned, he doesn't look exactly like me, but someone that looks like me, who was the same age as me, for that person to be taken away in such a violent and disgusting way. You know it does something, it literally, it does something to you and not like a, it's not a good thing. I'm not saying that I'm one for violence against police officers, but you know what, McHale Rose, the video that he put out before he died was, I got to take, I don't know exactly what he said and I'm not gonna try to quote what he said. But his sentiment, and I feel that sentiment, because it's like man like at what, at what point do these murders of our people stop? What do we have to do in order to stop it? Because it's not a killing, and you know people always love to throw, 'Oh, white people were killed at a higher proportionate rate than Black people by police.' It's just like, 'Yeah,' and I know this for research purposes, 'but that's bullshit.' It's a slap in the face almost, and then obviously when we have a president, and we're in the regime where we are now, you know, it almost feels like it's open season on us. When when Breonna Taylor's killers, not- they get let off. Or when this Derek Chauvin guy, or whatever his name in Minneapolis, when he's able to go and be a member of another police department. Or when Indianapolis's Mayor, when their City Council, when their Chief of Police, when the President of FOP have all been silent about the murder that we all witnessed on camera, you know, how else is someone supposed to view it at this point? You know, what other - and this is coming from someone who has context on all this stuff. I was protesting in 2016, when Philando Castile and Alton Sterling died. That was my introduction into- I don't want to say introduction into- but that was my first time kind of stepping out of my own and doing some kind of civil disobedience. And so taking the things that I've learned from that four year timespan up until now, it's like nothing's different. Because, you know, nothing's changed but the story, but the name. You know, nothing's changed. And I don't know if I see what the solution is to that problem. I mean, but I do know that something has to be done. At some capacity, even just the basic human empathy that people should have to be able to see like, oh, like, it wasn't.... It's almost crazy, because, this is so funny, Dave Chappelle tells a joke about, like, about Rodney King, or I don't know if it's Rodney King, but he tells a joke that was like, you know, white people didn't believe that police brutality was a problem until they saw it in Newsweek. You know, and then they were like, it's like 'wow, honey. It seems like they're beating Black people like pancakes, like hotcakes.' And so it's like you know, but the thing is even with all this information, beyond Newsweek, we're talking about every major publication has something about these police brutality going on. There's information, there's data, there's facts, there's all this stuff, and the people in power still can't seem to realize that this is a problem and an issue. And so, I mean, it's frustration, it's anger, it's disappointment, it's that sadness and that depression. It's all those feelings in one, and then not only as someone who works with kids, right, not only do I see myself in those situations, but I see the children that I that I teach and mentor on

a daily basis. I'm like, 'gosh, if you can't get your stuff together I'm so scared about what this world has in store for you.' You know what I mean. And even my, I have a three year old son, the same thing. It's just like 'man, how can I...' And I guess it's not even how can I, it's like, 'I will not stop doing the things that I'm doing until this world is a better place for my son, and for the kids I work for, the kids I work with.' It's a whirlwind of feelings, I guess I could say.

41:00

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah. So then taking those feelings and moving into the protest, what does the protest mean to you? What does it mean to, why do you choose to protest?

