

Amaya Lyn Melendez interviewed by Bryant Acevedo
November 7, 2020
New York, New York

Bryant Acevedo: My name is Bryant Acevedo and I'm interviewing Amaya over the phone in New York, New York on November 7, 2020. Do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history project?

Amaya Melendez: Yes, I do.

BA: Please state your name, your age, your occupation...

AM: My name is Amaya Melendez, I'm 21 and... Can I just say my associate's degree?

BA: Yeah... Your occupation, yes... Go ahead...

AM: I'm doing Human Services

BA: Alright! Your racial identity?

AM: I'm Puerto Rican, Hispanic

BA: Okay... Your gender identity?

AM: Female

BA: This is weird, but go ahead... Sexual orientation?

AM: Basic

BA: Where are you from?

AM: I'm from Brooklyn, Bed-Stuy New York

BA: Okay! Brooklyn, Bed-Stuy New York. I like that.

AM: Yea

BA: So, tell me the long story of how you and your family ended up in New York City. I know you was born here, but just overall like from the minute that you felt like you was able to... You know what life is basically...

AM: That's actually a good question

BA: That is an amazing question!

AM: All I know is my grandparents came here, I don't know what age. All I know is both my parents both have their parents from Puerto Rico. I mean, I love Puerto Rico, I used to go there and visit every summer. It was a little different, like a different atmosphere cause' everything is more natural there and you actually see the stars at night. You have neighbors that seems to be actually nicer like I notice when you go either DR or Puerto Rico, they... The most that you meet them... They just have open arms, they treat you like your family, they show you love and that's not really what you get in new york city cause' people are kind of selfish like they don't really care to open up.

BA: I get what you confront, New York has that rude personality...

AM: Yea, like... it's always, "*what are you looking at?*" Like if you're looking at somebody, they be like, "*what are you looking at?*" It's judgemental and that judgemental leads to envy; jealously.

BA: Would you say like growing up in New York City... How do you have like tough skin?

AM: I don't know... I mean I grew up in Bed Stuy. So, I guess in a way it has kept me aware of the street cause' you always have to be careful and it's not only of where I live, it's like, I also have to think about... like my parts, you know what I'm trying to say but it's like since I'm a female is like is hard for females cause' they get harassed and assaulted. I guess in a way it has always kept me a little alert by my surroundings.

BA: For sure, for sure... Do you feel like that has helped you overall? Not only that, but just growing up in New York City has helped to talk more to people cause' you see, how tough skin you have to be when coming into an environment with certain people and then with certain people on the train... And being able to just maneuver through the roughest of New York.

AM: Honestly no I don't feel like I'm the type of person that suited New York. I'm not the type of person that starts. I'm not the type of person to engage in any type of anger.

BA: No, not engage, not engage but I just meant like in overall, you know growing up here at least for me it was always like having to know how to maneuver in certain environments. At least for

me like I had, you know... I feel like this is the overall statement for anybody like born and raised in the New York City. But, it's like you feel me and your own personal hood, you walk in certain way, you talk a certain way or like I don't know like... It's more overall like with the city we come from like is either you fight for yours or you get stomped out and that's like... It's not meant to be taking it in a literal sense, but it's like more a speak up for yourself because no one else will. That's the city where we come from... So alright, we are going to keep it going to the next couple of questions. Tell me how has the Coronavirus changed your life or impacted your life?

AM: That's such a good question, I feel like everybody could say something about this.

BA: Yea, that's such an amazing question. I'll let you go first, I'll speak my piece later.

AM: For me Covid really affected me cause' in my family we don't really talk. So during Covid I really realize who's there for me and who's not and it's like that's such a cliché to say but it's like you... It really is a thing you notice in the toughest of times, who's there for you, who's not, who's real, who's not. Like you get to see slowly but shortly, it comes out at some point. But honestly, I decided to go to therapy and I realized it didn't work for me, cause I came to some many realization about myself I like to be very self aware of what I do, so I could say it helped because it made me realize a lot, and it helped to realize where I have to go from here.

BA: Alright so for me Corona virus changed my life for multiple ways. I'm not usually used to always being home so that's definitely one but overall I feel like the main thing that it changed was the way that I interact with people like to me, that was so different. Even though I interact with people like let's say for example on social media you feel me that's a different type of interaction than when I go into the school building and have that physical interaction with the same people in that space or even with new people in that same space. it was always... There was always something to talk about so when I disconnected from that it impacted multiple [feelings] like from how you apply to a job and how an interview is conducted. It also affected me in the sense of the people that I talked to. It affected me in the sense of how we do school now, like this is very weird to me and to me it doesn't work out for me because I'm the type of person that I need to see what's really going on like I need to be in person that physical interaction for me is everything. I like to see how for example in the class how other students challenge the profesor, I like to see how I'm being challenged, I like to see how the professor explains different terms in different ways. To me that's where I feel the real learning is at. So, the next question actually is a sub question, so that one is, what was it like to be home so often?

AM: Honestly, it wasn't really anything new cause' I was always home. I was not really the type of person to be outside like that...

BA: But compared to that, you waking up every day and going to school all the time...

AM: I don't know, it felt weird but the very first time that I actually stepped outside my eyes were burning, you know like your eyes change depending on the lightin. That moment that I came inside, everything was orange and dark, so it felt weird. I was like, "This is how outside looks again?... It's so sunny." But it's like you notice the beauty around you, you actually get to not only experience it, but like get to really take it in, like this is the world around me. It's beautiful, I don't appreciate this enough.

BA: I completely agree with you! So you said that the lighting felt weird the minute you stepped out, right? When you was home for so often.

AM: Yea

BA: Okay so you said the lighting for real the minute you stepped out right when he was home for so often?

