

Shantal Taveras interviewed by Ezequiel Hiciano
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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, protest, pandemic, united states, immigrants, racism, political parties, interview, individual, black, country, feel, agree, family, absolutely, home, police, conversations, knew, government

Ezequiel Hiciano (00:00): My name Ezequiel Hiciano and I interview Shantal Taveras we located in Bronx, New York. This oral history project is being conducted by Ezequiel Hiciano a student at Guttman Community College, City University of New York. By signing the form below, you have granted permission for the audio recordings, notes, transcripts, video and photographs resulting from this interview to be gifted to a collection held at City University of New York without restriction. If you have granted permission to do so, the interview may become a part of an archive, and the interviews will be made available for the use consistent with City University of New York's mission, regulated according to any restrictions placed on their use by you and/or interviewer. Do you give me permission to do the interview?

Shantal Taveras (01:20): Yeah, of course.

EH (01:22): What is your name?

ST (01:23): My name is Shantal Taveras.

EH (01:25): How old do you

ST (01:27): I'm 25 years old.

EH (01:29): Where are you from?

ST (01:31): I'm born and raised in the Bronx.

EH (01:34): What is your first language?

ST (01:35): My first language is English.

EH (01:38): What is your racial identity?

ST (01:40): I am a white, essentially.

EH (01:43): Tell me the long story of how you, or your family ended up in New York City.

ST (01:49): Yeah, so my mom actually came here when she was 20 years old on her own. She was very big on kind of just making it. She came here all by herself. So pretty much that's how my mom ended up

here. I think my dad is the same way, I know less of his story compared to my mother's, but essentially, it's the same they came they immigrated here from the Dominican Republic and then just establish themselves.

EH (02:16): Now we're gonna change the topic now we're gonna talk about a COVID-19 how are you coping with the pandemic? I've been

ST (02:26): Doing okay.

ST (02:27): I think a lot of my time I spend self-caring in terms of running or just walking outside.

EH (02:35): Yeah. How has the Coronavirus changed your life?

ST (02:41): It has changed it a lot. I mean, in general, I transitioned from full time work to part time, and I am a full-time student. So, I isolated from Coronavirus I have had changed myself but with Coronavirus. I think there's a lot of changes in just the general scheme of things.

EH (03:01): Yeah, that's nice. Do you know any of your family had or someone closer to you have covid-19?

ST (03:09): Yeah, so actually, recently, a large exception of my family, my mom, my aunt, my father, my brothers, and my cousin, they all got sick. So, I spent a lot of time with my family during the pandemic. So, I was very isolated, and they were isolated too. And I did lose my grandfather and my great uncle as well a sweet individual, so I really do miss them.

EH (03:35): So, what was it like to be home so often?

ST (03:39): Yeah, it's a lot, especially when I was so accustomed to going outside for work or going to the gym. So having to find free time to do that separate from my work and my home has

ST (03:56): Become difficult,

ST (03:57): But still possible.

EH (03:58): Okay, that's for everyone to so How has it impacted your society? mentally, emotionally?

ST (04:08): Yeah,

ST (04:08): I think socially, I saw very little of my friends, but I did see my family. So that was okay, on that and mentally. I think I was okay. In the beginning. I think for a while, I was kind of like, Okay, this is my life now. So, I kind of remained stagnated, but I think I'm okay now. I think this is just what life is. and humans are used to being like adaptable to different situations. And this one's not, you know, we're privileged to have homes and just live and breathe. So, I'm putting that into perspective. I'm okay.

EH (04:43): I agree too, what have you learned about yourself and your family since the beginning of the crisis?

ST (04:50): Yeah, I think I learned a lot about how important life is and how important family means

ST (04:58): To each other.

ST (04:59): But also, like how Humans can impact other humans, right? We learn that if you're not wearing masks, you can potentially make another person die, right or someone in their family died.

EH (05:16): What has been the hardest part of this pandemic for you?

ST (05:21): I think it's kind of just being home all the time, like you asked me before being home all the time was taking a major shift. Something I wasn't really used to

EH (05:32): Has there been anything positive to come out of the pandemic for you?

ST (05:40): I started running. That's about it. Really? I don't run that much anymore.

EH (05:45): That's good for you

EH (05:49): Why has been your favorite thing to do? All of them.

ST (05:56): I like to read before I haven't read as much. So

ST (05:59): With the lockdown,

ST (06:01): I started reading so much more. Okay.

EH (06:10): So how has COVID-19 change? how you think about relationship between have individual as of society?

