

Anthony Colex interviewed by Topaz Pantoja
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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

COVID-19, protests, vaccine, cops, people, train, stories, terms, pandemic, helping, issue, transportation system, jobs, police department, media, Black Lives Matter

Topaz Pantoja: My name is Topaz Pantoja and I'm interviewing Anthony Colex in our homes on May 17, 2022. Do you give me permission to report and make public this oral history?

Anthony Colex: Yes.

TP: Remember, you don't have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. So, let's start. We are going to start with urban life. So, tell me, how [do] you get around the city?

AC: Public transportation.

TP: What kind of public transportation?

AC: Train and bus.

TP: And which one do you prefer?

AC: Train.

TP: Can you tell me about your experience with the transportation system in New York City?

AC: In general transportation, I guess it's okay. It's not the best, but it gets you around pretty quickly. It is usually reliable. And it's just nothing special, it's nothing big. But it is, like I said, reliable, at the very least.

TP: With everything going on in the trains, do you feel safe in your city's public transportation system?

AC: I feel less safe than a few years ago, especially with all the incidents that are currently happening in our public transportation. I mean, it needs to be a little safer. It's not like it used to be.

TP: What do you think needs to be put to make things safer? Like more cops?

AC: Yes, more law enforcement needs to be implemented into the transits not only in trains, but also the buses. There also needs to be more modern surveillance because at the end of the day, I do believe that the cameras that we currently have in the transportation systems are not of the best quality. Usually they're blurry, or in some cases, they're not working.

TP: So, I'm curious, do you have any wild stories for me on the public transportation system? Or you could tell me about the rats.

AC: In general, no. There is nothing really that crazy that goes on. But there are instances where you do have the homeless come in. They do like, not a show, but you know, they're not quiet, they're preaching there. You kind of get what I'm coming from. But aside from that, like you mentioned, rats. They're in the trains. They're in the tracks. I mean, they're just safety hazard for commuters.

TP: Wait! you had seeing them inside the train!?

AC: Yep.

TP: I would have started screaming and running.

AC: Look, I saw the rat on the other side of the train. I was not going near it. It eventually left the train. And that was that. But that's New York. I'm used to it at the very least. It's like I said, nothing crazy.

TP: We've seen crazier [things] though.

AC: I mean, there's people like I said, not necessarily only homeless. I mean, everybody comes in [and] they start arguments aloud. I have had instances where people are just smoking pot on the train. That's just annoying. I mean, that's inconsiderate as well. I have nothing against pot, but come on, do it in your own time. Don't put everybody in that situation, especially if you're trying to get to work or school or whatever.

TP: So, tell me about your community.

AC: My community in terms of...?

TP: Like, is your community safe?

AC: Yeah, I consider it safe, even though we just had an incident where there was, I believe a shooting but that was once in that like 10 years I have been here. So, I think it's fairly safe even though with that one incident but in New York City as a whole like I said before with the trains, it's getting bad. Crime is rising. There is more violence just in general. I mean, it's not like it used to be.

TP: Is there any law enforcement protecting your [community]? Do you see the [police officers] around [your] block? Or not?

AC: Yes. The cops just patrol the area. I mean, that's what they're there. That's their job. I see them more frequently than [in] previous years. They did add more speed cameras, which is a huge plus, because we did have an issue with drag racing. That is probably not the correct term. But they were basically racing along the streets, because at night, the streets are very lonely, and

have little to no cars. So, they did add cameras to stop these people from racing. I think that is one of the biggest changes that has happened to the community.

TP: Okay, let's talk about the diversity in your neighborhood. Would you consider your neighborhood to be racially segregated?

AC: No, there is a bunch of Hispanics, African Americans, some Middle Easterners in the area. So, I would not say that this area is segregated at all. We're not even like a gated community where they keep, you know, starting minorities. That's not a thing.

TP: Okay, have you experienced segregation in school?

AC: No, I haven't experienced any type of segregation.

TP: So, you go to John Jay. In your school system, are there any ethnic groups missing?

AC: No, John Jay is a fairly well diverse College.

TP: Okay, that's pretty cool. They keep bugging me to go to their school, but I say no. So, we're [going to] move this along to the Black Lives Matter protests.

AC: Okay.

TP: Do you keep up with it? Do you know how it started?

AC: I do know it started because of George Floyd. I would consider the killing of George Floyd. That's obviously how it started. And it just took off from there. Protests about police brutality were all over the country. And what made it even worse is that we had a lot of instances during these protests, where cops were being brutal. They were overextending their power. They were being... I don't have the words.

TP: Abusing their power.

