

Collection: Thee Black Pride in JXN Oral History Project

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Narrator Introduction and Interviewer Reflection

Darius Nelson is a multidisciplinary artist and community organizer in Jackson. Our interview together was enlightening and yet challenging for myself as an interviewer because they are such a powerful and sure speaker. They are both knowledgeable and self-assured while being incredibly open and welcoming to any sort of question or discussion. Flare and intellectuality

are how I would describe Darius. They are a proud Jacksonian and work tirelessly to provide a voice for their-self, the Black LGBTQ community, and the overall Black community of Jackson through art, interaction, and community organization. One of my favorite portions of our interview was hearing them speak on their art as a mechanism to draw attention to the water crisis as well as gatekept recreational water sources from Black individuals in Jackson. This portion of the interview speaks to their uniqueness as an artist and as an activist, drawing on an ancestral deity, Mama Wata, that represents fluidity in connection to many facets of humanity, including gender and sexual fluidity. They taught me a great deal during our interview, for which I will always be extremely grateful and humbled.

[00:04:44] Pennington: Hello? Hi! How you doing?

[00:04:53] Nelson: Hi Leigh! Great. How are you?

[00:04:55] Pennington: I'm doing good doing good. It's like you know, on day two of recovering from a very nasty hangover, but it's.

[00:05:03] Nelson: No, I completely understand. [Laughter] Definitely. I'm glad you're recovering though.

[00:05:08] Pennington: Yeah, no, I've gotten to this point where it's like I'm still. It's—I'm old.

[00:05:13] Nelson: [Laughter] You can't hang like we used to like in undergrad, or when we were younger. I understand that.

[00:05:21] Pennington: Yeah. It's just like it's my body is screaming at me every minute of every day it's like just get your—we're not doing this anymore, get your crap together.

[00:05:32] Nelson: [Laughter] I completely understand. No, for sure.

[00:05:34] Pennington: Yeah, what's been going on with you?

[00:05:37] Nelson: Nothing much. Yeah, not really much of anything I've just been doing like my work at my job and then been like trying to hang out with my friends. This time change has really been impacting me. And it's making me want to crawl back in bed every chance I get.

[00:05:54] Pennington: Really?

[00:05:55] Nelson: Yeah, I don't—like it gets dark here now around like 3:30. And then like, it's completely dark around like 4:30 [PM] or 5:00 [PM].

[00:06:03] Pennington: Yeah. I didn't think it would get that dark in the South that quickly, like.

[00:06:08] Nelson: Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah. I don't know what it is. Maybe it's something about like our position to the equator or whatever. But like, when the time goes back for us, we get impacted, like, a lot worse than the rest of United States. It's weird.

[00:06:24] Pennington: I didn't know that. I thought it was I thought it got dark early up here because like, we're very far like up north. But yeah, I don't know. Do you find like when like the sun gets taken away for you, you're like, okay, productivity is?

[00:06:36] Nelson: Yeah. Yeah, it's out the window, anything. And then also, I like as a Southerner, and just as a person who does not like the cold like the wintertime. It's just really terrible for me. And then also, like with global warming now like, is there is no ease into like a temperature change. It just happened so suddenly. So all of that happened at the same time.

It's just like, oh, my gosh, so but I have friends who like I try to do stuff together. Or try to like plan like events or outings. So they try to keep me active. It's just a matter of me actually, like having the executive function to go, you know?

[00:07:15] Pennington: Yeah, fair enough. I don't know. It's like, also the scheduling thing. Like, I mean, I work seven days a week, usually in the morning, but I hang out with like, a lot of artists whose job entails like, Okay, we're going out to this place and like, it's a lot of networking sort of things. Sometimes forget, I get up at nine o'clock in the morning.

[00:07:33] Nelson: Yeah [laughter].

[00:07:35] Pennington: They are like, Why are you not coming out? I'm like, sunshine. I have to like work in the morning crazy? [Laughter] Absolutely insane. All too hard the other night, gotta get a tattoo and I probably should not have.

[00:07:51] Nelson: Oh, wow! I was actually supposed to get the tattoo this week as well! That's so interesting.

[00:07:55] Pennington: Really!?

[00:07:55] Nelson: Yeah, I'm getting magnolias with my friend. Yeah.

[00:08:00] Pennington: Why? What's the significant significance of the magnolias for y'all?

[00:08:03] Nelson: Magnolia is like the southern like flower it's in Louisiana, and Mississippi, Tennessee, I think Alabama. And then like, also, like, it's a really pretty flower. And I just, I also have like a familial history with it. My grandmother had a huge magnolia tree in her front yard. She still has it. I mean, she's not she no longer with us, but her house is still like, you know, up. So it's still there. I just don't know. I just love them. They're so I don't know, they're so mysterious, because they pop up whenever. And they have such like random times when they bloom. But they're also just so pretty to look at. So yeah.

[00:08:41] Pennington: That's cool. Would that be, that's not your that's not your first tattoo, I'm guessing.

[00:08:45] Nelson: Oh, no. I have three. I have, like, you know, a black band, like I have two, one on my left arm and others on my right leg. And then I have like a guardian symbol on my rib. It's called Sankofa. And I think I told you about this, it means never, don't ever be ashamed to go back into your past to build your future. So basically, like yeah, just go back. You can look into your ancestry and look into the history to build your future.

[00:09:13] Pennington: Yeah, I like that. That's very, very, very true. Yeah, I've always had these for so long because I'm like a bit of a I'm not I'm not great with pain [laughter]. I was like, This is it like that's as it I know. It's just like, Okay, off to the races. Now. I need like, a bigger one.