ST (06:18): I think COVID has changed our mind frame into thinking that it's not just about, you know, just yourself on the individual sense, but also about how we think about the people in our society. And even beyond that it's not, I think the US is known for being the most individualistic country. But I think what the pandemic has showed us is that we do better when we think about other people

EH (06:42): Work more together.

ST (06:43): Exactly.

EH (06:44): Yeah Okay, So how do you think the government reacted to the COVID crisis?

ST (06:51) Not well.

ST (06:54): But again, like, I'm not in the government. So I don't know, what is actually underlying the actual steps that are involved with the government.

EH (07:04): What is something that you like, do you like to change about this global pandemic?

ST (07:11): I wish that, you know,

ST (07:13): When

ST (07:16): China had this influx of a pandemic, that Americans were more willing to help other countries as opposed to just closing out these countries. We have amazing health care staff and personnel. It would have been awesome. How do us given our forces to help other people even though we do have a tumultuous history with them.

EH (07:37): Would you like to get the vaccine?

ST (07:41): Yeah, of course.

ST (07:43): Yeah I think it's important to get it because even if we don't, like even though I'm young, younger than some, you know, older people, I have the possibility of spreading it to another individual without even knowing it. So, if I can save another person's life by getting this vaccine,

ST (07:58): I'm willing to do that.

EH (08:0): How do you feel about the world reopen?

ST (08:05):

I think the world never really closed. I

ST (08:08): I think maybe during the summer did close, but I think the world has been slowly reopening. And people have just been kind of ignoring the mandates of COVID. And the world has always been open. Just the door was slightly ajar.

EH (08:23): I agree. Okay, so what was the first thing you're gonna do a one day? A when you have the freedom from the pandemic?

ST (08:33): Yeah, hopefully go to Hawaii with my cousin.

EH (08:37): That's nice. How do you think will we be changed when we come out of the pandemic?

ST (08:46): I think like what I said before, in terms of like, I think nothing really has much changed. I think people are more cautious. Some people are more cautious about hand sanitizer. But I think people just want the world to come back to normal. They're consuming their normal habits and routines. So, I don't think much will really change.

EH (09:06): I believe in the future; you're going to have a child. So how you're going to talk about racism or COVID to your child.

ST (09:15): Yeah, I'm gonna, hopefully there'll be books available at that time, so that I don't have to, like, How do I explain COVID to a little child, right? It's possible, right? How do they explain like, the plague to us when we were children? Right. And that same way, it's like it was a history lesson, but we can make it interesting, but also kind of resonate, the importance of why it happens. And like, why it's so important to have community within these times.

EH (09:45): It's like more like a lesson that you're never going to forget. Yes. Okay. Why isn't it that you learn about 2020 can be lesson or anything that you experienced before.

ST (10:01): I think cherish the people that you're with, even if you don't know them even if you do, because we don't know the next time we're going to see.

EH (10:10): Like more appreciate people.

ST (10:12): Yes, exactly. Even if you don't know them, it's just like, have certain courtesy for the people who are in your community, even though you've never spoken. So

EH (10:21): That's nine now we're gonna talk about BLM Protest . Do you remember where you were when they when you heard about George Floyd murder?

ST (10:32): Yeah. So I don't actually remember where I was. I don't have like an impeccable memory. But I do recall that I saw it on Instagram. So a bunch of the murders that happened during the summer even Eric Garner, which is like almost pointing with him in reality, a lot of it I heard from the internet. So yeah.

EH (10:57): Okay, so I feel like everybody use the internet now is like, the more the new now.

ST (11:09): I don't watch TV anymore. And don't I have access to a television frequently. So seeing it on social media is usually the way I go about seeing.

EH (11:19): What are some of the reasons that you think protesting Black Americans and their non-black allies are angry about conditions in the United States?

ST (11:30): Yeah, whatever I think, honestly, this is a repeating, like, infraction against black people in America where, you know, it happens so consistently, and it's so exposed in the media that like, I feel that people have been desensitized to black pain and black experiences. So, I think one of the reasons that it has erupted is that people in America, whether they're a black, white or Asian are noticing that minorities in this case, Black Lives are disproportionately being affected by laws by housing laws. It's not just a one thing. It's not just because George Floyd died, right? It is because George Floyd died because he's an important individual, but he's an individual that matters, but it's the whole, ricocheting and the history that goes behind it as well.

EH (12:26): Do your believed that one day racism going to end in the United States?

ST (12:35): No, I mean, I want to say yes. And if we do, like, maybe it will be in the far future. But there has a lot. There's a lot of things that need to change. And there are a lot of people who want to need to change and right now a lot of people don't want to change,

ST (12:55):
or even have those conversations.

EH (12:57): Do you believe there are issues with the criminal justice system in the United States that have helped flame these protests?

