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Diontay Santiago Interview

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Interviewer: Verónica Quiroga
Interviewee: Diontay Santiago
Bronx African American History Project
Covid - 19

Veronica Quiroga: Hi everyone. This is Veronica Quiroga from the Bronx African American History Project, and we are here today with Diontay Santiago, who is going to be talking to us a little about his experiences ever since COVID 19 broke out. Hi, Diontay.

Diontay Santiago: Hey, how are you doing? I'm Diontay Santiago. I'm a rising senior at Fordham University, the Gabelli School of Business, marketing major. I'm happy to be participating in this.

Veronica Quiroga: Thanks so much. Diontay, so just for starters, I'd like to talk a little about how you feel COVID 19 has impacted since you mentioned Fordham, just your life as a student in general. So if you want to start by talking about that.

Diontay Santiago: Okay, so um, as a student, just in general, I feel like, um, because, you know, Coronavirus has kind of prevented us from, not even kind of, it has prevented us from being on campus and such. It's kind of cut my access to a lot of, like, the resources that I used to take advantage of being a student. So probably, like, the most important thing that I used to use was, like the gyms at the school, for example. So I've gained some weight since this has started. You know, I haven't been able to keep in shape the same way that I usually do, just because there hasn't been a lot to actually do, like kind of engaging when it comes to fitness, yeah, most of the parks don't have like, their hoops up and stuff like that. So like, there's no sports to participate in for the most part, yeah, just having like, a lack of access to weights or stuff like that, or like even, like, just recreational spaces has kind of impacted me. I guess you could say, uh, probably second is the library for sure, I have my own room at home, but, you know, like, my little brother doesn't have his own room, so he's definitely coming in here all the time, non stop bothering me, asking me to, like, you know, use my laptop, stuff like that. Even when school was happening, like, um, since I'm the only person who has a working laptop in my household, I used to leave my laptop at home for him. Like, you know, we use, like a school computer, something like that, because we do have access, like Cloud softwares, like Google or Microsoft, OneDrive or whatever. So, like, generally, just use those kinds of things. We even have to, like, split a laptop. My younger brother has been, like, a little bit like, I would just say, stressful, but it definitely takes, like, a lot more coordination, or even, like, my sister wanted to borrow my laptop or something like that. So, yeah, it's been impacted. It's not like, it's been thrown off course completely, but there's a little bit more, like I said earlier, coordination has to go into my studies, or, like, just like, day to day life in general.

Veronica Quiroga: Absolutely, I definitely feel that, also the same boat have a younger brother, so pretty much just never having privacy and having to, like, make do with what technology you have available in our households. So Diontay is also president of our Black Student Alliance at

Fordham. And Diontay, I'd like for you to talk to us a little bit about how the transition from sort of regular life to COVID and online life has impacted your work as president of the BSA.

Diontay Santiago: All right, so, um, for sure, there's been so many more zoom calls and online meetings and all that stuff. Uh, that's not necessarily a negative, though, you know, like we make do with what we have in this, uh, pandemic. But, uh, you know, just to kind of list things that are different. That's one, um, we've been utilizing our social media a lot more than we have in the past, just because that's the only real, uh, kind of platform to connect with a lot of students. What I don't like, I don't know, beg administration, because, like, I don't like to sell, like, Zoom calls and stuff like that. You know, we could just set up our own zoom calls, like facetimes or something like that. Or like, even last week we did, like an Instagram Live and like, we're invited, like, different students between LCA and Rose Hill to come talk to us and stuff like that. So, um, yeah, some of the roles that were, like, more important in the past during these times have been mitigated in exchange for some other roles. So for example, like, Treasurer is something that's, like, super important to a club, but, you know, like, we haven't had access to being on campus, so our treasurers haven't had to do the exact same amount of work. Now, before I was President, I was a social media coordinator. And don't get me wrong, like, it's not like, that's not like anything to do. Like, there's a lot of communication, like posting and design for a lot of likes, just like kind of marketing things have to go into that. However, like our new social media manager guy, he has had so much work to do, because every day we have a new person asking us to read their statement. Or like, you know, like, Please approve our petition, or, Hey. Can you join this zoom call? Like, oh, like, can you help out this donation or something like that, especially considering like that, um, I feel like during these times, like during the pandemic, I guess the worst of some people have been able to bring out. I have been brought out and the latest police brutality cases and all the protests and a lot of like, the tumultuous things that's been going on lately have kind of been, like addressed and dropped on our club and having to kind of address it in a remote fashion. I'm not like I said before, it's not necessarily stressful, because this is the kind of stuff that we signed up for. This is the kind of stuff that we wanted to address. Let me rephrase that we did not want to address that we rather not have to address those kinds of things to, rather not they exist, but these are the kind of things that we'd like to use a lot, utilize our platforms to address. So, like I said, it's not necessarily stressful, but there's a lot of, like, coordination time consumption that goes into these kinds of things. But like, um Yeah, just a lot more having to be loose, like, your phone, your laptop, or something like that, for the most part, even, like, having it, oh, sorry to interrupt you. I was done, and something came to mind, even having to, like, coordinate with um Like, even ways like, how are we supposed to, like, retain like um black students on campus, or even, like, helping like students of campus on color, like, how to be able to, like, retain them on campus. I guess you could say like, get being able to keep their kind of like interest on school during these times, because, like, it's not easy to kind of feel like you're involved in a community that you might not have been very involved in from the beginning, especially now that you're at home and not even on the campus day to day, like stuff like that. Yeah, that's all. That's my spiel.

Veronica Quiroga: Just for clarification purposes, when you say that other clubs have been reaching out to you to sort of approve petitions and statements. You're referring to, statements and donations pertaining to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Diontay Santiago: Oh, yeah. Like, completely, if you saw the amount of like, like, text, emails, Instagram, DMS, like, you know, like, I appreciate people trying to do their part. It's just kind of, it's kind of daunting to realize how, like, you know, all these people are now following us and listening to us, because a lot of people have been, like, murdered and hurt in these past, like, few days. And now, like, I mean, I guess it's a good thing, but it's also a bad thing, you know, like, yeah, the amount of people asking us all, like, look at these petitions. We want to write this new statement, and it's the same statement written by the same kind of person every single time. But you know, I don't know. It's just a lot. This is a lot on the plate, but yeah, definitely exactly what you said.