41:30

Long, Nigel

I think for me, I think that, like I said, I've always been one that's into fighting whatever the power is. It doesn't matter what it is, it could have been my middle school principal, up until you know right now it's [Indianapolis Mayor] Joe Hogsett and the government. And, I would have been happy to be a rebel at whatever point for me. It doesn't really take much, I guess, to get me fired up and like, 'Yeah! No! Screw that!' So my feeling going into it is and why is, it's like I feel like it's my duty, almost, like it's a job. And I think that this is how it is either way, whether it's this or community service. I feel like those things are duties that I have as a person in our community, right? So like my grandfather, whose parents were sharecroppers, he would always tell me about the story of his perspective from Emmett Till. Right? So hearing him talk about how, and my grandmother too. They both are born in some backwood Mississippi somewhere. You know what I mean, I think Oklahoma, Mississippi is where they say that they're from. And so hearing him talk about Emmett Till right? So he was a boy at this point in time, right, and he's like, and my grandmother, they both tell the story, but they would say that when that happened down there, that my grandmother would say she had eight brothers and sisters or something like that. She said that her mother did not even feel comfortable letting the boys out of the house. Because they were so scared of what might happen to them. So hearing them talk about that. Right? Hearing my dad, who was a minister and a pastor, hearing him talk about my other grandfather, who was a DPW worker. He was actually one of the, in - I couldn't tell you the year - in one of those years I think when Richard Lugar was the governor. They had organized a strike against the, you know, whatever the case may be, I don't know the exact story, but the wages. So he led a strike, you know, to the point where Richard Lugar sent police officers to my grandfather's house. Threatening to arrest him if they didn't hold off this strike. To my dad who, like I said, has been an active and vocal proponent against racism and against these systems of oppression. So I guess I could say it's just in my, I feel like it's just my duty. All those things, right? And my grandfather and our talks of like, man it's really crazy, because when you, it's.... And this is gone off on a tangent. I'm sorry. But it's almost crazy generationally, how Black people almost - and I don't want to say exactly, but how they feel towards protesting in general. So my grandfather's generation, who's 76, right, something like that. He's seen these different iterations of racism over time, right, since he was a boy. You've been seeing these different iterations of racism. You've seen, oh, you know, things like Ronald Reagan, you've seen the 1994 crime bill, you've seen Rodney King, you've seen, you know. And now you're seeing the same things, except now you're

getting videos of those things, you know his sentiment is like yeah burning that shit down! You know, like, whatever, burn it down, right? To where you have my dad who's more like, who is, you know, 50-something, and they grew up where they had opportunities to go to college. Black people at that point in time had achieved a status in the country to where we could go to school, and it was a norm. To where we could go to work, people were able to work in a factory or do whatever their job was - I don't want to say factory - do whatever their job was, be able to buy a house, own a house, have however many kids, and send those kids to college. Coming from that generation, I don't want to say they're passive, but they're almost to the point where it's like, 'okay, we can make it work. We got to play the game, we got to be strategic about how we do certain things.' And then you come to my generation, which is I would say like 40 and under, and they're like, I feel like a lot of us are like the same, like my grandpa. It's like 'burn that down.' Like no! We can't, we have the facts, we have the data, we have the videos, we have the evidence that this system is inherently racist. You know like, 'No, we- I do not want to partake in this, I want to burn it down, because that's what needs to happen. I do not want to sit at the table. I want to flip the table over.'

You know, so like, it's weird, and I know that was a weird kind of iteration, but I guess this just goes back into - I think it's just my duty. Like, it just doesn't, it's not, I don't look to get paid. Or I'm not looking to get any- for me, what I'm getting out of this is that my son can have a better life as a Black man in this country. So that's kind of where I'm at with that. I guess it's just my duty. It's what I'm supposed to do. It not a 'Oh shoot, do I need to go protest?' It's like 'okay, what time and where, and what are we doing?' So that's kind of what it is for me, I guess.

48:54

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, that makes a whole lot of sense. Don't apologize. It's great. No, it's really interesting. Everything you've had to say is very interesting, so thank you. This isn't exactly on my list of questions, but I'm curious, especially since your dad is a pastor. What do you think the role is for religious institutions in this movement, or is there? Or just for religion?