ST (13:08): I think the infrastructure of the United States has been based on inequality. Right, there are certain people who are above the cut, like I think while police officers do have a duty to protect and serve, right, we do look up to them. So there is some sort of power dynamic that we do expect. But because of this power dynamic, we don't know whether what we do know that race does play a role, but because the ideas are no, we're serving new this idea this, this border between, say, like protecting and like racism is kind of blurred. So we don't know what is actually happening. But we do. I mean, I believe we do know what's happening. But I think there's higher levels that are involved that are being overlooked.

EH (13:54): How do you explain the persistence of racism in the United States generally and NYC specifically?

ST (14:00): I couldn't tell you, I couldn't really tell you the persistence of racism. I think there's an underlying history that has kind of been entrenched into our history or even like housing, right? There's certain areas in New York City that's particular to certain races, and you know, how police's, guard those areas, or whether they arrest, you know, specific people, and in this case, it's like, look at our criminal justice systems. It's disproportionately filled with black individuals, Hispanic individuals, Asians, and it's weird because most of the United States is composed of white people. So how does that make sense? You know, it's not only that black people are committing crime white people want to, but what does it mean in terms of sentences? But in in terms of your question, like, how do you explain the persistence of racism, I think it's just deeply entrenched into the infrastructure of the United States.

EH (14:56): And that is inequality that we have now, why you think NYC become an epicenter of the protest?

ST (15:07): I think it became the epicenter of protest because there's so many more people, right? We have more access to social media, the news constantly kind of goes around in these major cities and new centers are in these major cities. So when you're in these bigger areas, with Epicenter, you have more presence of social media. And that's why it was so highlighted across the United States. Because if we were to look at like a small city in Kentucky, they don't care that a protest happened there compared to like, a huge protest that happened to New York City. So that's why

ST (15:39): Because I'm

ST (15:40): Sure there were little big protests and other locations, but it just wasn't as huge as it wasn't.

EH (15:46): Okay. So, do you have any story that you like to share about racism or police brutality?

ST (15:56): I don't have any stories really, I asked, you know, as a Latina that looks like a white woman.

ST (16:02): Because,

ST (16:04): You know, I am a white woman, white facing at least, you know, I haven't had any issues with racism.

ST (16:11): Or

ST (16:12): With the police. However, I have been with people who have experienced racism, like fully frontal on their faces. But it wasn't in the United States, it was more in Paris, I had a friend who I was staying with. The owner did not like this individual at all. So whenever this individual spoke to us, you would only talk to me,

EH (16:31): So how do you feel like when you see someone close to you, that was discrimination?

ST (16:37): Yeah, So I think when I was younger, I never noticed. But now that I'm an adult, and I realize the kind of context that we're in now, it becomes my obligation to make sure that the people who I'm with are protected. Whether it means means standing in the way of certain types of individuals or highlighting that this is like, you know, my friend, or whoever I'm near is, like not disrespected.

EH (17:03): Were you active in the protest at all in a digital or in person way over the last 6 month?

ST (17:14): Oh, um, I was involved more digitally, as opposed to in person just because I was with my family, my family. My grandmother was staying with us at the time. So I did not want to go out and possibly put her in harm's way. So a lot of what I was doing was more digital, posting certain things, donating money whenever I could, to build projects or just making sure that information was disseminated around the area.

EH (17:47): Okay. Do you have any stories or experiences about being involved in the protest that were impact ful to you? Or someone that you know

ST (18:02): Project, I don't know someone who has been directly involved in the protest.

ST (18:08): But I do know,

ST (18:09): I went to school in Pennsylvania, and they opened up a kind of fund. So anyone who needs bail money or anyone who needs any help during this specific time during COVID they collected donating money and funds for that specific is called a biker.

ST (18:28): Abolitionists fun,

EH (18:30): Can you say the name of the school?

(18:32): I went to Haverford College. This is fun is a consortium between Haverford College and Bryn Mar College. So if you guys want to donate money, they're doing amazing things, all proceeds actually go for proceeds go to the people in the classes that they're supporting.

EH (18:47): How has BLM shifted the culture?

ST (18:53): I think

ST (18:53): Black Lives Matter, the protests and just the programs that they've put into it has really shifted it in terms of making these conversations much more accessible to everyone, not just democrats who, you know, are exposed to these certain types of ideology. Sometimes democrats are not, but I feel like people in my own age range are often talking about specific policy, you know, policies or protests that have occurred. So hopefully, what I think BLM has done and what I've been reading about just seeing in the news, it's expanding these conversations to people who typically wouldn't have these conversations, whether they agree or whether they don't agree. And I think that's what's important, having this new dialogue with people who typically would not have this dialogue, and that's what BLM has been constructing and doing in a very good way.