Veronica Quiroga: Yeah, that's interesting. And I mean, not to sort of jump in or give my word or I'm not supposed to. But I mean, these are actions I feel like other clubs and other orgs on campus could have been taking, they could have been taking time to sort of listen to you guys and listen to what it is that the actual Black Student Alliance on Fordham needs. But instead, it sort of feels like, just because of everything that's happening, there's now all this, like a new wave of attention and momentum being given so hopefully, I mean, they maintain the same level of...

Diontay Santiago: Actually, that's something I've been worried about. Like, once this is all said and done, is there still going to be a maintenance of attention placed on, like, the needs of students that are somewhere in the margin? Because, you know, it's not even just black students that students that like are ignored this way. I definitely feel like, definitely a group that is ignored also like, you know, students who are like LGBTQ or like others like minority groups, or like ethnic minorities or religious minorities.

Veronica Quiroga: Absolutely, absolutely. And do you think that, or sort of, how would you say that everything that's going on has sort of been exacerbated by COVID 19? How do you feel like Fordham, Or do you feel that Fordham has sort of helped to alleviate some stress during these moments? What could they be doing better?

Diontay Santiago: So, things have been exacerbated, mostly because a lot of people have to be home now, and there's a lot more attention placed on media, not even just social media, just all forms of media, whether it's like TV or like you're getting your news from the newspapers, or like the news updates that your iPhone gives in the morning that everybody usually ignores, you know, so, um, excuse me, I think that definitely does like I kind of exponentially increase that the attention that these things get now in relation to the way that Fordham has tried to alleviate like student trust law and COVID 19. I don't know if I'm thinking hard about it, like, have they at all? I really don't know. I wanted to say the Cares Act, but the thing about the Cares Act is, like, that was, like, federally mandated. So like, was it Fordham or? Like, because I know everything was

cool, I had to do that. So I don't know if I want to really credit that to Fordham's like, oh, they did so much for us with that. I don't know.

Veronica Quiroga: Well, just in your own experience.

Diontay Santiago: Okay. Well, personally, I've had a lot of administrators that I know reach out to me, try to be resources for me. So for example, I'm a fellow in the Office of Chief Diversity Officer, Rafael Zapata, the chief diversity officer and like, um Kendra Dunbar, they've been super supportive, always keeping in touch with me, like, making sure, like, I have like resources and stuff like that. Like, I got an email like, two days ago from Raphael talking about, like, different resources for like, black lives matter. When I say resources, I mean like news outlets or places to donate and stuff like that, so that we have more like answers. Like, frankly, white students who hit us up talking about, hey, like, I don't know where to donate, or I don't know where to protest, but I want to support or something like that. Like, you know, like, these resources are there so, you know, they send those kinds of things forward, having, like, phone calls with me every so often because I work for them. Also Professor Clarence Ball from the Gabelli School of Business. I'm pretty sure he's like the director of diversity inclusion. He also was like, I guess he's like the professor mentor to the diversity equity inclusion advisory board, and I'm the president of the mentoring leads, which is like a subsidiary of that advisory board. And because I like work with that, he's been like, direct when it comes, like, contact with me. He, you know, like his line is always open. So, I mean, like I said, I feel like I've been personally supported, but it's also a matter of like, or even my professors during the semester, they were in response. But like I said, it's a matter of me being a little bit more like connected, you know. But I know my experiences as a freshman at Fordham University, I didn't know many people, aside from a few other commuters. And that's like, maybe, maybe like, one kid on campus who transferred out at the year because he couldn't stand the racism at the school. So it's like, it's, by the way, he transferred to Howard University and went to HBCU. So that's a PWI to HBCU. You have to get it. I'm not gonna get into that. I'm just saying, but anyways, um, yeah, so like, I said, like, I'm more concerned for the people who don't necessarily have the exact same administrative support, like, even, like, the kind of friends that I have, kind of, like, they are the ones who, like, really, like getting ignored, I guess you could say, but yeah, personally, I've been good, though it's all good,

Veronica Quiroga: Absolutely. And I mean, would you say that overall, sort of your experiences speak to the general Fordham, you know, being that you're president of a whole org on Fordham, or would you say that you've had sort of a harder, slash, easier time transitioning, and just in terms of the products that Fordham has made available to us with Zoom, etc, a lot of students often talk about not feeling like zoom platforms are working enough. Or others have spoken about sort of the interruptions that have been happening with Zoom.

Diontay Santiago: I haven't really experienced any problems with Zoom, honestly, but I've heard people experiencing problems. I experienced problems maybe, like, the first few days, but I guess that's because, like, the amount of people getting introduced to the platform, and also,

like, I personally have no problem on zoom, and I haven't had any problems accessing any of these platforms and stuff like that. But that's also just a matter of, like, who knows that these platforms are being used for more than just class. You know, like, I'm told about these things, like, I get the invites, I get the emails. A lot of students don't get those opportunities. So like, like, I said, just personally, I've been good. I don't know if my experience speaks to the majority. Probably not, because I feel like, uh, I don't know. I don't want to make the black experience at Fordham, like a monolithic thing, or, like, even just like my individual experience at all kind of encompassing anybody else's. But I don't think my experience is like the norm. I'm pretty sure a lot more people probably have way more difficulty.

Veronica Quiroga: Yeah, same. Um, so you mentioned working in the Office of Diversity Inclusion. Were you still working slash, are you still working currently from home? And talk to me a little bit about what that experience has been like.