49:29

Long, Nigel

Yeah. I think that, for one, I can speak specifically to Christians. I can't speak to any other [religion]. But, I mean, when you think about the type of person that Jesus Christ was, right, you think about the people that he associated himself with. If you think about that he was hanging out with the fishermen, and the tax collectors, and he was going to hang out with the prostitutes, Mary Magdalene. He was going to hang out with, you know, he was in spaces where he was just with the people. you know what I mean. When do you think about Jesus 'You're like man like Jesus would have been Black Lives Matter.' You know, when you think about it. So I mean if we're followers of Christ, and we're followers of that person, then I think that that person who hung out with the the lowest of the low and talked about justice and went into the church to flip over tables because they were not doing what they were supposed to be doing in the church, or who converted the Roman soldier. When you think about that man, if that's what you're basing, if your job is to follow that man as a Christian, then I think you follow in the ideas and the

revolutionary footsteps that he left behind. You think about, you know, his death. Even the way he was crucified, you think about that. That's persecution. That is what it feels like to be a Black person in this [country at this] time. And I'm not saying we're crucified. But you know when a person is killed, or when a person is murdered- Because when you think about the - and I don't want to get too into the weeds on this - but when you think about a crucifixion, it was, it was a public death, right. It was a way that people were publicly shamed and embarrassed. There are parallel crucifixions to me. And I think to anybody that really cares, right. There's parallels to crucifixions in the way that people are murdered on camera, and we're all subject to watch it. It's just as traumatizing, it is just as violent, there's no difference to me. And so when you think about that, and you think about Jesus being Black Lives Matter, and you think about Jesus in the context of being a Black Lives Matter person, or at least the context of what that is - and it's fighting for justice and equality and equity and all those things - you know, those are the things that Jesus fought for. Every Christian in my mind should be following those footsteps. That we stand up to the system, that we stand up to the tradition and the way that things have been. That's what he did when he stood up to the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the Bible. He stood up to the government and the tradition and the way that things were, and the status quo. He stood up to those things. And so for me, the church, his role in that, the modern day church should be the same. You still fight for equity, you still fight for equality, you still fight for justice, you still fight for freedom. Whatever, freedom, quote unquote, in the context of this freakin country. But, you know, freedom in that context. But yeah, I mean I think it's the church's job to do that. And then even if you look at how integral the church was in the civil rights movement in the 1960s. And if we're not talking about just Christians, but even if you're talking about just social movements in general, you look at the the Nation of Islam and the way that they've been able to organize and talk about justice and talk about, what equality, you know, what it looks like to be a Black person in this country. And what that did for Black people at the time. I think there is a role.

Now, I will say that the church isn't the only way, as it was- I feel like back in the 1960s, and in the Civil Rights movement, it was much easier to kind of fit into one of those two pots as a Black person. I think now there's a spectrum of Black people. And so it's hard to try to say that the church- At that point in time, I think the church and the movement spoke for a lot of people. I don't think that that's the truth nowadays. I think it is for a certain group of people. But it's like the church in the 1960s speaks for the monolith of Black people as a whole, as it did at one point in time. And that's just because there's so much diversity of being Black nowadays. I mean whether you're, like I said, there's a spectrum of Blackness, I feel like, and so wherever you fit in on that spectrum, you know.

But I do think that it's still the church's job. And that's not just for white or Black. I think white churches need to, and have, there are some that have stepped up and done their due diligence of speaking out against the injustice and the systemic oppression that's happening in this country. So, yeah, I hope that answers your question.

55:40

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, absolutely. That's great. No, I wish I could find a WWJD BLM sticker.

55:50

Long, Nigel

Oh right, yeah. That might be something that we get going.

55:55

Leiserson, Emily

Right, that would be. That totally makes sense to me. Okay, well I do want to ask what you have seen your role as, or what your experience has been in organizing protests or participating in them?