AM: Yea

BA: So yeah, even though I laughed a little bit, I completely agree with you. Like for me, being home so often it felt weird on multiple occasions, like not only did it feel weird because even though it's something that I kind of asked for because I wanted to be home to be able to tap in more into my hobbies, like making music and focus on the Podcast that I was working on but it was weird because I miss having the social interaction that I had in in the school environment I miss the way classes were being given, when they were being given the right way. So yes, being home often, like having to deal with all my family members all the time, having to wake up at a certain time for class as well... To be on a computer screen all day and then writing a paper afterwards and just doing different assignments, and always looking at a screen... I started to hate it and I hate it the distant kind of like interaction that I had with my peers as well you feel me it became to the point where it's like, I didn't talk to none of my peers afterwards. It was just more of like we're just talking during class and that's all it is and then I don't know what to do after a certain amount of time. It was just like, I no longer want to do this and I'm no longer inspired or motivated to want to do this because of that. So, we [are] going to keep going with the sub questions as well. It's so crazy because all of these sound similar but they hitting they definitely hitting all the points that they need to hit but the next question is, how did it impact you mentally and emotionally?

AM: Oh Jesus I could be honest I feel like I was already messed up mentally, but it really just pushed me further and to realizing. It's not even realizing, I guess yes in some reason it really pushed me further to come to terms with yeah you really have this problem you really need to fix it you need to do this this and that to work on it cause' you're going to have to step back into the world at some point and you're not going to show any change like you need to. You're going to

end up feeling the same way every time when you have this opportunity at the moment to really take that time and fix it, work on it.

BA: Wow! I just want to say that was beautifully put together... Is that the end of your thought? Just to make sure.

AM: Yeah.

BA: All right well for me it impacted me until I took a mental toll honestly all around emotionally and physically to me it completely threw me off the rails and the reason why I say that is because I feel like covid affect the whole world it affected everything that we do it in the way that we do it so to me it took a toll on me because it made me deal with things that I didn't want to deal with and I feel like that's what it did for other people as well it's like we were we was always living life so fast on doing what we had to do and what I mean by that is if you had a nana 5 you were used to going to your nana 5 and then going to let say the gym and then going home and doing what you have to do at home. It was like a constant routine that we will keep up with so we were distracted from the things that we didn't really want to think about and once you should throw that away and we were forced to slow down and kind of I feel like even though we were stuck with things that we didn't want to be stuck with we eventually opened up and have more of an open mind to be able to deal with it and what I mean by that is this like let's take example family we all seen that we saw it on the news we saw how Como and his brother was dealing with the news when they had their little petty arguments and overall like there was there was a moment of light in there and it was a moment of light because they both put they both basically put their pride aside and said what they had to say and it's like even though I dislike you at the moment because you're my sibling I Will Always Love You So it came from like a loving place so I feel like in a way that forces to deal with our family members on a moral grateful level and I not only only family members but we started appreciating the world than people more because we didn't see them as much, we didn't ... we looked back and we took the little moments that we had together and we kind of became more grateful for those things because we didn't have the luxury to do those things anymore. so that's how it took a toll on me and I'm actually grateful for it because it made... it helped me become a better person because it's like I needed that because I was distracted from the things I didn't really want to focus on and it kind of just and made me and allowed me to feel those emotions to be able to get back on track that's my thought of it next question how has it impacted you socially?

AM: Oh my gosh, when I had to go back out and talk to somebody besides my family I was so awkward, it was so bad. I felt like back in high school cause' I was socially awkward in high school it just made me feel like I was back to that situation in a way. I was there and somebody it's like "*Why [are] you acting so awkward?*" I'm like this feels so weird like not in my house talking to

my family. Honestly, we didn't even really interacted to one another either like I was mostly talking to people through a computer screen for like hours so it somehow feels different.

BA: It's that the end of your thought?

AM: Yes!

BA: It impacted me socially I'm with my family because the cause' the interaction that I was having with people felt so different like all around you know how like even being on the train like people legit 2020 stop using trains and what I mean by that is like people of the working class. I would say that unless they were forced to take the train to work, that was the only way on the train. When I was working to the pandemic because I didn't really have much of an option, it felt weird being on the train. The trains were always empty and the little people that were on the train at the time of my commute is just like everyone had a mask on, which is understandable because the pandemic but it's like, people don't want to be around each other no more and is more of like, if we got to a point in time where people distances themselves from the scope of love. What I mean by that is like even though New York has always been rude, it would always have his glimpse of little beautiful moments where there always was like someone performing on the train or it's just like someone doing an act of kindness outside. Now it's just like even if you are walking outside into someone, people like always want to push you away because they don't want you to be close at them. I don't know, that's very weird to me... Not only that, the way you want to talk to people like it's always, if you were to go to the store, you gotta put the mask on. It's just like... I don't know, to me it just feels so weird because we are no longer living in the world that we used to live in. With family during the Pandemic, it was also the social interaction was kind of fun to a certain extent because it was just like now we would all join zoom or a FaceTime call is a little. We would do little fun things that we were able to do while being socially distanced. It felt weird after a while because I missed sharing that moment in person and seeing that motion a reaction that you would have in person. I no longer have the luxury of doing that so it definitely felt rare to me. The next question is, are people in your household working? That's a follow-up for the last question, I'm guessing during the coronavirus.

AM: My mom was working and they refused to close down work but other than that my sister was pregnant so she was unable to work. I worked in the same place but they had to lead me off.

BA: What have you learned about yourself and your family since the beginning of the crisis?

AM: Basically what I have realized was that I have childhood trauma that I still to have to work on. I have that overthink problem that has to do with my anxiety and I kind of in some ways learned to cope with my anxiety.

BA: Okay. And what have you learned about your family since the beginning... Since the hit of the Pandemic?

AM: With my sister I know I wasn't really that close to her but recently I noticed that we have a lot in common than I realized.