Diontay Santiago: Alright, so, um, honestly, the work has not been the same since we haven't been on campus. Oh. Lot of it, maybe, like, half of it was more than just, like, you know, like sitting in, like an office and like coming up with ideas, like, a lot of it was also, like, I don't know, typing up certain things, like processing all these, like different paperworks and stuff like that, like attending events and kind of like helping to orchestrate how they've, um, how they go. So, kind of being at home. I'm not gonna say it's taken away any, like, the the passion behind it, I guess you could say, but it's just taking away, like, a lot of the processes, like, now it's a whole entire, like, matter of, like, how do you still connect with the student base, but through a laptop, like, to a phone? So the work has been, well, it's just, unfortunately, I can't even speak so much that I've done during the course of my work, just because I feel like there hasn't been much that I've been able to kind of do while at home. We've had, like, a lot of discussions, though, a lot of talking about different ways that we could support students, a lot of like sitting in on calls with administrators, listening to the kind of thought processes that they have and how they want to support students. But personally, I haven't done many projects. The one thing that I tried to work on, which I need to follow up on is, like, possibly over the summer, setting up zoom calls with incoming freshmen and kind of speaking to them about how, like the Fordham experience will be like, but from a specific perspective, you know, so like having my club talk to black students about being black students at Fordham over the summer. Because, you know, there's not going to be any sort of, like summer introduction. I don't know what they call it, like the summer city thing. I don't, I don't know the orientation type of thing, yeah, the summer orientation thing, you know. So, like, I know, when I did one of the summer orientations, you know, I went for the free food, you know, but I want them to get more than free food out of the experience. I mean, there's not going to be any free food because it's remote, so might as well get something out of the experience. And maybe, like, understanding how they may feel at Fordham, like, kind of, like, bracing for that, obviously not speaking to everything negative, because it's not like Fordham's 100% negative. It's kind of negative, though, but not 100% negative, but, um, you know, like, that kind of stuff. That was one of the only projects that I've worked on, and I have not gotten very far with it, just because of a, I don't know, I guess my own lack of progress due to, like, remote working. It's kind of hard. It's hard to catch everybody on emails and coordinate everybody's schedules when nobody is scheduled to be at Fordham, you know?

Veronica Quiroga: Absolutely, absolutely. Nyasa, did you want to jump in? Slash. Do you have any questions?

Nyasa: Yeah. I actually wanted to know what you had mentioned like that, their access to resources have shifted. And I wanted to know what sort of resources I don't have if you feel comfortable, could you imagine, or could you think would be helpful? So you had just mentioned, you know, reaching out to incoming first years. But are there any other things like through the stories and the conversations and the calls that you're sitting on? Are there any new things coming up about people's experiences during this time?

Diontay Santiago: Well, sorry to interrupt you. Somebody kept on calling me. I tried hanging up, and they kept on spamming. Could you like, just give me a quick run through one more time?

Nyasa: Yeah, so I wanted to, it's a two part question. So you mentioned that there were, there are resources that folks have access to, that they had access to they don't currently have access to. And I just wanted to know if there's any sort of resources that you have been imagining or thinking of outside of just the one that you mentioned in reaching out to incoming first years. And I also wanted to know if like this, like incoming stories and like sharing and testimonies that people are giving about the experience at Fordham has also shifted how you are thinking about being a leader in the community at Fordham.

Diontay Santiago: Alright, so I'm just running back to just make sure I got everything down. So the first part of the question, basically, is, what kind of resources have been inaccessible and how those have affected kind of and the second one is, how have the experiences of other students that I've heard kind of affect how I want to be a leader at Fordham University.

Nyasa: Yeah

Diontay Santiago: All right, so for the first question, um, like, I said, like, a lot of the resources, aside from, like, you know, physical things like gym and I mentioned libraries, like, aside from, like those two primarily, um, it's even like, just having, like, a support group, you know, so a lot of people found solace. And like, you know, commuters found solace and being in the commuter lounge. You know, like black students found solace and being in the city, Muslim students found solace and being like MSA, you know, like the. From organizations that these people, like, were able to, like, unwind in, in the physical, inviting space, you know, or like, even having access to, like, just be able to walk into office hours, like, go to your dean, like, whenever you feel like it. It's not as easy to, I'm not saying it's impossible, but it's not as easy to kind of reach these people and schedule things online, especially if you live in, like, in a different time zone than them. You know, like, I know some people who were overseas, you know, like, six hours ahead. Or, like, I even know somebody who she would study abroad and when she came back to the US, because, you know, Coronavirus and all that, her classes were at like 10am in Spain, not speaking London, like 10am in London, while she was in Dallas, or, like Houston, I think not Dallas, Dallas. Yeah, Texas, basically, yeah. So it's, it's not, there's so many like intangibles that I would like to discuss. When it comes to the resources that people have, I feel like a lot of them,

a lot of the most important resources weren't necessarily the library in the gym, but like the people that you have access to groups to support. Um, so yeah, it's a whole entire different experience. A lot of people just don't even want to kind of be in work mode, 24/7, in the place that they relax at, like, you know, like, working from home isn't even as easy. And some people don't have the kind of home where, like, you know, you could go to like, a different room or something like that, like, begin to work, you know, I know some people have, like, office spaces and, like their houses or whatever. I've never actually seen that in person. I've seen it on TV, so I assume it exists. But you know, like some people may be able to go to like those kinds of spaces or something like that, while others may not. So I don't want to drag the question out, but like to give an all encompassing answer, like people, I guess you could say all kinds of people, like friends, peers, administrators that you can meet face to face, like, hash things out with. Like I said, there's plenty of great alternatives. Zoom is one of them, but it's just not as easy to kind of coordinate all those things through the internet all the time, you know. Um, and to the second question. So even, like, hearing from like, the experiences of some of these freshmen. I give you, like a quick example I was, since I'm, like, the president, the mentoring LEAD program for the school business like, aside from, like, the development and the implementation of programming for the freshmen, other sophomores that are part of the program, you also like develop, like a personal connection with one of them. So I was talking to one of my freshman mentees the other day. He just told me about a sweater too. I like to sweat it. My bad. I'm getting off track. Anyways, um, he was telling me about this other guy that he knew, another freshman at this guy didn't even, like, have a laptop, like the whole freshman year, and like, as somebody who did not have a laptop until, like, the May of my freshman year. I thought I had it rough when I used to be told, like, oh, I don't want to meet in the library for a group project. I like, Oh, man. You know, this guy can't even participate in group projects or conversations because he actually does not even have a laptop. You know, like, what do you do? Work from your phone. I've done that. Essays on your phone are not fun. It's it does? It just doesn't work the same way. Like you start writing an essay, like you write a text. You think you have so many things on the word on the page because that, you know, you fill up one page on your phone. It's not the same, you know. So, um, just handle the inaccessibility, like resources are just like that. Like where some students literally rely on being able to come on campus, to be able to do their work. Like I said, that might not be a majority of students, but I feel like, you know, like appealing to the majority all the time, it leaves a vast minority, like falling through the gaps, you know. So I kind of want to shift the way I lead a lot more toward, uh, how can I put it, not just being able to, like, lead, like conversation and discussion, or like, you know, like fun trips and stuff like that that we do as a club, but um, also being, I know a lot of a lot of people have proclaimed The club as, like a silly specifically as a place where, like, a lot of black students, like other resource for black students on campus, my own be more than just like a social resource, you know. So I know, like, our club has been doing, like, a lot of donations and like and charity work throughout the last like few weeks, just utilizing the power of social media. Like I remember one day I saw this thing on Twitter, just like a matching challenge for the Minnesota freedom fund, right? And I was like, hey, like, this would be great on Instagram, because I have so many people like, so many more people on my Instagram who like, actually like, engage in my content. I uploaded on my Instagram, I put like, \$20 I was like, Yo anybody match me? Me. Within the next 24 hours, they got like 10 more people to match me than my other friends did that. They got 10 people to