EH (19:45): In the past few months changed how you think about police and racism in the US?

ST (19:53): That's a good question.

ST (19:55): I don't think.

ST (19:56): Right now, in my current thoughts, I don't think race Islam is going to go away anytime soon until we do a major upheaval and have more conversations. And I, I've been thinking about this a lot like nothing's going to change in the US or how the police are acting until people want to change. And right now, there's a lot of people in the US. And you can see this in our politics, as well of people not wanting to have these conversations because it doesn't go with their values and what they believe in. So while BLM has opened the conversation, we also see that a lot of people while the doors there, they're not going to go through until something major happens. So I don't think that that's really my opinion on racism and police.

EH (20:48) I agree too, Did you learn more about the history of racism in this country since the protest started?

ST (20:55): Yeah, absolutely I think when the protests and obviously like there was a civil rights protest, and we learned about it in school, but we always learn about it in a shallow, very shallow way. I think what this protest over the summer, because people were at home and more people were more willing to go out and protest, a lot of people were sharing resources and information about the history of racism, and maybe the more even like, subtle, more quiet racism that exists, racism, facets that exists within our country. So yeah, not only has social media, in terms of posts and what people have been sharing, but also the resources that people have been sharing in this time,

EH (21:36): Why do you think there is so much backlash to BLM?

ST (21:48): I think there's a lot of backlash because of kind of a bad apples that existed a lot of people go out to these protests, and they do destruction and looting. So then what the media, at least what I saw the media do was that they highlighted the destruction rather than the actual peaceful protests, right? Because if there had been more destruction, you know, we always see like, whenever someone wins a football championship, people destroy their cities. Yeah. If the protests had destroyed the cities, there would be no stores open or available. And we didn't see that. Yeah, no, there was only a few stores that were disrupted. I mean, of course, there were damages.

ST (22:29): And there were losses,

EH (22:31): Do you feel that they knew have more impact to the destruction of the show? They knew more, people that complain about the protests.

ST (22:44): I think a lot of.

EH (22:45): Yeah, absolutely. And having these little bad seats here and there. This is what they focused on. So made the protests look bad and have this backlash. But at the core, the protest protests in general are supposed to be peaceful. There's a difference between having a protest and a riot. And most of the people who were there were protesting, they

ST (23:06): They were not rioting.

EH (23:07): I agree with you. How do you explain folks who respond to BLM with "All Lives Matter"?

ST (23:17): I think the people who support all lives matter. I think the general direction that they're going for is that yes, of course, every life matters, whether you're black, Asian, you know, Hispanic, whatever identity you are, right? This includes like gender identity, sexual orientations as well. But I think they're missing this greater piece, which is the idea that black lives in America are disproportionately abused, neglected, arrested, compared to any other minority or sexual minority group in the United States. And I think that's an important distinction, that all lags' matters is not picking up on.

EH (24:04): Now, we're gonna change little be topic, we're gonna talk about 2021. What was going through your mind when you hear about the US Capital was invaded?

ST (24:17): I thought it was a joke, honestly. You know, I thought it was like, you know, April Fool's joke early because one, we're going through a whole pandemic, Joe Biden was just elected as the president. I really thought it was a joke. Like I knew that people were in front of the Capitol, but like, once I heard that they were gonna go inside and they were climbing the walls. I really, I was really surprised, and I thought it was an entire joke.

EH (24:43): Do you feel that Donald Trump have a lot of influence to the invitation to the Capital?

ST (24:50): Absolutely, I think also he was outside in a tent waiting for this Okay, as if he knew that this invasion was going to happen. So yeah, I think he has a lot of influence in What happened in the Capitol and I think as a president, he misused his social media platform. You know, as the leader of the United

States, you know, I have no problem with him being a president. But as a leader of the United States, you must have a certain front, a united front as a president, whether you are Republican or Democrat, right. I don't care if you know, he won the election fair and square. And I never said anything about that. But the fact that he kind of misused his political platform to highlight more division within our political parties was something that I was, this is probably more than the question that you're answering.

ST (25:37): But this is just how I'm feeling.

EH (25:38): Yeah, I agree too, what do you think led these people to attempt to violently overthrow the government?

ST (25:47): I think, like you said, I think a lot of Trump supported their ideals, and there's their vision. Right so these people were kind of in helped by the message that Trump was trying to share? I don't know. I'm in my, in my short, you've 25 lived years that I've had, I would have never anticipated people to gather into a federal, you know, break into a federal building into my like, in my entire life, I've never thought that would have been a thing, but it happened.