BA: Okay. I relate to you. I feel like I've learned a lot about myself but most of all, the most important lesson that I would say that I learned about myself would be that I still have things to work on, I feel like that was one of the most biggest things that impacted me for the simple sense how I said it earlier, I was used to routines. I was used to going to school, going to the gym, working on music, working on my on my hobbies... Just doing everything that I was doing, what felt good to me. When everything was stripped away from that, I noticed that I had to work on myself. I knew a had to be good with myself before I went out to the world then try to fix other people's situations or try to fix other issues in the world because I feel like the most important lesson that impacted a lot of people and I'm speaking from my own experience I don't know for others but I feel it would be that you have to keep yourself grounded before grounding others. You have to take accountability for your own mistakes like when you said you want to work on something, work on it and don't try to justify it with an excuse. When the pandemic hit, a lot of people stopped working out, does it matter if you were a gym head or not. It was just like you worked out for a little bit at home, for a couple weeks the first three weeks people were still very consistent but after that I was just a lot of people gaining weight. I'm not speaking up saying that's wrong or anything, but it was just like overall we let go of ourselves.... With 2020 overall it showed us that we have to be more grateful for the things that we go through because all we have is the now and I feel like we were all surprised as far as Politics, as far as what was never possible and what is now possible. I mean that because The whole year overall it was just like an ongoing movie and every month felt like it was four years in one. Every situation was just like, "how could this happen?" No one believed this would happen, [but] it happened. New York City on shutdown, the world on shutdown, who would have ever thought [of] that? I feel that was definitely an eye-opener for all of us. The follow-up question is, what has been the hardest part of the Pandemic for you?

AM: Actually, it has to be with both friends and family cause' like you have your own little situation going on with your friends and sometimes we let that outweigh whatever is going on with your family but it's also the fact that during the pandemic you really realize you need someone there to help you cope, but it's like some your friends are there but they're not there in the way you need them to be. It's like when you talk to somebody, you're talking to them but they're not fully comprehending things. Family is like they're there too but they're not there.

BA: I understand where you're coming from. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it's just like the same interaction that we used to have and where people would actually listen it's not the same no more,

it's more of like we're here allowing a flex talking to each other but you're not really here. Mentally you're somewhere else and that has changed because of the way that we're looking at the world now. We became so tapped into this entertainment world and social media world that you could be talking to me but I'm on my phone and it's just like before the pandemic that was so far down the line that no one thought signs like that would happen. We knew it was coming in the same that everyone is going to be more into social media and the entertainment world as far as watching TV and so forth whatever the case may be. When the Pandemic hit this fast, it was just like the interaction is not the same. Now people are ordering more from home and even the way your delivery guy is coming to us, leaving your food at the door, the way that you talk to your friends while I was on the phone or not it's just like if you are both going out somewhere now y'all both got Mask on and it's just like the outside world that is so much more different compared to what it used to be. Just like how you says, you could share a moment with someone but it's so much more different for the simple fact that now people are so much more worried about now that the pandemic help if it hits a second time even though I'm sharing this great moment with you in my head I'm thinking about, *"if I don't get a job as soon as possible I'm basically like I don't know what I'm going to do, I'm going to lose it all"* Not even job, it could be school or anything. No one is really appreciating the moment and the now as much as possible and I can't really speak for the whole world or whatever the case may be, but I'm just saying overall people because of the way social interactions and the Pandemic changed the world, people are now more concerned with first world problems. Overall, you can share a moment with someone now but they're more concerned with the first world problems of their own. They no longer don't want... It's not that they don't want to interact with you as much as possible, but it's more because of the way the world changed, we're looking at everything so much more different and it's going to take some work but we will all get there at one point or another. Next question, has there been anything positive to come out of the pandemic for you?

AM: I guess you know it made me grateful for the things I had. There was just one moment where I went on this trip and I did something and I feel like I want to go back to being that grateful again. I'm grateful cause' it made me think of how I want to be and how I am now. It showed me of how I'm growing and it showed me what I want in my life and what I don't want; what I want from myself and what I don't want from myself.

BA: I completely agree with you. Is that all?

AM: Yea

BA: I feel like there was a lot actually for me. The most positive thing to come out of the pandemic for me is me getting myself together. I feel like that has been the most important thing, me being able to see different perspectives, being able to understand more of how the world works, being able to understand how to do new things and to always push myself. The reason why I say that is

because previously to this semester, in the last semesters I felt low with a couple classes. I did what I had to do regardless but one of the things that one of my old professors have said is, *“either you get with the program or you get left behind.”* I had trouble like basically understanding that and I looked that like you're bugging, like he wasn't right. I looked at that because I was just like, *“you telling me I'm not going to stop in front of that school building again and know what an actual classroom feels like? Is this what you telling me?”* The professor was talking about how the students had to get with the program that's more technology being developed like the way that we doing things are so much more different to how it used to be and no one really knows how long this is going to last. Is either, you keep living in the past and in denial or you actually do what you got to do trying to learn all the programs and everything that we do differently now to the best of your ability. I didn't take it as offensive cause' what he was saying was real. I'm able to see that now because even though I struggled an immense amount this semester, I'm starting to see that I really gotta put my mind in this and in the same way that I got to put my mind in this and be more positive toward the new idea. Let's take things that we have to do, I feel so much more better knowing that I learned a new skill. Everything from personal, physically to emotionally, I have to improve on... And if it wasn't for this pandemic, who knows where we would be, who knows what other mistakes and failures I wouldn't have if it wasn't because of this. I feel like this was the best thing to come out of the pandemic for me because it's forcing me to really get grounded, not only on myself, but grounded in life overall and being able to always keep pushing forward. The last question of the section is, what do you think the nation in the world should learn from this pandemic?

AM: To appreciate those around you, to appreciate moments cause' people honestly been losing other people in like snapping your finger and not only to friends, but like family members... It's just crazy. People just always been talking about appreciating the moment but people don't think about that because they are just in the fast paced life, like doing this and that but not living the moment, just thinking about tomorrow or like 5 years from now.