match them and put on the city page that got 10 people to match them. Like, before we knew it, like, amongst like, various different funds, we were able to procure, like, around \$1,000 for all these different things. Like, \$1000 may not seem like a lot, but if everybody's doing like, you know a little \$1,000 like, that's important work. So that's just like, that's that's just setting it up for like, the next thing, like, that's not really relevant to me being a leader on campus. Well, I mean, it is, but not in the way that I'm trying to describe it. So now, um, alumni have seen that. Alumni had read about it in the Fordham Observer, they wrote like, a little article on that, and they've reached out to us about doing like a thing where, how could you put it? A matching thing? So alumni from PwC, two from Google and one from MSF. It's some sort of mutual fund. Maybe I really don't know. Actually, I never heard of it before. Like today, in many ways, for every dollar that we donate, they match Google matches up to 10,000 PWC and MSF match up to 1000 and as of right now, like, basically, it just doubles anything that we get. If we get 1000 like, they give to like, now it's 2000 you know. So like, being able to procure those kinds of resources and being able to, like, give them out to things that could reinvest into our own communities. It's super important to me. Like, the last example I'll give, working with the Gabelli school, we so, like, when the Cares Act came in, or whatever, one of the professors told me, he was like, hey, like, I need you to go and compile a list of kids who need laptops. He was like, it doesn't even matter like, like, as long as, like, they have a reason for the laptop and they have, like, an asking price they like, can get these resources. I just need to go get the kids that need them, especially the belly. I mean, obviously I'm only operating the bicycle business. I can't speak to Rosa. I can't use Gabelli money for students, you know. But he said, like, go get the list of students. I'm gonna pitch it to the council or whatever. You know, I got maybe, like, five students that I could identify, you know, I don't know every single student in public school, but five students I was able to identify who needed resources, and I was able to, like, send them over to him. And I don't know what developed of it, but like, you know, like, just even being able to coordinate the first step in the foot, the first foot step in the door, you know, I'm trying to say so, like, um, yeah, I'm definitely trying to be a leader who doesn't just focus on creating spaces, but creating earlier, I was talking about intangibles, like, now, like, I want to be able to, like, create some sort of, like, tangible substances for students to actually be able to, like, Look toward, aside from, you know, just friendship. Friendship is cool, though, for real, but you know, like other stuff too,

Veronica Quiroga: Absolutely. Thank you for sharing that. Deontay, so thanks a lot for talking to us about how sort of COVID has impacted or exacerbated conditions for you. As a Fordham student, I'd like to hear a little bit about how you feel. It's impacted your family and your neighborhood. So talk to us first, a little bit about where you live, where in the Bronx you're from, and then, yeah.

Diontay Santiago: Alright. So like, I don't really know if my area has a name. I know most people know, like, the name of the area. My area is, like, funny, so I'll just like, give like, the crossroad. Live on, I live on 176 in Bathgate. So, like that, that's like, near Webster. It's near Grand Concourse, but it's also near, like, Crotona Park, but it's also near Fordham, but it's also like, like, it's in between a lot of stuff, but essentially, like, I live not too far from Fordham University itself. Like, well, like a 30 minute, 40 minute walk on a good day.

Veronica Quiroga: So would you say the South Bronx or closer to the North Bronx?

Diontay Santiago: Definitely. Um, all right, it's always funny, because before I got to Fordham, I didn't think I lived in the South Bronx, but apparently I do live in the South Bronx, yeah,

Veronica Quiroga: I'm just gonna say that. I'm pretty sure it's the South Bronx.

Diontay Santiago: I realized that, like I used to always tell people I live in the South Bronx, I live in the middle of the Bronx. No such thing. Apparently, I used to look at the maps and be like, No, I live in the middle of the Bronx. It doesn't make sense. I live in the South Bronx. The South Bronx, I used to identify that as like 149 and down I live on 176 but apparently anything below Fordham Road was kind of considered like the South Bronx. I didn't realize that until I got to Fordham University. Previously, you're from the south Bronx? Oh, yeah, from the South Bronx, I guess, whatever, though. So yeah, South Bronx.

Veronica Quiroga: Okay, so yeah, just talk to us a little bit about how you feel. COVID 19 has impacted the South Bronx, your community in particular, and your family.