56:13

Long, Nigel

Oh, man. I would say, for me, I personally am a person that likes to make sure that everything is logistically okay. So whether that's making sure that our perimeters is good, making sure that our- that we have the fliers that we need to be able to pass out, making sure that we have water or medical supplies, milk. I have all that stuff, walkie talkies if need be. I think those are.... But I think the biggest role that any organizer can play in a protest is educating people on why they're protesting. Because I think that a lot of people come to protest because of the phenomenon of a protest. And so, for me, the goal of a protest- I know why I'm there, but I think the goal of a protest for me is: did I do a good enough job of explaining the true issues? Because a lot of people come down there with a lot of raw emotion when you're protesting. So you feel a certain way, or you're angry, or you're upset, or you're sad, or you're going, you're feeling that. So it's figuring out how to funnel those emotions towards the causes. So whether that's a list of demands that we're educating people on, or whether that's history of a certain thing that we're educating people on, or even here in Indianapolis, one of the things that we did a lot was educating people on defund/re-fund. So a defund, and educating them on what a defund looks like, and then saying, talking about how I think one of the biggest things that I would, and I use this all the time when talking about defunding - so my thing would be like, 'Okay, you know, we want to defund the police.' People are like 'well what do you mean when you're talking about defining the police?' 'Well, when we're talking about defunding the police, we're saying we want to defund the police and put that back into community services and neighborhood services and things.' And so a big part of that was saying 'okay well how much?' The question I would ask people was 'okay well how much of the city's budget, what percentage of the city's budget, do you think, goes towards IMPD and police?' People be like 'I don't know.' One third, 25, you know, the percentage is like 25 or 26%, something like that. And I'd be like, 'okay well, how much of the money or the budget actually goes back towards neighborhood services, crime prevention, health services, food insecurity, all these buckets of things that need money to do well?' And people are like, 'I don't know.' And then you tell them that it's 3% of our city's budget goes towards neighborhood services. And you can look that up. That is on our city's website. That's a shock to a lot of people, and so it's educating people on things like that, and things that they wouldn't necessarily know. Or that 'hey, like, did you know that the the review board,' and now it's a little bit different, but at the time it was 'Hey, did you know that the review board for the police Review Board is made up of two people from the City Council, people that the mayor selects, and people that the chief of police selects? And there's no one that represents the community on those boards?' Or



those things, or those votes. Like the community doesn't get a vote. It's people that have the interest in themselves, like not themselves, but the interest of other entities, and it's not putting the community first in those conversations. So it's educating people on things like that, so that they can have an understanding, so that they can go back and tell them like 'I learned this today at the protest, I did not know this, I need to go tweet about it, I need to go tell my friends about it, I need to tell my mom, I need to go....' You know what I mean. I think when you're protesting, I think as someone who's an organizer, you know you're making your voices heard, you're advocating, but we're also using the opportunity and that chance to educate a new group of people so that they have a better understanding of protesting. And why it's important that we sustain a protest. And why it's important that not only do we protest but we do whatever civic action is needed to take that. So whether that's showing up at City County council meetings, or whether that's voting, or whether that's, you know, whatever the case may be, whatever the civic duty is or whatever blah blah blah blah blah. That we're educating people on how they can do that and do those things.

1:01:35

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, absolutely. W groups were you mainly working with, or are you mainly working with?

1:01:41

Long, Nigel

So I'm a member of the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance. So, I work with them directly. And, yeah, that's the group that I work with. We support anyone that's doing - not anyone - but we support other groups that are doing thing. So obviously we've done things with Indy 10 Black Lives Matter in the past, and SURJ [Standing Up for Racial Justice]. We worked with Faith in Indiana. We work with.... And it's not just groups that are doing Black Lives Matter stuff. So the Indiana Racial Justice Alliance, we have I think it's three or four issue campaigns, which are criminal justice, voting rights, immigration, and now I think they're adding a health, public health committee. So we have these different committees that we form, of different organizations and different people, to do different things. I specifically have been a part of the criminal justice group. And there's different, like I said, there's different organizations that we work with and partner with. Allies for Action is another group that we work with as well. Yeah, so we just want to make sure that the organizers are being generally organized. So that it's not just we're out here at a protest one day and then everyone goes home, and we're like okay cool. But like, 'Okay, what are the what are the actions? What are the things that we need to do? How can we, what is it that you can do after this protest? Or in between time? We have lawyers that are a part of the group, we have different, other people that are part of the group to kind of fill out and make sure we're looking at it from a holistic standpoint of making sure that we're fighting injustice in the right way. Fighting injustice in a way that we can win the fight, at least at some points. But then also keeping those sustained actions and those sustained movements going as well.