BA: I completely agree because I feel like people didn't know all the things that were snatched from them when the Pandemic hit. It's just like the pandemic not only showed us how easy life can be gone but it also showed us that Just like that you got to be prepared for the worst and know that even though it's not going to turn out the way you wanted to, things are always going to be all right because we're all in this as a nation. Everyone is losing someone close to them, everyone is socially distancing, everyone is wearing masks or not, but everyone is dealing with the same issues that the world is dealing with. The most important lesson out of that is to show empathy, know how to sympathize more with people and understand that everyone is transitioning in the same way and feeling these emotions. It was like, before you go out there and and you do something reckless in the sense of having a social interaction in a reckless way I could say. Just remind yourself that everyone is feeling the emotions of everything that we just went through and whether you want to

be ignorant or not about it, this is really happening... Pretend I'm an alien and explain to me, why have these anti-racist protests erupted?

AM: When did racism officially started in the world? You have to think about that, don't you?

BA: For sure! I would say the 400 years of slavery and the injustices in our community since way back them, in 1900s.

AM: Yea. Honestly, I really feel that it really does have to go back... People are not born racists and people might not feel like this, but I feel like learning about history that kind of gives people a sense of pride like, "*Oh! I had somebody that looks like me and they are better than this person because look what this person has, look what somebody like me has.*" I don't know if that makes sense but I like to think about it that way. Like I really feel like it has to be about us learning about history.

BA: I will get a little deep into this. Let's say police brutality, where do you think that comes from?

AM: It always comes from power. People think that because they are higher range than you that they could do whatever they want.

BA: Do you feel that the way that the system is used, is valid?

AM: No because the training that they have for people to become police officers is the bare minimum. Honestly, I believe that they should do medical exams for these people in order to see if they are mentally strong enough to take on the job, not only physically cause' all is not about being physically strong.

BA: At the end of the day, I would say that at least police from what I have seen. This is very sensitive but do you feel like the police system judges a lot of minorities based of what they wear.

AM: Of course, I kind of go to stereotypes and racial profiling. I don't want to sound insensitive but people always like to say that hispanics are like very fiery. Everybody goes with stereotypes based on the color of people's skin, based on where they were raised... They automatically assume that if you were raised on the hood that means that you are ghetto and that you like rap music, etc. However, that's not true you can't go along with the things you believe, you have to go with what you have witnessed through the person yourself.

BA: Let me ask you this following question, have you ever been stopped before back out?

AM: I have not.

BA: You have not.

AM: But I know it has to do with the fact that... I mean I don't know if a lot of females have been stopped by cops, I have never really seen that. But, I know it probably has to do with the color of my skin, and the way I look, which is sad.

BA: I'll briefly speak on my own experience not going to get more into it because I'm interviewing you, but at least me I've been stopped a couple times. I've been searched because of what I was wearing, I've been told a lot of times growing up not to wear a hoodie because *"if I wear a hoodie I look suspect."* I've been told like... I feel like the minority growing up in New York, this is something that we know. We know that police are very racist, we know we're always told, *"don't talk back to police because they always have the right of way"*. So me having my own experience not only because of what I was wearing but I might even get a little more specific. That was this one time, I was downtown and I was with my sister. I don't know why they stopped me, for no reason. I'm not going to lie like I just have my bag, I was with her and Legit was walking into the train station to specifically on Fulton and it was day time like probably like three 3-4 p.m. Max sign was still out station full of people cause' you know Fulton is packed and they decided to just stop me and search me and a my sister looked at it like *"how they going to do that to you?"* They didn't ask her... they didn't ask her [anything], you feel me? They didn't stop her, they didn't search her. Just because I was a male with a hoodie, you feel me and I didn't even I don't even think I had the hoodie fully, you know but legit. They stopped me for no reason and now only has it happened there but it has also happened on multiple occasions and I've even got spoken to certain way by certain officers. It's very disappointing having to go through that and being able to just keep your cool through that knowing that you... Regardless you can still get arrested, regardless I can't speak up because I fear for my life, if I speak up to you. I don't want to end up like every other teenager or like every other person on news; shots in my back because I ended up talking back. It's very disappointing because this is the... Ongoing system that keeps on going for cycles and generations. It has to change and the reason why I said that is because whether is a person driving, whether is a person walking or running whatever the case if you are minority you supposed to go about it the way that it's supposed to be talked to those *"don't talk back the police always have the right away,"* Just, *"how is your day officer?"* or *"how can I help you, am I being the teen?"* Like they could be so nasty and rude with you and you got to keep you cool. And it's just like if no one keeps as if this cycling and this Generation just keeps on going like this and no one speaks up and no one within inside the department does anything to change, it's always going to be like this. But that's my piece of it, let's keep on going.

AM: I don't see like they care to change it, to be honest.

BA: They really don't cause' it's been like this for years but hopefully, everything we live through to 2020 and hopefully that all changes everything. But lest see... Why do you think New York City became an epicenter of the protests? I feel like this is the perfect follower.

AM: Cause' New York is the most popular place, people always come to New York. I feel like a lot of stuff starts at New York City. And that also goes with California, California is a very trending place. I don't know, I just feel like New York is a powerful place to be. In other different places, you don't get the same energy.

BA: Okay, I completely agree with you. I feel I New York City became the epicenter of the protest because I feel like we're very relatable to that since most of the population... From my personal experience without looking it up statistically, I would say we have a very big population of minority and we deal with a lot of injustice things. I feel like that's the reason why I were very United when we stood together because we feel that pain when we see those cases on the news, doesn't matter what part of the world is coming from because we know what it's like to be in those shoes. I'm just going to say that. How have the uprisings across the country shifted how you think about your ethnic identity and your place in US Society?