Diontay Santiago: So I'll do that, where the South Bronx Community, family, okay, so the South Bronx in general, like, people have been dying disproportionately in this borough, like contracting Coronavirus disproportionately, um, I know some people be like, oh, like, I don't believe in systemic racism. But, like, that's actually an example, right there. You. You know, like, just like, faults in the healthcare system. I guess you could say like, or like, even like, the lack of treating patients with the same care or same concern, rather, because I guess like, you could treat them with the same care, but it's like, it doesn't matter if you don't really like care to begin with. You know, that's why I meant like by care, not like, not patching them up, but more like, it'll be all right, you know, so, yeah, it's kind of crazy to, like, even like, kind of be around all this that's without kind of seeing it, but knowing it's happening around you. You know, the other day, I was walking past St Barnabas on my way to my cousin's house, and I see like, two trucks at St Barnabas saying one of my best friends from middle school, she works at St Barnabas, and she was telling me, like, oh, yeah, those trucks are dead bodies. And I was like, like, I mean, I don't know if she's telling the truth or not. She'd be lying sometimes, but it's like, it is what, like, you know, what I'm trying to say? Like, it probably is, I don't have any reason not to believe her, you know. So it's just like the kind of like insensitivity, or I'm not gonna say insensitivity more like numbness to the whole entire situation, like witnessing these kind of things happening around you, and like knowing that there's not much you can do about it, like I'm not a healthcare professional, nor am I, like a policy maker. So this is just like witnessing these kind of things happening to me. Things happening to my community is kind of a disparaging I guess you could say at the least. So yeah, as for the South, my personal community. How's been affecting my community? Honestly, I feel like, I don't think it's affected it yet, but that's because it's not the summertime yet. And a lot of people know summertime in New York City gets a little crazy, you know. And you know, with the cancellation of programs like summer use with no basketball courts outside, you know, like, basketball is big in the Bronx like, you know, like, no basketball tournaments this summer. So many things that's not going to be available.

Veronica Quiroga: Not to mention that more basketball courts and recreational spaces have been closed in the Bronx than in any other borough.

Diontay Santiago: I've been telling people this, and nobody believed me, but I'm like, yo, like, why do they take everything out the hood? But I still see people like, playing like, like, I'm on YouTube, playing basketball and blah, blah, blah, and it's like, how, how do y'all still got basketball courts? Anyways, I'm not even gonna get into that whole entire thing. Who? But, yeah, uh, I feel like it hasn't affected my community yet, but like it's going to affect it soon. Because, realistically, like, even, like, the whole entire concept behind like, divest from police officers, like, you know, like divesting from the police and investing into the community to create, like, sustainable programs. Like kids don't have to resort to anything that might be like, less than satisfactory in terms of like, I guess like behavior, I don't like to use the term behavior, me selling animals, but for lack of better terms, but, uh, here it's just like, now that the kids aren't gonna have anything to do this summer, like, they might just be outside hanging out, possibly contracting Coronavirus. There might be like, like, with no money coming through. Some people may feel like they have to resort to like, certain things to get money. Like, I don't even know what's gonna happen. I just think that maybe my community will be affected this summer. I'm hoping not. But as of right now, I guess they're okay, the minute phase one opened up, though, people have been outside having block parties like crazy, very irresponsible. But you know, like, I can't understand the sentiment. I mean, a few months ago, people in the South were protesting for haircuts, so it's like, I'm not even gonna judge them, or anything like that. Or maybe I'll just judge everybody equally. But, uh, my family, my family's doing pretty well. Actually, both my parents are considered to be essential workers.

Veronica Quiroga: So uh, yes, yeah, tell us a little bit about that and how their experience says, slash, life has changed ever since all of this. Do they commute to work via MTA, anything like that?

Diontay Santiago: Okay, so, um yeah, my parents usually take the bus to work in the morning. So, um Yeah, they take the bus in the morning. Excuse me, usually they have me pick them up in the afternoon. I'm not sure if it's because, like, drive to pick them up. I'm not sure if it's because they're scared of Corona or because they just don't want to take the bus back home. I'm pretty sure it's the latter as opposed to the former. Maybe it's an excuse that they use, like the Coronavirus, I don't know. I think it's gonna get picked up. But anyways, if they could take the bus in the morning, they could take the bus back now, but I'm not gonna keep on going to that. So, um, yeah. So the whole entire thing is, like, my parents have been very concerned about the Coronavirus, like, because they are considered, like, like, they work in like, a certain kind of field. So, like, they're able to, like, get like, um, the test done. Because they work in like, they're not like healthcare professionals, but like, they work in healthcare, you know, so they're able to, like, get the test done, like, more, like, rapidly, like, in comparison to, like, most people. So like, I know, my mom's already done it twice, just out of like, fear that she might have contracted it on the bus or something like that. Or, like, you know, she's making me do it on Saturday because I've been to maybe, like, three protests so far, and she's like, oh, like, you probably brought Corona into my house if she don't got it. Though, like, I think I don't have it, but

you know, like, might as well check to see, just in case. But yeah, like, like, financially, you've been well, just because my parents are both fortunate enough to be considered essential workers. But aside from like, like, I know it's been affecting a lot of people financially, so I just wanted to make sure, like, I was able to address that, that this is, like, I think, a unique thing, or, like, specific to my own circumstances. I feel like more people have been affected negatively than positively, um, but also, yeah, just like the fear of, like, contracting Coronavirus, like working in, like, a healthcare space, there's a lot more sick people that come through that could be, like, somewhat fearful, uh, being on public transit could be scary, you know? So, uh, yeah, my family's just kind of been on edge about it, not necessarily like me and my siblings, like younger people, we haven't really been like, scared. I guess you could say I'm trying to be, like, cautious, but I wouldn't describe myself as scared, you know. But, uh, my parents definitely a little bit, uh, anxious over it

Veronica Quiroga: Yeah. And I mean, as they should be coming in and out of the house every day as essential workers. So first of all, we'd like to thank them, because they are literally on the front lines of this pandemic. And just you mentioned a little So briefly, you said that you don't feel like your circumstances sort of apply to the larger Bronx, generally people in the Bronx. How do you think the pandemic has sort of impacted life in the Bronx overall?