AC: There we go. So, it didn't help the situation where we had a bunch of instances where cops were like you said, abusing their power. It was kind of hypocritical.

TP: How do you feel about the protests with everything you saw?

AC: How do I feel?

TP: Yes, like, do you have any disagreements on what you saw? Like, we saw there [were a lot of stores destroyed.]

AC: I mean, protests in general, I have nothing against protesting as long as you're not disturbing or being a public nuisance. And I think that's very subjective. So, I guess as long as you're peacefully protesting, I have no issue with any type of protest. But in terms of the writers

themselves, that's just illegal. They should be going to court if they have been caught. Writing in any way is not civil. You're not helping anything, in my opinion. But yes, in terms of the peaceful protesters, that's perfectly fine, I have no issue. They're just doing their civic duty, which is protesting.

TP: So, yeah, that's good. We're gonna keep this along. Do you have any stories? Like, we're both Latinos. You know, how people [be] having problems. There's been news reports all over. Like, if someone's speaking Spanish, they automatically get to get caught out by a person.

AC: Sorry, what?

TP: They get singled out; they get pointed out [for] speaking Spanish.

AC: Okay, yes. And what was the question?

TP: Have you experienced that in any way? Like, any kind of racism in New York?

AC: Ah, okay. I have not experienced it. I'm very dense on it. I don't know, it's really hard to explain. I want to say yes, but at the same time, I usually ignore it, or I don't care about the subtle gestures of them probably being racist. But have I seen other people being probably stereotyped? Or are you talking about Spanish [people] being called out for speaking the language? Yes, of course. It's just not right. People can talk however they want in their native tongue. And that's just a right. You know, I think it's just not good or fair to critique someone for not being able to speak the main language in a country.

TP: Do you think the media plays a role of how they are showing race and racism in other form?

AC: Well, of course the media does play a role in these systemic stories. And I think one of the biggest issues with this is that they only choose the juiciest story. So, you are not always going to hear about an individual just being targeted by three or four people. It's usually white on black or possibly, white with Hispanics. It is usually, I think, with white individuals. And I think the media is not helping it, especially when we have really big racial stories like George Floyd, that was a very big one. And it was coverage day in and day out for several months.

TP: Yeah.

AC: I think the wrong issues. And of course, there's a lot of misinformation when it comes to the media, and the stories, sometimes they harp on it too much. And personally, I don't like that. Of course, they have the right to do it. I mean, but I just don't think it's something they should harp on for more than a few days.

TP: So, with everything you've seen in the protests and everything, how's your opinion of the New York Police Department changed over time?

AC: I think my opinion on New York, the NYPD has changed because of multiple reasons. I mean, at a young age, you would think these people (the cops) are there to protect and serve. And yeah, to an extent. Of course, they are. I mean, whenever you call 911, who are the first

people to show up? The cops, and so forth. But I guess there's just bad apples, you know, in every field. And it's even worse when it comes to the any PD, any police department, because the media will harp on those bad apples and will make it look like the police department, or whatever field is out there being covered, is the issue, when in reality, it's just that one person, it's not the department. It's not the county or the state's fault. Usually, though, and yeah.

TP: Okay, do you have heard someone saying that all cops are bad because they follow the same system? [If so,] what do you think about that?

AC: So, the notion that all cops are bad, that's just false. Of course, not all cops are bad. Like I said, there are bad apples that make the whole department look bad. But are all cops bad? No, no, they're not. And in terms of these regiments, the training needs to be updated. We need to train new cops on how to de-escalate situations. And yes, in some cases, there is no de-escalation. And we do have extreme instances, like shoot outs, where one side is unfortunately killed. But in those rare instances, I kind of get the reasoning behind. I mean, cops are just people, they're just doing their job. They want to go home, and whatever gets them home, is what they're going to take. But if there's an instance where let's look at George Floyd, that was an instance where an individual was not putting up any resistance and was killed. The fog right there lies with the cops. That is a lot of power that these cops had. I lost my train of thought. And those instances like George Floyd, it was very different. Cops did not need to overextend their power.

TP: You just actually answered the next question I had. Like about the changes that should be made in the New York Police Department. So, my final question about the Black Lives Matter Protests [is the following:] Were you active in any of that?

AC: No, it was unactive keeping in mind this was around the time of COVID. So, I have a grandmother. I'm not going to try and risk her life for these protests or any protests. I mean, I don't want my grandmother to get sick, especially during a pandemic. It could be the death of her, and I don't want that. So, in this particular protest, no, I did not join. But if the circumstances were where we weren't in a pandemic, yes, I most likely would have joined the peaceful protests.