AM: I feel like hispanics are not really represented as much. I feel that when it comes to people of color you don't even really see stories of them succeeding like the only thing you could ever see is like rappers but there is so much success besides being a rapper. For example, Doctors, Professors, lawyers... You don't really see that kind of stuff and it kind of bothers me because instead of you trying to bring some type of positivity to another person. You should also bring that positivity to kids of color because they are people too. I feel they don't really get a voice in society, they are out down the must.

BA: Let me add into that. It makes sense because of the social contract that we have all around the world...

AM: I will give a brief example. Cardi B is always a topic and people always what to talk about how she is dump, but I feel that she is actually very smart. She literally brought this topic and I was like, *"that's so true."* But basically, she has people commenting about if she can afford this or that. And she was speaking up about it. It's like basically he's got people commenting like oh can you afford this and that she was speaking out about it like people don't ever ask Caucasian celebrities about that, It is always to people of color and it's not right, people of color have money too. Why to put us down or make us seem like we're less.

BA: I love that you brought up that example for the simple fact that the social contract of people of color (minorities) always having the lower hand, always ask being looked at as the underdog, the one that was never really going to come out and I feel like in every way that is constructed is just like the way Society works as it's constructed to bring us down for us to feel that we are not really in a position of power. It's so crazy because we can't even look at what's happening now in 2020. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris is just like not only is she the first female vice president first and not only is she African-American, but it's just like, the only other time that happened was with

Obama... Where a person of color like being from the minority was really in a position of power and still when he was in power, he was still wasn't able to do all the things he wanted to in the way that is contracted financially and the way of like when it comes to housing. All the Section 8 and Housing Programs were meant to be stuck there because now that we're living of these programs, you only allowed to make between 20 and maximum I would say 15K. After that, that's no help and it's just like, how you going to tell that to a family of 6 that every single individual has to work and fight for their own even if they live under the same roof?, how you want to tell us that we're not allowed to make 50 or 60K. Not even 60K, but even past the 40K. It's just like now you don't got a place because now you got to pay 200,000 yearly for rent because you would be paying almost \$2,000 a month. This is the way that is constructed, it meant to keep us at the bottom and the only way to really do that is you got to find the knowledge to be able to get out of here because that's t the illusion that he wants us to have... We can make it out of here the same way they did.

AM: They don't want us to succeed.

BA: And even goes into the school system like, elementary school, high school, colleges like cuny we are look at that as if that's for the poors or for the ones that can't go to the fancy major, Ivy League schools without having the money. The only way that we can make it like with scholarships, but even with a scholarship you're still being looked at differently because it looks like you're not supposed to be there. That's the illusion in multiple industries and it's just like, why does it got to be like that?, why can't a Spanish or black person be CEO of the biggest companies? That's my piece on that. Do you have any stories that you are willing to share about the encounters that you have had with racism? In general, have you encountered yourself with racism?

AM: Honestly no, I have not faced any place racism or cop stopping me but I have seen it happen. I only have seen racism happening but not towards myself.

BA: How was that? You experiencing that... Seeing someone be harassed or experienced racism.

AM: It's like I wanted to say something, but it was not going to change anything, that's the problem. It is not fair because literally these people were driving around doing nothing and they had the cops stopped them but that's not the first time. This one time actually I guess it wasn't me, I just came from New Jersey and these cops decided to stop the car that I was in. I just was like *"what did we do? Why are you stopping us like we're just in a car and there is other cars passing?"* We were kind of the only Hispanics driving through there and then we noticed that the other people that they stopped were also African American.

BA: You actually brought me to my own experience where I was driving away from my family members and they stopped us because we had a tent on the car but it was not because of the tent. It's more over the line like it was looking for some drug, I'm pretty sure. That to me is just so mad

because it's just like in this city everybody got tense like black windows and I feel like that's just so frequent but the overall just like in front of my building, there is always like a cop ahead and it's not because his violent, that's more of like if their ticket station where it's like there's always one cop car they're just giving tickets, trying to meet his quota. They want you to believe that they don't have a quota for the quota is real. I've spoken to an NYPD officer. Before I used to know him and he told me behind closed doors that they do have a quota. Not going to really put it out there, his identity is unknown but it just now makes sense and why do they do that? Let's put that in the communities that are mainly minorities and we all saw it, we saw it back then with the commissioner Raymond Kelly. I believe it was right Raymond Kelly. When the audio monologue came out, it was signed along the lines that y'all got to stop minorities wearing this and that. From descendents of African-American and Latino/Hispanics... None of that was mentioned caucasians, so that's what it reminded me of and that's what every other encounter that I've had has been a bad encounter. I don't think I've ever had a good in concert with a cop. As far as the racism, not only with the police, certain restaurants I stepped into... Certain stores and it's like they look at you on up and down like just because of the skin of your color in this is and just because of how you look and it's disgusting.

AM: You actually make me think of a couple things.

BA: Go ahead, you can speak on it.

AM: One thing is that I don't know if people are going to think about this, but don't you think people of color in that are in the 4th of scare themselves?

BA: This is a sensitive topic.

AM: It is, but you made me think about racism things. Honestly, I have never had somebody to say that to me but people would assume on Arabs. Sometimes when I cover myself with my scarf when I was cold, I would had people giving me weird looks. I never paid attention to them staring at me.

BA: And that taps into the stereotypes because of the no American society I'll put it like that... More stories among friends and family being shaped about racism in the policy since protest started?

AM: I mean... I don't really know if this counts as racism but I know I went to Carolina, my dad and my sister's boyfriend were in the car and a guy who is caucasian told them that he was going to shut them. I don't really sure if it has to be with this.

BA: There is a lot of racism out there. For me personally, I know stories of a lot of people that have had encounters with racism. Now the polices don't even care. And what I mean for this is that polices do what they want. Because of everything that has happened in 2020, I feel like now they are given so much power... Have you learned about an experience of someone close to you? That is our follow-up question.