Diontay Santiago: So many different answers I can get to that question. Well, every time I go into, like, a small business, like on, like, my local chicken spot, right? I'll try to talk to the people who, like, you know, run like, I like to talk to people like, it brightens up their day a little bit, because I know, like, those kind of, like, like, being in the restaurant from opening to closing can be, like, really, really boring. So I can all ask them, like, Oh, how's things been on the last night? I also give myself a beef patty, pepperoni, some cheese, and cocoa bread. And I asked him, I was like, Yo, like, how's things been? Like, you've been doing it? Well, like, how's business? And, you know, like, maybe he felt like I was mocking him. I felt kind of bad afterward. He was like, there's really no business, like Coronavirus, like, barely business. And I was like, Damn, that's unfortunate. A lot of small business owners have been experiencing the fact, like, they can't get the same kind of like, traffic that they've been getting, especially when a majority of their student, their customers were students, you know, I know, like, the businesses around Fordham University are feeling it right now, like, because a lot of the students are the people who, like, we're constantly buying businesses like, around, like certain, like, big high schools definitely feeling it like, especially like little like bodegas and stuff like that. Um, for day to day work, low key. I'm reconsidering it, and I feel like a lot of the people in the Bronx just because, like, a not in a negative way, but like, there are, like, a lot of low income residents in this in this borough, and a lot of the jobs that I guess a lot of us doing hit this borough are considered to be essential. So, like, you know, the person who's like, at your supermarket, or like, the person like, like my dad, like a janitor, like the person like cleaning your floors and stuff like that. Like, they haven't really, like, experienced, like, job insecurity, so I feel like it's been, like, split down the middle. A lot of them are, like, a lot of people here are essential workers, you know, I haven't really met anybody who's like, lost their jobs, but I've heard of people like losing their jobs, you know. So for example, I have a friend who, who his mom likes, works in the office, and his mom hasn't been able to go back to work. And for somebody who's like, in there,

like, like, around 50 transitioning from office environment to, like, an online, remote environment when they barely say, every 50 year old don't know how to use the internet, but quite a few of them aren't as literate in, um, digital services as a lot of us younger people are. So like, it's been, like, very difficult for her, like, difficult for his sister, who, uh, she hasn't been able to actually work, like she worked at, like a, like a cruise line or something, and, like, nobody's taking cruises. That's just it. That's like an incubator for Coronavirus. Nobody even, like, aside from the fact that we can't take cruises, even when we probably can, I. Doubt many people are going to be taking them, except for the people who just want to get those deals, which I can understand. Like, I'm not gonna say it's right, but I can understand she can't work because, like, how she's selling tickets to people physically, you know, like, so I've seen people lose their jobs. I just feel like, um, it's a two way street in this borough.

Veronica Quiroga: Yeah, I also think that, I mean, for so many of those residents that haven't lost their jobs, essential workers, like your parents, for example, then you're, you're sort of fighting a different battle, and battling different demons, in terms of risking your life every day, going out there, possibly contracting the virus, and then bringing it back home to your families. That's a lot of that, um, we've, we've heard that from a lot of interviewees and a lot of just people expressing the fear. So if they are essential workers, they have that economic security. But then there's insecurities on the health side.

Diontay Santiago: Yeah, I don't know if it's worth the trade off, maybe.

Veronica Quiroga: Or if you even, if we even are fortunate enough to be able to pick, yeah, coming from the places we do Nyasa, did you? Did you want to ask anything sort of pertaining to that before we move on to the next thing?

Nyasa: "Shakes Head"

Veronica Quiroga: "Okay, cool. So Diontay, you did mention going to a few of the protests, and only because I feel like this is an essential time, an imperative moment, to sort of hear, not only from leaders in the forum community, but just from leaders, and you are a leader in the Bronx, whether you consider yourself that or not. So talk to us about your experience at the protests and sort of how you feel. I mean, you could bring in COVID, but not necessarily from my own personal experiences in protest in Manhattan and Brooklyn. A lot of the protesters were wearing masks, gloves, but there was absolutely no social distancing. And then obviously, like, once you're sort of on the front lines of it, there's no social distancing between the actual protesters and the cops. So what has your experience been like?"

Diontay Santiago: So I was just going to the Coronavirus part, because that's what, that's the, probably the most brief commentary I have, like you said, Most of people I've seen have wore masks, not everybody, but for the most part, I've never felt like scared of contracting the virus in those crowds. But those crowds get huge, and you never know. So it's like there is a huge health risk. But I went to one protest here in the Bronx, and it was led by my song. He's like an older rapper. I don't know if everybody know him. I barely even knew him. I only ever heard one

song. But anyways, that's how it's a point. And he said, like, for this point in time he believes, like, like, essentially he was saying like, he believes that like, health is important and all, but like, he rather put his health on the front line to kind of fight against the brutality that a lot of like black and brown bodies have been facing at the hands of the police, as opposed to being home and like, from all the people that I see at these protests, I feel like those sentiments are definitely echoed all throughout the country, throughout the world, because there have been, like, a lot of international protesting too. So it's like, for me, I definitely do think it's a risk, but I think it's worth it that you'd be out there protesting against all these things. So my personal experiences in the process, however, I think my biggest gripe is that the media tends to portray them. And like, I'm not even trying to, like, pick sides of media, like, left media, right, like, you know, like either side has been portraying a lot of these, like, uh, protests and, like, a sensationalized point of view, you know, like I'm watching TV, like, even on CNN, like I see fire and people getting arrested, and I don't know, riots and stuff like that. Or like Fox where, like, the video that guy who, like, pulled out his crossbow and started shooting it at like, people, and then, you know, Fox interviewed him and gave him a platform to lie and say that two black guys beat him up inside of his car when he was, like, outside of his car, like, getting beat up by white people for trying to shoot them, or crossbows and stuff like that, which is crazy to me to even fathom that that happened in 2020 but it is what it is. And, um, yeah, like, I just feel like the news is portraying a lot of these protests, or, like, picking and choosing the protests that they want to show. You know, I've been to plenty of protests that I'm not like, trying to talk down to anybody's form of protest, but, you know, we weren't hugging and loving cops but at the same time, like we weren't burning and, like destroying, like small businesses, you know. So it's like peaceful protest has been achieved, definitely, you know. And it's just not really on the news like that. But thankfully, we have social media where, like, we can be our own news outlets, where all it takes is somebody to post it and a few 1000 people could see it easily, as opposed to, like, always having to consume your news from, like, major media sources. Now, my last name is Santiago, but I can't speak Spanish, but for all my like, Hispanic friends that I know, I. Who like, do like, speak primarily Spanish in their household or whatever. A lot of their parents have been watching shows like Univision or Univision. I don't, I don't know how to, I don't know the name of the channel. I think it's that. And it's even like news channels that aren't like, I don't know if it's based in America or not. I'm pretty sure it's based in Latin America. But even news channels that aren't based in America are kind of vilifying and like portraying these protests as something that's like tearing the country apart. I guess there's like an ideological tear, but, um, you know, I'm trying to say, like, it's making these things seem way more violent, and kind of MIS portraying it at the point of the door. A lot of people are saying, like, oh, riots are undermining the point. But it's like, no, because the riots are happening because of this. So it's like the point is being undermined by whoever wants to undermine it, and the news is definitely helping spread that kind of propaganda. So like, that's my biggest thing about this protest. But I've only been in peaceful ones the times you know. Like, even I remember when Fordham Road got looted, you know, like, I went to go help clean up for them road at nine in the morning, and then I was downtown by 1pm to go to a protest, to protest the the brutality, like people are trying to, like, make it seem like us versus some kind of thing was realistically not. You know, that's my biggest commentary on these protests. I just want people to know like it's not all just violence