1:03:59

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, make sense. So, what about the pandemic has concerned you the most?

1:04:07

Long, Nigel

Oh, Lord. Just being Black. Just to be frank. I think IUPUI actually did a study earlier in the year that declared racism was a public health issue.

1:04:25

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, I remember that. Yeah.

1:04:26

Long, Nigel

And so, and it was, actually it was a resolution by the City County Council, too. So it is a, everyone knows that race, that being Black in Indianapolis, you have a higher chance of being - [sound cuts out] that concern me about COVID, in general, is just that there are people, people that I know, family members, people that I don't know, people that I've met doing work in the community, that are more likely to die from COVID or complications due to COVID than I think any other swath of people. You know what I mean? I don't know, like any other subsection or race, I guess, of people. So I think that's the most concerning, or the thing that worries me the most. I'm also worried about-. I have a grandmother who's older and who has health complications, and so obviously that.

School. I mean, like, I've been doing Virtual School for the past month and a half. I'm actually planning to go back on Monday, which I'm not sure how I completely feel about. But it's just those things. I guess, bigger picture, why haven't I, and I guess this isn't a concern, but it's a true question of why haven't we, as a country, tested nationwide? Why? Why has that not been a requirement? I think that's the thing. I definitely-. As someone that's on the front lines and that's doing work, you know, even when the country was shut down, I felt like an essential worker at that point in time, because we were still delivering food and making sure people could eat. You know, so obviously you know, if I had it, contracted it at one point in time or another, just like what does that look like? And how does that affect my just life in general? I guess more so just questions of why we haven't handled it accordingly. I mean, why haven't we followed some of the other countries in the world that have? And obviously I don't think there's anything you can do about stopping a protest.

I think one of the other things is the misinformation about the virus. On both sides, left or right, just general misinformation, which has become a part of our political landscape, I guess. Misinformation, I think that just deserves its own bucket. On both sides, once again on both sides. But, yeah. So I mean I guess those are the things that kind of concern me.

1:08:16

Leiserson, Emily

And I certainly don't want to get to the end of this without talking more about what you're doing with kids. You mentioned right at the beginning that you want to create space for them. So what does that

look like?

1:08:27

Long, Nigel

I think what my goal is - and this is not - this is a secret. I don't want to say a secret, but this is still in the works. So, don't tell anyone. Wait, you are gonna tell everyone. Never mind. No, I don't mind. I think trying to figure out how we can create a system either within our schools or outside of our schools, where we are civically engaging and educating parents, teachers, and students around issues that they care about. More specifically, the students.

I did TeenWorks this year. So I facilitated a TeenWorks team, which if you don't know what TeenWorks is, it's an organization that allows kids.... It gives them the opportunity to work throughout the summer, so they can gain some money. We also train them on some job skills. But actually get them out in different community spaces, different businesses, different other entities, to where they can gain these skills, but then also they're getting paid, so they're working. I think the program sounds pretty self explanatory: TeenWorks. So the teens work. But I think one of the things that came up during those conversations - I would always host and have conversations with my students about, you know, just everything. One day we had a conversation about what, and these are all kids that are 14 to 18, so sophomores in high school up to seniors. So we had a conversation about what COVID looks like. What e-learning looks like for them was the question. And so we did an activity called what went well, what didn't go well, and what could be better. And so having those conversations with them. Talking about and talking through what they didn't like from teachers. And you know, you would think that from kids - a normal person would think they're from kids you would get snobby answers that would say, 'Oh, you know, I don't want to do elearning.' Or 'I don't want to wake up in the morning.' Or whatever, right. But the group of kids that I had came up with the most practical solutions for engaging themselves and holding their teachers accountable. Because that's a lot of what came up, was 'teachers aren't as responsive,' or 'teachers aren't as inclusive,' or whatever. And so, we had this conversation. They came up with these practical things and these practical solutions. And so I asked them another question, and I asked 'Okay, well have any of your guys's schools provided a feedback loop for you guys, to where you guys could give them feedback on how the year went, and what they could do better?' None of them, out of 15 students in the room, none of them were able to answer, raise their hand and say 'yes, my school reached back out to me and asked me how [things went]. Right? And you know, you're taken aback almost by that.