AM: Actually... I know that there was somebody that I knew, they had like kinky hair and they were hispanic. They worked in a building and they spoke about how people will come and say, *"Ohh you should cut your hair, you look like you could scrub the side of the boat with that."* That person has heard comments like that since child but it the majority of the time it has been from a Caucasian person that was like the person's boss. That goes back to the whole power thing, you have to sit there and you have to take it because if you don't, then you're going to be broken and you are not going to have a job and that's the sad part. People think that because they have power, that they have something over you and they think, *"okay, if you don't want to take this or you want to talk back, I just could find somebody else that's going to do it."*

BA: Where you at all and digital or in-person activism of the last 6 months?

AM:I would say digital.

BA: If so, how so?

AM: I don't know if this counts, but educating people. I would say to post or joining little conversations here and there would like friends talking about my experience living in the hood and their experience living in a better neighborhood in Greenpoint.

BA: Why did you decide to get involved into do those post?"

AM: Because it was the right thing to do... People need to be educated.

BA: I completely agree with you, but there are certain people that I feel like we all have known this person even the people that our future is going to be listening to. I would say the person that just decided to supposed to black screen and it is something that I actually spoke about in one of my podcast cause' that's how I got involved in digital and in person when I wanted to go protest as well and that's how it felt to me. I was seeing people that I would say, *"yeah, but let's pay attention to the Lueders."* They would not speak on social media about anything at all like a concerning this issue, but they will post a black screen and never talk about anything else again concerning this issue. It is just very frustrating when we all know one way or another how it feels to be part of the system in that way, like just because you don't know the person that just got murdered on national TV, doesn't mean you can't sympathize in actually saying that what was done

to them, was wrong. How can you not stand with your people?, how can you not go out there and protest? And not even protest, but how can you not even go out there and really speak up? That could be you, that could be your sister, your brother, your uncle, your cousin... This is why people need to be educated on these issues, for when the time comes you're prepared for whatever comes.

AM: This conversation is sparking so much.

BA: Yeah, everytime I end up talking about this, it sparks a lot of emotions because I feel like I've had certain encounters in the world that we live in. It sparks a lot of emotions and things that need to be talked about... The next question is, how have protests in the context of the coronavirus shifted the way you think race in America? I got the perfect answer for that, but go ahead.

AM: You can go first cause' I need to think about this.

BA: I am not even sure, I know we are more than halfway through this interview. I'm not even sure I was supposed to be speaking most of the time, but I just want to speak my piece so people can understand all perspectives I can give to them from you and from me. I'll answer this question and then I would want you to follow up or just say what you have to say and the way that you think of it on your own. In the context of coronavirus and the way I think about race in America, it has shifted; it was mind-blowing to me saying what happened when New York City was on curfew for the simple fact that has never happened at least for me and my 20 years I can pretty much speak for this generation. I would say no one has ever witnessed something like that, the way it made me think about race is how you are going to put a curfew on people and on this date for the simple fact that we are going out there and being vocal about how we feel on this issue? Is this another reason for you to arrest us or to give us another ticket? Or for us to treat be treated as [if we don't matter]? I'm not going to sit here and let that justify the way I look at this issue. I'm not going to sit here and let their actions be justified for the simple fact that just because the high of said we should be on curfew, I should be home before 8 o'clock or before 9 o'clock. We're being out here standing as a nation, I'm standing with my people and I'm doing what I got to do for the simple fact that this is affecting all of us. If you think I'm going to look the other way just because you put a little curfew on us or just because you said social distancing... That does not mean I'm not going to stand with my people, that I'm not going to be vocal about how I feel. It was just to see how they divided the nation in two and to see how people were saying, "*you're stupid... There's a curfew, why you going out there?*" You're trying to be the next person who gets shot or that gets hurt in all these protests. We saw the amount of people that got pepper sprayed, we saw the amount of people that got arrested, we saw how many how many lawyers were doing free pro bonos to get these people out because they knew a whole bunch of people were about to get arrested. That's the way I saw the shift of race and how there was even certain white people standing with the minority in certain States, but that still not enough to speak of all them. Excuse my perspective but that's just what I stand on.

AM: One thing that popped into my head... It made me think about future generations, for our ancestors and for our grandparents who came to their country and wasn't really able to fit the same way other people were because they had an accent and because they were immigrants that weren't born on this land which is ridiculous.

BA: For sure... And that's another thing, I'm going too much into it. I don't know how my professors is going to feel about it but I'm going to get into this because this is important to me. To add on what you just said, that's something that goes under-represented. We get stop as minority or actually older people out, how you say they're immigrants, they don't really know the language, they don't know how to maneuver at as much as someone that's born and raised here. It just like, now they they kept talking trying to understand what the officer was saying they got pulled over or stopped by this Cowboys that was working... There was driving and it was just like they didn't know what the officer was saying, so the officer told him to go outside the car and to put his hands behind his back. Now that person is in court trying to fight a case that they know nothing about. They don't even know what they did wrong and it seems like. Let me speak for the younger generation as well, it's just like, you get arrested and whether you're innocent or guilty the first thing that they do is just like, if you are not able to afford bail while being innocent or able to afford a lawyer, the first thing they tell you is to plead guilty. How am I supposed to plead guilty for something that I'm innocent for? I'm not doing that. Now I'm facing whatever amount of time I have to do because I couldn't afford a lawyer and I couldn't afford bail... Is that what we call a Justice System? Justice where? I just had to speak on that.

AM: You just reminded me of the fact that since people are immigrants and they don't understand [the language], I'm sure the most of the time the cops like to write it off as resistance. If you don't what the cops are saying, they assume that you're resisting so then you obviously you know you going to get arrested. And then you sitting in that place like, *"what did I do?... Can somebody explain it to me?"* I'm sure you are going to ask the person but they are going to tell you, *"you obviously did something wrong, that's why you're here... Look at you look and look how you are talking"* You also made me think of a bunch of videos that you have probably seen where there is a lot of hispanic people speaking another language and they are being told to speak in English since they are in America.