deluding, and like to believe that it is regular, ignorant, or to even believe that it's not about Black Lives mattering. You know.

Veronica Quiroga: Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, there's, there's definitely that part with the media and stuff, but I feel like it's sort of our own responsibility to just go out our way and figure out, like, what is sort of being exaggerated, what why? What reasons would the media have to sort of portray us in a certain light? Um, so yeah, that's just all personal responsibility when it comes to that. Um, but talk to us a little about Bronx Clean Up – Oh Nyasah?

Nyasa: yeah, yeah. I actually just wanted to speak on what you were saying in regards to, just like, the importance of media, and again, a personal statement, but really, like you were saying, trying to dissect, you know, how this story got fabricated so quickly, you know, like we're seeing a very quick response to these rebellions, much quicker than where we saw a response to COVID period. We're seeing people have interest in particular neighborhoods and particular places that they had never liked. The amount of people that I saw sharing like Fordham Road as someone who was like from the Bronx and like people weren't normally talking about Fordham Road as like a, you know, going viral place. It was just like, really, like, striking. And I really think that, you know, we should be really, you know, critically thinking about what the media is doing. Not only that they are doing it, but what would be their intention, you know, like, why would you need to fabricate that story. Of course, what are you trying to uphold?

Diontay: It's sad though. I feel like so many people don't even take the time to, like, ask those questions, and that's why like So your point of Veronica, yeah, it's, it's our responsibility to like, digest the information. But knowing that, I guess a lot of people don't even know where to look for the information, aside from the news. So it's like, I'm not saying like you're wrong, because you're definitely right, but it's also like an ethical obligation, obligation, because nobody feels obligated for anything, but it's an ethical responsibility of news outlets to kind of portray things correctly, or at least unbiased, you know. But, I mean, I haven't seen unbiased reporting ever in my life. I don't think that actually exists. So it's like, you know.

Veronica Quiroga: Right? And then find out that nine of our largest media companies are sort of owned by these conservative people, or just groups with conservative interests, then it makes even more sense. Sort of starts to fall together. But if we can't trust the media, and if we can't trust the news, where do you get your news from? Who do you trust?

Diontay Santiago: Nobody

Veronica Quiroga: When it comes to anything COVID 19 related anything, because even with COVID 19, that's one of the other sort of pandemics. In addition to the racial pandemic, pandemic, we're getting news from everywhere. Right information, wrong information about how to wear your mask, how to safely, social distance, how to do anything. So where do you sort of get that information from?

Diontay Santiago: I trust the media to an extent. I trust them enough to at least try to, like, delineate, like, what are they given? So I'll be honest with you, my favorite new channel is new 12, the Bronx. That's the most trustworthy new channel ever watched in my life. So I watched news 12, the Bronx, a lot, not a lot, but I watch it more than others. My grandmother has CNN on. I'm watching CNN with her, you know, like they know, I don't know. They're not always terrible. Um, I try to go online, like googling things, but. Even then, like, one time I was Googling something about police for like, an essay, and then I ran across, like, a I thought it was a good essay that I was about to read. I was on a white supremacist website. So, like, I don't know, like, sometimes it gets difficult. I go to Twitter, sometimes following certain people on Twitter who just upload videos or just upload stories. Like, they don't even put their own critiques into things. But even then, Twitter lies so much on both sides. I saw a video. It was like a cop stops bothering black man after he reveals he was an FBI agent. And I was like, this is incredible. Like, if that's real, I need to, like, know more about this. I looked into it. The guy on his Instagram was like, Guys, I'm not an FBI agent. He just checked my, like, my ID, and I wasn't the person he was looking for, you know? So it's like, there's so many, like, lies on both sides. I love the FBI agent unlock, though, because that's a nice little story. Um, that sounds the point. So it's just like, I don't know, like, I try to cross reference multiple platforms to see if I can get things, but I don't think I'm any better at getting news than anybody else's, to be honest with you. So yeah, wherever I get my news from, I don't think I'm like a pariah. Well, I don't know if I'm using WordPress correctly, but I don't think I'm like, the aspirant model, where somebody should be like, yeah, like, where he gets his news from? That's where I want to get it from, because I'm probably telling lies too based on the lies that I'm being told.

Veronica Quiroga: um, so just sort of to thank you on behalf of the Bronx African American History Project for joining us today quickly and just sharing some of that, some of your insight and some of your wisdom with us. So just to end off on a slightly negative note, um, what are your worries for the future, and if what the CDC is predicting that a second wave will hit, how do you think that, in tandem with the protest against racial injustices, how do you think that that'll sort of impact your own life?