TP: Did you follow it on social media?

AC: On social media? yes. At the time, especially early in the protests, I was on top of it, but then after a while, it was just repetitive. And that's where repetitive news coverage played a role essentially in doubting my interest in the protest.

TP: Since you're talking about COVID-19, we are going to go to our vevry last topic. Okay, so COVID-19 has changed lives for many of us. Tell me, you were working before or during COVID-19, right?

AC: Yes, I was working before COVID-19. I was working from September 2019 to March 2020 and after that, I got laid off because obviously the pandemic was around. They needed less workers as well. So that probably also played a role, but I think that one of the reasons was also because of COVID-19.

TP: How did change your workplace? How did COVID-19 affect you personally?

AC: All New York was shut down I think the summer of 2020. So, for me, I'm a hermit. So, I usually stay inside when I don't need to go out. So, for me, it really didn't change much, it just limited where I could go because I didn't want to get sick.

TP: Has the COVID-19 impacted your hope in helping your family?

AC: Yeah, I can say so. We contracted COVID 19 ourselves in January of 2021. So, we got the virus. It was a pain in the ass for a month.

TP: So, while the entire world shut down, did you take any hobbies?

AC: Hobbies? I'm more like drop hobby, which is just drawing, but in terms of other hobbies I have, I guess I just stuck with them, if not increased my passion for the hobbies for a couple of hobbies.

TP: Tell me which?

AC: Gaming is one of them. Fishkeeping is the second one.

TP: Yes.

AC: And fishkeeping was the one that actually increased for me.

TP: You got a lot of fish?

AC: Yes.

TP: Okay. How have your relationships changed with your friends, your neighbors, or your family?

AC: In terms of family, nothing's really changed. If anything, we've grown closer. But in terms of friends, of course, there's COVID-19 so, anything outside was off the table.

TP: Yeah.

AC: So, I guess that did limit the obviously interaction with friends that are not, I guess, in my household, which is no friends in my household. But yeah, I guess, family it strengthened and for some friends, it distanced.

TP: Not for me though.

AC: No, not you.

TP: So, let's get to the juicy questions.

AC: Okay.

TP: What are your thoughts on the vaccine mandate, the vaccine itself and the vast mandate? All that good stuff.

AC: I'll tackle the vaccine itself first and then we'll go on to the mandates. So, in terms of the vaccine, when it was first, like rolled out where reports were saying, "the vaccine is ready for elderly" and all that good stuff. I was one of the people who were skeptical on it because here's a vaccine that only took months to be produced. Most vaccines and/or medicine in general in the United States, takes five sometimes 10 years to actually be approved by the CDC and the FDA. So, when the vaccine for COVID rolled out, I was highly skeptical. I said, "there's no way this thing is actually safe." Fast forward a few months. Data starts rolling in, I start looking at several like graphs where these vaccines are actually helping. At that time, if you saw a graph between non vaccinated and vaccinated individuals who had contracted COVID-19, the data said that the individual with the vaccine was not hospitalized. Whereas the individual who had no vaccinations was taken to the hospital and stood there for a number of days. So, I guess that made me want to actually go up, because here's hard proof where the vaccines actually work, and we can see that they're working. The vaccine for COVID itself it's something that actually helps.

TP: And what do you think about mask mandates?

AC: Mask mandates right now it's more like [doing] whatever you want.

TP: Yeah.

AC: I mean, we have been dealing with this for two years. You already know the risks that COVID can pose to an individual. So, for me, I would wear the mask. I never had an issue wearing the mask, but I do see other people having issues with it, which is to me ridiculous, selfish.

TP: And selfish.

AC: Yeah, I would say selfish. Now, in terms of the vaccine mandate, I think that's a little too much to an extent where you can lose your job. I think that goes a little too much. I think you should always give people the option of either vaccine, fully vaccine, or test weekly. But we had several jobs like the NYPD [and] the FTNY. We had people from those jobs actually lose their jobs because they didn't want to take the vaccines and there was no other option. So, we had people lose their jobs because either they refused to take the vaccines, or they couldn't because they were immunocompromised. I think that's just a little too much. You should always give people the option whether to get vaccinated or test.

TP: Okay. So, to wrap this up, is there anything I should have asked or anything you'd like to add?

AC: No, currently not that I can think of. No.

TP: Are you still comfortable making this oral history public?

AC: Yeah.

TP: Thank you so much for doing this interview with me, my best friend. You told me a joke earlier I remember. I started laughing. I can't cut it out now. But thank you for your time and thank you for doing this interview with me.

AC: Yeah, no problem.

TP: See you later.