And so hearing that, and having more conversations with them, it's like, how can we create something to where- we always talk about how kids are partners in their education and how 'Oh well, you know, you're partner in your education.' It's like 'no, let's create a system or school or place where kids really have that partnership in their education, to where it's not just they come to school and are institutionalized to see what it is, whatever the end goal of learning is. I think my biggest issue with our schools is that we are built to, they're designed to- How do I say this? They're designed to uniform the kids. They're designed to put them all in a box, where, as I feel like a part of education should be that self discovery and that uniqueness. And how can we better serve you as a student? And I'm not saying

that I personally have the answers. I think I have a possible general solution, which is to talk to the smartest and most innovative generation that has ever existed. You know what I mean. And ask them how they feel about things. I mean, yeah, I guess that's kind of my long term mission, is to try to develop and work on how can we engage students where they're at. Not just in a way that we're engaging them to do an activity, but hey let's engage you to that you have a say-so, and it may not be like, 'Oh, you know let's let the kids run wild and let them run the school.' But let's start small, let's say, 'Okay, come up with lunchroom rules.' You know what I mean. 'And you guys are going to abide by your own lunchroom rules. And we're gonna see how it goes.'

And we allow them that space to learn, and if it gets too loud and then you know if there's trash leftover it's like, 'Okay, well, you know that that's part of what you guys have to deal with is who gets selected to pick up.' And what does that look like? And I mean, like I said, I'm kind of just talking right now, but I think that's just an example on how on a small scale you try to give students that feel of a partnership. Because I feel like anytime someone has a sense of ownership within anything, they're going to take it ten times more seriously. And I feel like that with my, I went to Shortridge High School, Shortridge Law and Public Policy Magnet. This is crazy and this is a whole nother topic for another day, if you ever want to talk about public schools and public education, call me. I would love to talk to you about that. But I went to this school where we had a choice in some of the things that we wanted. We had a student court system, like a real, like I was a prosecuting attorney for the student court at my school. So we were trying cases. And that gives you that sense of like, 'Oh my gosh, like wow.' And we had a jury, so you're getting tried by your literal peers in these cases. In a school where we taught civic engagement and civic education, which is like not civic education of who you need to vote for and what you need to vote for, but like civic education on how to be a literal citizen in this country, and how to do it effectively. And not just like 'Look, why are local elections so important?' You know, why are local elections honestly a little bit more important than the presidential election? You know like, why? And how does that affect you, and like why is the school board so important? And why is the school board that is being bought here in Indianapolis, why is it so important that we as a community stand up and fight against that? You know what I mean. So there's so many issues that we can engage kids with. If we try to tell them and talk to them and say, oh, and you you, because I've had it done to me before. Oh, you don't know anything. As a 26 year-old, there'll be grown men telling me what I know about whatever. And it's just like 'okay but you didn't even give me a chance to find out what I know because you automatically just shut off because I'm younger than you.' It's just like, 'That's ridiculous.' Especially today, when like I said we have the smartest, most equipped generation of people, right there, that know how to use all this technology, that know how to create social. I mean it was, it was kids who bought up all those tickets at the Donald Trump rally. Like kids, who were like 'yeah, we're gonna we're gonna buy up all these tickets.' You know, ha, like those are children. So you're telling me that you can't organize and revolutionize and teach them about equity at a young age, and teach them about inclusion at a young age, and teach them why it's important. And I'm not talking about the basic inclusion package - you have to care for everybody - but no like why. And have those conversations. Because they know what's going on. They see all the stuff that's going on. They see the killing. They see the police brutality, they see COVID, they see all these things. And these things are affecting them firsthand. Why would we not engage them and see hey, 'how do you guys feel about this?'