Diontay Santiago: I feel it's gonna be like some sort of like positive and negative repercussions, but for sure, I'll start on the negative sides weekend. On a good note, negatively. I feel like when school come back, when school comes back, rather, might not be able to stay on campus. And I really don't like working from home. Like, I don't mind it too much, but I really don't like it that much like, I much rather be on campus. I don't want to go with what you guys went through, like, a class of 2020, not having a graduation that's black. I need to walk down my stage, you know. Like, I need my grandmother to see that in person, you know. So, um, yeah, I'm just worried that, like, we won't be able to go back to school. And I'm worried that, like, a lot of like, a lot of, like, economic growth is going to stagnate in these kind of areas. But, you know, like, life itself will kind of, like, be harder for so many more people, like, if they don't, like, if a second wave comes and they don't freeze rent, people who are really not living, you know, like, with, like, in the homes. So I was hoping that there's enough government intervention that things like, we can, at least, like, sustain the lives of people. You know, on the good side, though, I feel as though, because there's so much, like, health crises, so these kind of, like, protests and all that

stuff, I feel like, maybe on, like, on a on an optimistic note, the government will be like, alright, let's appease and like, let's listen to the people. Like, you know, we want to get them out the streets and in their homes as soon as possible, you know. But, um, I don't know that probably won't happen as easily as I think, when I think, as easily as I hope it will. But, uh, yeah, I'm hoping that maybe, like, to prevent like, a second wave coming in, like, getting people out of the streets in their homes, not being like, gathered in mass, or no, like, implement some sort of like, policies or like, I don't know, listen to what the public are saying, is saying in regard to the protest. And so I kind of implement, adopting some of the things people are saying. Like, even like the MPD, I don't know if they're being like, dissolved, like rebuilt. I don't know if they're being defunded slightly by, like, there's something going on there — Were there, what?

Veronica Quiroga: They're being defunded, and then they're gonna try, sort of, like, another model for, like, a community based safety. Watch, yeah, so like, that is viable in New York City, being that a lifetime Bronx resident. What's your take on that?

Diontay Santiago: I mean, it depends on where they are if they defund. How do you think if they defund the NYPD, who have, like, a huge budget, it's like, then where are they putting the money toward, you know? So I feel like defunding the NYPD and putting the neighborhood watching is just not enough. Like, it's also like defunding. It's divesting and reinvesting. It's like the proper programming for a lot of students, like, oh, the NYPD, like a 5,000,000,005 point 5 billion budget or something like that. Can we put that money into NYCHA to make sure people actually have like, hot water or something, you know, like, I. Like, you know, like, stuff like that. So it just depends, like, what they do with the money. So I'm not sure if that's gonna be a viable model, but I'm just hoping that whatever happens, like, the government could try to, like, take care of people better. So, like, protests aren't happening anymore, so that Coronavirus isn't spreading anymore, because these things like this are impeccable timing for something like this to happen, you know, and impeccable. If I say impeccable, I don't mean good. It's amazing. In like a I can't believe this kind of way, you know, like I fight the they may be, they may be able to work in tandem to create positive results out of these two negatives.

Veronica Quiroga: Hopefully, that's what we all hope for. Um, so then lastly, my last question, and then we'll leave you alone. Um, what is the most important thing that you think people should know right now about COVID 19 in the Bronx, racial injustices in the Bronx? Talk to us.

Diontay Santiago: Uh, most important thing? Hmm, more about COVID 19 or racial injustice and the Bronx. Like I said earlier, I just want people to know that, like, uh, People aren't protesting because, like, they want to cause havoc. Like, I'm not gonna say everybody's in protesting because they want to cause havoc, but for the majority people out here protesting and risking their lives, quite frankly, because, of this whole entire like problem of, like, police brutality, or, like, just unfair treatment of black people in general in America is like, it's a it's his own kind of disease, you know, and it's been around since the 1600s you know? I mean, it's just been, like, diluted, I guess you could say, or like, reduced in a way. Like, yeah, people aren't slaves anymore, but now people are working for a few pennies in jails, you know. Or like, like stuff, just like, all those kind of things. You know, it's just, I was when people know,

like, people aren't just freaking havoc to wreak havoc, and just because they don't, they do not see the injustices and inequalities, like they don't have to experience them themselves. So they don't actually understand what's going on. Doesn't mean that they don't exist. And I feel like it's their choice and whether or not they want to get educated or not, but discrediting somebody's movement that shouldn't be a choice, you know. So I just want people to understand that, like, this isn't about, I don't know, black people being like animals or like something. It's like all sorts of things. I just saw a picture the other day on some guy on LinkedIn, the Harvard Law graduating class, 2020, like, all the black men in it, they took a picture together wearing like, all black. Some CEO of something said they look like a game to him. Like, hey, they look like a game to me, like a bunch of thugs. And it's like seeing those kind of things. Just like, I want people to understand, like, those are the kind of things people are marching against, not so that they could go, like, rob the Dior store, even though this is that. But like, you know, I don't care about robbing the Dior store. They Dior store. They are a big corporation. Maybe I, you know, you got, y'all could put that on the record. I said that too. So, yeah, that's about it.

Veronica Quiroga: Okay. Thanks so much, Nyasa. So did you want to add any final words or final questions?

Nyasa: No, I think that was really, I heard that was really great. And I think really putting an emphasis on what people are, you know, rebelling against and fighting for is really important, because I think that a lot of folks are worried about the momentum of this movement, like dying out or like shifting. But I think one of the things that is really interesting about the intersection of COVID and the beginning of this is that people have free time in a way that they have never had free time before, right? And so people's energy is being sourced differently. You know, you don't have to go into work anymore and deal with that nine to five and then go out and, you know, try to be at a protest. You could just do that all day for that now, exactly. And I think that that kind of shift is really powerful in what kind of changes we can see.

Veronica Quiroga: In addition to, I mean, COVID is not going away, so the injustices and the sort of inequalities exposed by COVID, they're going to be there, and that exacerbated with what's happening right now. I mean, there's no way to sort of let the momentum die down when these inequalities are being exposed on a day to day basis, by the facts that we hear about the people of the Bronx. Yep. So yeah, thanks a lot again, Deontay for sharing with us, and hopefully we're able to catch up again sometime down the line and. And hear about more experiences.

Diontay Santiago: . Of course, of course. Thank you for having me.

Veronica Quiroga: Thanks for joining us, Diontay.