EH (26:23): What do you think about the treatment about the police to this all the white people you think if we're like a Latina or a black guy?

ST (26:33): Yeah, no, absolutely

ST(26:34): Hadn't been a different population, I feel like there would have been tanks, there would have been dogs, there would have been, like drones, all those like, you know how, like, during the protests, they had those rubber bullets that like knock people's eyes out. I didn't see one, I didn't see one single rubber bullet, I didn't see one single gas tank, I didn't see any of those things that were done on pride, like those peaceful protests, even when they were looting, you know, or destruction of the media likes to say, I did not see this at all. Now, during this copy selection,

EH (27:10): You can see the inequality that we have in the system and what do you think about the impeachment trial of former President Trump?

ST (27:25): You know, after the first one I knew the second one wasn't going to go through. So the fact that I think there's just a lot of things going on in our government, that that is being overlooked. Maybe even if it's not being overlooked, it's just being ignored. Or at least in our timeframe, we're not able to change it because these systems have been so solidified that they work for only certain people. So I think it's really a shame.

EH (27:56): If they claim Trump, they're gonna look bad too

ST (28:02): That is right because it's a political party. And they were supporting him this entire time. So it'd be weird if they didn't support him in this trial as well.

EH (28:10): How do you explain the lack hostility between the two political parties?

ST (28:15): I think it's definitely gotten worse. And under the Trump administration, I can't say like in comparison to any other administration, because I either was too young, or I wasn't born. So I don't have much experience with understanding the hostility or how it's risen over time. But in the time that I've been cognizant of political parties, I feel like there was hostility, but now that hostility is much more present.

(28:47):

Let's say that Trump wasn't a white person. They're gonna be like, impeachment trial, they well who like more the same or different?

ST (28:58): Would we do if, if so, I see what you're saying. I think it still depends on the political party. Right. Like, let's say he was a black man, but he was still Republican. I think Republicans would still support his impeachment trial, they would still be, you know, say that he didn't commit a crime because I think political parties are much more powerful than someone's race, right?

ST (29:24): Yeah,

EH (29:25): I agree we do, so now, I'm gonna ask, like one or two questions that feel like it's more personal that want to ask. So how do you feel that immigrant who come to United States, do you think they contribute to the community?

ST (29:40): Yes, absolutely. Without doubt, I mean, my own mother, my own cousin, they've been amazing people to this country. You know, I have never met an individual. I mean, maybe because I'm biased because I'm in New York, but I've never not seen a hard-working immigrant in my life. And it couldn't be just by us because I know my mother, I know my cousin. I know that people that I've worked with, and they all have been exceptional people. But when you're an immigrant here, there are a lot of benefits in terms of income and having a greater lifestyle for yourself. But there's a lot of, there's a lot of negatives that come along with that with racism, with certain stigma to like stigmatization is that go along with being an immigrant or not speaking English? I know a lot of people who have been bullied, go to schools, because they don't know English. It's a bit traumatizing for immigrants as well.

EH (30:35): So what challenging some immigrants face in the US now?

ST (30:44): I think now, specifically with everything that's going on, I think, when I don't, I don't know if you remember, but a while ago, there was a caravan that was coming.

ST (30:54): South American

ST (30:58): Crossing through.

EH (30:59): I saw too

(31:00):

yes, exactly. And when because they were escaping for refuge. Right. And like, had I been the president? I would have been like, yes. Let's find a way for you to make it here. That's fine. You jobs. It's fine to homes. Because if something was happening to the United States, other countries, hopefully

would want to accept it. Right. So we want to, because I don't know whether it's in Venezuela, I don't know. But anyways,

ST and EH (31:23): Yeah, lateral, I assumed they knew that a lot of people from Venezuela they move to Dominican Republic. They go government is not, is not well, that society. I feel the same way for any person that have like any problem within their own country, if they have the chance to go out the country, then they move on, they need to give here the people say that people progress.

ST (31:50): And I think the US has the resources to let immigrants come here. They are just I think there's just like such an old stilted way and how they think about immigrants that but they don't benefit they take from the community. They it's like, no, it's mutual thing. They're also paying taxes and they don't get their tax back.

EH (32:09): He knows I feel that if you have any more immigrants, we gonna have more job and this help the economy

ST (32:23): Yeah, I also think

ST (32:24): That and having immigrants come here, it also helps the infrastructure of their home country because those people who are here making money will send monies to their families, and then that country will be better off as well.

EH (32:35): Yeah, that was my personal question. So thank you so much for the interview.

ST (32:39): Yeah, of course, you kill anytime.