BA: Okay, follow up question. How have the past few months changed how you think about police and racism in the US?

AM: Obviously, we all know racism has existed for so long, but it's like now you really get to see it. It's like, you don't get to see behind the scenes. You actually see video clips of people getting killed and shotted. There is a video I saw recently. One was about a white man and the other one was about an African American man. They both were doing the same thing. The only thing was

that we saw an African American man get shot 5 times while they just tried to push the white man away. You've seen it also as a kid throughout TV shows, but you have never really paid attention to it. They always like to stereotype people of color. The hispanic women, they like to make them spicy and curvaceous, they have African-Americans they always try to make them seem like if they're angry, uneducated or that they're on drugs or something like that.

BA: That propaganda, I feel like comes straight from up top and that stills with us all the way from when we were little kids. I mean that from the cartoons that we watch, the movies that we watch, the entertainment, the video games, the music. I'm playing both sides of the field here because me speaking from an artist perspective, music is an amazing thing and you can speak up and make a difference with it. Just because certain music sends a certain message... America always says that some people try to manipulate the messages that's being sent through and that's because we come from the bottom. The way that we interpret music is so much more different compared to someone that had a good their whole life. Someone who's been a little more fortunate and privileged that didn't go through what we go through, didn't come from the hood, how to deal with the struggles of dealing with police brutality and I'm as much racism as we encountered are seeing the people around this encounter. It's just very frustrating because it's just like, why we got to be the ones that are seen like that on TV? Why is it always gotta be bad? We do a lot of good but that's not being televised... And it's cause' that, America has so much blood on their hands. Not only blood, but it's like for all the wars and everything that we've been through, we have always been on the other end of the state where we're not on top. It's all propaganda cause' you know how many spanish CEOs there are out there that we just don't know about and it's because that's not being televised, that's not being put out there. They just want to see us in a bad life. Even though we always get the bottom hand, that's what's going to make us shine at the end, just give us a couple years and I promise you we all going to be that generation where we do shine and we do change these barriers. That's why we got at least one right now in order for the next generation to keep it pushing, but eventually, I do have hope for Humanity that that will change.

AM: you know, not skin colors... Colors like green, blue, red. If people really think about it and never noticed black and white black. Black is always identified as bad white is always identified as good; black is always identified as dirty, white is always identified as clean.

BA: I want you to go more deep into that. What do you mean about that?

AM: White people are always seen as good and likely they don't get in trouble for what they do. Then you see African American people, they always get in trouble and they don't even do things sometimes, they just get in trouble because of the color of their skin.

BA: That's facts and that's the American we live in and that we need to change. Not only African Americans, they do go through with the most but we both come from the bottom, African-

Americans and Hispanics we go through a lot. In order for that to change, we have to take accountability for our own cause' there is other African-Americans and Hispanics. I'm going to admit into that that the don't speak up. They see it as like going to go live the average life and live the way I was told. Let's go back to WWII, When it comes to encountering a cop or not even encountering a cop. It's just like, "*you're here, you made it to the Big Apple. Now live your life, get you a nice apartment, make a family, and deal with life as it.*" It's like no. That's not how it's supposed to be, speak up, protest, march, be vocal about it... Not even that, you don't even have to go to that extent, but it's like, if you know another one of your own is doing bad and seeing signs that they shouldn't be seeing or doing an action that is not justifiable, then speak up for that, speak against it, correct them. That goes for my overall message back then when you spoke on how you feel a person of color feels on the force. I know I hope this is not going to be taken out of proportion by whoever listens to this, but to me there is no good cops, to me that doesn't exist. And you know why it doesn't exist to me? If you are someone of color or not because into those cops start are speaking against other cops that are doing bad, then there is not good cops. I rather lose my job even if I have responsibilities for the system to change because I will not allow my kids to be born and raised in something so disgusting, to me that's just not it. I can't bring a kid into this world like this and I have to do something in the now to know that my kid or whatever generation so forth listen to this afterwards down the line, that someone out there and someone can take the message that I'm trying to portray and push it even further because that's the thing we say, "*oh no, don't speak up against that because you might lose your job.*" That's why the justice system is the way it is because everyone keeps with the same routine. How are we supposed to stand together when we don't even correct the wrong? So... That's that. Did you learn more about the history of racism in the country since the protest started and what have you learned? That's a two-part question.

AM: I mean, I was doing research for one of my projects which have to do with women and I honestly did not know this, but they were testing birth control on African American women and Hispanic women because they want it obviously to see if it works but they also because they also tested it on them because they knew for a fact that it would cause them to have problems with fertility.

BA: And they only picked those sets of women like in those ethnic groups?

AM: Yea, they talked about and in WWII they chose African American women and Puerto Rican women in like the 70s. They chose them specifically because they were testing [things] out to see if it actually [would]work. It had to be with the whole fertility thing, they didn't want them to reproduce and that also has to go back to ICE if you know what's going on at the moment.

BA: Yeah, I'm currently aware. Just remind me I didn't know that fact.

AM: And it's been happening since the 50s and then they started to push it a little more in WWII.

BA: That's crazy.

AM: I know.

BA: What have you seen your peers doing that inspires you?

AM: I would say that they are actually speaking out and some of them are taking action to educate people. Some of these people really think it's funny to have Kanye West win. I literally knew somebody that was like, *"I think it would be really funny if Donald Trump wins"* and you know, I got into a little discussion [where I mentioned], *"you didn't grow up where I grew up, you didn't grow up where the majority of..."* He was caucasian so I was like, *"you don't understand what I have seen, what I witness, what people who are in my community witness... Like it's okay for you to say that because it's not going to impact you the same way that is going to impact us."* It kind of bothers me because this is not a joke, this is people's life. We are trying to fight against it, why are you going to enjoy it like if it's funny? You're trying to fight for future generations, you're trying to fight for your ancestors cause' they weren't able to speak up. So, it's not a joke... This is reality. Things will really get messed up if you want that person to win.