1:18:21

Leiserson, Emily

Absolutely. That's awesome. Okay, we're almost out of time, so I'm sorry about that. Couple quick questions. So I skipped over demographics, but, you know, if you were to think about demographic categories, age, race, gender identity, how do you typically describe yourself?

1:18:51

Long, Nigel

Black male. Yeah, Black male.

1:18:58

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, it's just that simple, but you know I always want to ask.

1:19:01

Long, Nigel

My son calls me dad, so I guess I'm that too.

1:19:05

Leiserson, Emily

And a dad, perfect. And what is your zip code?

1:19:12

Long, Nigel

46226.

1:19:16

Okay, that's just helpful for when you're talking about organizing in the neighborhood. That helps.

1:19:18

Long, Nigel

Oh, of course. Well yeah so the neighborhood that I was actually organizing was 46218 though.

1:19:27

Leiserson, Emily

Okay, got it. Yeah. Okay. Thank you for clarifying that.

1:19:34

Long, Nigel

Of course, absolutely.

1:19:31

Leiserson, Emily

Awesome. Is there anyone else who you think would be really good for an interview like this?

1:19:43

Long, Nigel

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I can, I can. Yeah, absolutely, I can. What would what would be the best way to connect you with those people?

1:20:00

Leiserson, Emily

If you could just email us together to connect us that would be awesome. Or you could send me their information, and I could just say that you gave it to me.

1:20:13

Long, Nigel

Yeah, absolutely. There's a couple that I'll probably just send you their emails and let you email them, but there's a couple that I can connect you with for sure. There's a couple other people with RJ who've had some interesting experiences. And then off the top of my head, there's a young man who, his name is Juwann. And he actually is a videographer, and he has been, he has his own kind of COVID-19 stories that he's kind of telling. So I think that it'd be really interesting for you to be able to interview him, as it's like, I mean he's captured literally from March, he was capturing me doing food stuff, early. And then also was doing social justice, or not social justice, but he caught some of the protest stuff too. And like really good stuff from the protest, I don't think his stuff has come out yet, but I definitely think that would be someone who you might want to talk to in regards to, you know everything that's going on.

1:21:21

Leiserson, Emily

Absolutely yeah that sounds amazing. How do you spell his name?

1:21:28

Long, Nigel

J-U-W-A-NN. I cannot think of his last name. I know him, but I can, I'll make sure you guys get in touch. I'll get his email and let him know that I'll be connecting you.

1:21:50

Leiserson, Emily

That's awesome.

1:21:51

Long, Nigel

He'd be a really good person.

1:21:54

Leiserson, Emily

Yeah, because we didn't really get to this. But one of the things that I like to try to talk to people about is arts and expression and how that's an important part of the politics.

1:22:01

Long, Nigel

Oh for sure, yeah. I could give you a whole nother couple hours on that. But yeah, no. I told you I like to talk. I'm sorry.

1:22:14

Leiserson, Emily

No, no, no, no, no. This is fantastic, everything you said is great. No worries. Is there anything else that you want to talk about before we go?

1:22:26

Long, Nigel

Not that I can just shoot. Like I said your questions are really good, and you left them open ended so I could just blah blah blah blah blah. I'm good at that.

1:22:41

Leiserson, Emily

It's great, it's great. We may have other opportunities, too.

1:22:50

Long, Nigel

You know how to get in contact with me now. So absolutely. No, I appreciate this opportunity, seriously. This was awesome.

1:22:58

Leiserson, Emily

This has been great. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

1:22:56

Long, Nigel

Yes ma'am. Let me know. I'll send over those names. I gotta run and go pick up my girlfriend but once I sit down, I'll think about it and send some.

1:23:13

Leiserson, Emily

Awesome, thank you so much. And thank you so much for your time.

1:23:15

Long, Nigel

Of course. Thank you, appreciate ya.

1:23:17

Leiserson, Emily

Take care, bye.