BA: What do you think about the cops response to protests that began in May 2020?

AM: People made history but they both took two different messages to fighting against racism, they both got their point across. I feel that's very interesting that you both could try techniques to fight against racism and protest... And get your point across right to your message, so hopefully, have a change later down the line or even sooner.

BA: So, I want to add on I want to add on to that for the simple fact that that was a big barrier between people where certain people would say that looting the tooting was wrong and that that shouldn't have happened and so forth and whatever the case maybe. It's just like, I understand those parts. And to add on what you said at the beginning, I did my research on Malcolm X, I did my research on Martin Luther King and both of them were amazing men. They both had amazing mindsets, they both did what they have to do for their people and they both stood by and grounded for what they thought and believed. It's just crazy how people thought about that, how to certain people it's just like, they were kind of trying to put our own people in the bad light and it's just like some people were talking without even doing the research and it's just like you're looking at it from the perspective where you're more focus on deluding when we just saw someone got murdered on national TV televised for 89 minutes. It's just like, that's more important than losing a human life? you think looting is more important? I get both sides, I really do, but it's like looting out of it and let's think about how we're standing more together than how we're trying to separate each other more. That's how I feel about that, and they were certain cops that I saw videos where

certain cops did reunite with the people and they said, “*we're even going to march with you all*” and there were other cops with it was just like a completely mess. Let's just attack these people, I mean that in the sense of like peaceful protest and let's just manipulate the protest just to make it look like it's about it in the bad light. So, definitely. What do you think about the local and national government response to protests that began in May 2020? So, basically how you think the government reacted to it?

AM: I would say some tried to dismiss it but some tried to use it to always to go with basically all the presidential debate. I feel like some of them wanted to use it like to prove their point.

BA: You have to be a little more specific.

AM: Obviously it has to do with the whole social media image. Some people wanted to use it to push others down and to get Donald Trump's message across like look at what they're doing, you really want this?

BA: To me, the national government response was completely trash because I feel like to me obviously with Trump controlling everything... Even though we all know there's other more heads above him and below him that were in control. Overall, the way that the national government response responded to that was completely trash for the simple fact that they didn't care about peace, they didn't care the fact that people were out here trying to stand together. It was just more on the top of time, we are going to show you that we do whatever we want to do because we are in power and that's the simple for the for the simple reason that Donald Trump even decided to become president in his case cause' he wanted to show America like even though I'll take this as a joke, I still didn't. I still did whatever he wanted to do. The national government's response to that was trash. Now, to the local government, they were not that good, but they were actually better than the national government. The reason why I say that is because even though we had our own messed-up things going on in hand side of New York and there was still police brutality, there was a point where I feel like the people and Kumar believed were at war with with the cops. I don't know if you heard about that, but it was basically like when Kumar has said I think it was, I believe when he said he was trying to be from the police and the police was basically you see what's going on how you going to take power away from us when this is exactly what we need to do. [Going] back to what Donald Trump said, it's just like use although all the force that you need to use in order to control your people. Even Trump cut them down when it was on the sense of, you not going to put your foot down?, you going to let your whole state burn down before you actually decide to do something? So, I would say the local government was a little more on defence of the people even though there was still a lot of messed up things going on. But, I'm still not on the side where it's like... I'm in their defense for the simple fact that it's still not justice. It's like, even though things are 1% little more different, we still have to work on the whole other 99%. How do

you like to see this movement resolved and what is your role in achieving by outcome? That's a two part question.

AM: Honestly, I don't feel like I want to speak more about it. I do post and everything but that's not really engaging. I would say me joining, instead of just sitting back... Trying to speak up and have a voice to make an impact, don't just see. It takes a big group of people to actually make a change. If you keep going trying to educate people, then hopefully, [it should bring change].

BA: What would you say your role would be? To educate people more and standing with your people in your surroundings to be more vocal about these issues?

AM: I feel like it would be protesting too. Cause' yea, you can do all of that, but are you actually going out there? Standing out to those people?... Walking through pass the police officers, like being in their face. It says something, it shows that you are not afraid to speak out.

BA: Is there anything else about the anti-racist opperacing that you would like to share?

AM: That I want to share?

BA: Yes. Is there anything else about the anti-racist opperacing that you would like to share?

AM: Somebody who is basically dismissing racism?

BA: Hold up, I want to make sure first before I officially give you an answer.

AM: It sounds a little bit similar to reverse racism... Unless I'm wrong.

BA: Yes. But overall I will just say that people have to be more vocal about racist issues. When some speak and sound racist, just correct them and overall in every issue where there is the criminal justice system, whether the is the police system, whether the way laws are constructed, whether it is. Anything out there that is injustice concerning racism... Try to correct it in any way you can and try to make people stand with you on it to make sure things change for the better. That's my response.

AM: Honestly, I feel that should be a whole course talked from a very young age.

BA: Definitely.

AM: Cause' you are told racism and you don't want it to going on. The majority of people don't want continue going up and we don't want to be like that. We want to teach the future generation

to not be like that. We want to teach the future generation that they don't have to go through that. So, I feel that teaching that to kids now will help them so much more. Cause' looking at social media, that's all people do now. So, that's kind of teaching them that in certain ways they see certain posts, and they just think, "*That's okay to do*" but they don't take that seriously.

BA: Yeah.

Am: And we want this to be taken seriously cause' it's important; it's a big issue that we don't want to see leading.

BA: So, that conducts my interview. Thank you for your time and your assistance... And for allowing me to interview you.

AM: It was a pleasure.