[00:09:35] Nelson: Yeah, right. Yeah, exactly. As soon as you get one you can't stop there. Especially like when you find out the pain. It is like, oh, I can do this.

[00:09:43] Pennington: Yeah, I don't know how to tell my mom. It's, it's a naked lady.

[00:09:49] Nelson: [Laughter] It's okay. It'll come. It's okay.

[00:09:54] Pennington: My friend was like a beginning like this. Just like Mom, I'm pregnant. I'm kidding it's just a tattoo. [Laughter] This could've been so much worse! I know, to call naked what a tasteful, very tasteful, you know, like, a hideable spot like it's, you know, if I premise it with an unwanted child. That's.

[00:10:20] Nelson: Yeah! I think that's perfect. She's gonna be like, oh okay. At least it wasn't, you know.

[00:10:27] Pennington: You know, I was like, what can you do kids grow up eventually. It's like

[00:10:30] Nelson: Yeah, right.

[00:10:32] Pennington: What can you do? Okay, so do you mind if we jump in? I don't want to take up too much because it is Sunday it's the afternoon, which is like, lovely. But still, you know, people like to have their afternoons. So I think last time we left off with the connection

difficulty we were discussing your views or relationship to the white LGBTQ community? And you were saying a lot of interesting things about the difference when it comes to the funding?

[00:11:02] Nelson: Oh, yeah, for sure. Okay. So yeah, I think yeah, I've just noticed that working with like, nonprofits, Black center, nonprofits and whites and nonprofits being in both spaces. Um, it was less about maybe any microaggressions that I was facing, although maybe I could say something to those. But the totality or like, the bigger picture that I was seeing was that there's a tendency for white nonprofits to get funded and established quickly and in garner a lot of financial social support from, you know, surrounding areas, and the community rather than Black LGBTQ spaces. And my example that was using was that, like, I've been to Black pride, in Jackson, and I've also been to white pride, and Black pride. Now, though, there are a lot of people that come out. Because there are a lot of Black, queer people and trans people in Jackson, specifically, the white LGBTQ events, and like, the people that put on so the sponsors, and like maybe the hosts of the events, garner a lot more financial support, and I've seen it, they have bigger budgets, there was a time where I was asked to be on like a planning committee for I think, T-Door or Trans Day of Remembrance, that's coming up on November 28. So this is just recently happened. And I saw how many white or I want to say, I'll just say, white, just like for lack of a better like words. But these are like white centered organizations. Or their organizations that have a majority white leadership, or employee, like staff or whatever. But anyway, these organizations are in charge of something as big as T- Door that impacts, you know, many communities, and not just white communities. And so in the though, like, it's not that there are not any Black, LGBT, you know, focused organizations, there is clearly a disregard for their inclusion. And like, you know, what they should be doing with those

with the funds that they garner. Because a lot of times the funds that they're garnering are not tied to any grant or any kind of specific way that they have to use it. It is just money that's given and you can, you know, give it to other people where, or you know, you could give other people opportunities to have a say so and what this should be doing. So, yeah, there's just a tendency for separation when there doesn't have to be. And I think that I don't want to speak to it as if like, these organizations have an intention of excluding Black people. But I do see that there is like a tendency or an ideology, a bias that a lot of white people, a lot of white organizations don't center to Black people in their politics, or don't center try trying to have some kind of collaboration with Black people. There's just not a—what am I trying to say? Like a not a preconceived notion, but like, there's just not a tendency to think about that or to like, actually have that be at the forefront of how they want to organize or how they want to service communities. So yeah, that's what I was saying, I think initially, or that was to sum it up.

[00:14:29] Pennington: Right. Just like a sort of an absent mindedness. It's like the, the history of the two communities has been like, majority history, like separated a lot of the time.

[00:14:38] Nelson: Yeah.

[00:14:38] Pennington: So it's just not, you're not you weren't bothering to think of this in in the first place. Is there also other complaints coming from Black LGBTQ community in that regard? Like, you know, just like, you know, mainly what LGBTQ organizations are they like you saying it's an absent mindedness, but if you know, you're getting complaints from the community itself, that it's sort of like it is an active disregard. Do you think it can be both a lot of times?

[00:15:00] Nelson: I think it can be both a lot of times because I have, it's not to say that I have not seen their collaboration happen. But even, okay, so as less often as the collaborations happen, even when they collaborate, there does not seem to be like a full commitment to growth, there seems to be this kind of theory of like, pull yourself up by the bootstraps, like we got here on our own, y'all should be able to, like, if we gave you even the slightest support, you should be able to take that and stretch it to a million dollars. And that's just not realistic in a city that does not have access to like, resources constantly. We don't have like the skill set that some of these organizations do. Not to say that we can't do some of the same things that these organizations do, or you know, that it's a necessity for, for us to have resources to be able to have the skill set. But I'm recognizing a lot of the way that nonprofits operate, and especially when they are nonprofits already have a lot of resources, they also have a lot of time. And so there is just not a recognition that time is a big factor, when you don't have access to resources. So therefore, you will need support and the time to be able to teach these organizations to be able to like, you know, actually survey and sit down and try to see what these organizations or these entities, these Black LGBTQ bodies need in regards to how they want to service their community. So yeah, I see that constantly, where there even may be a tendency to like to show support, whatever that may be financial support in the grand scheme of things, but then also be like, Oh, well, that, you know, it goes back into like, really, a anti Mississippi rhetoric, which is inherently anti-Black since majority Black people live in the south or live specifically Mississippi. Like, yeah, there's just it's yeah, it's just a it's a pattern that happens.

[00:16:55] Pennington: Right? It's like underlying sort of subconscious racist behavior as a result of just sheer environment. You know.

[00:17:04] Nelson: Yeah, mhmm, exactly.

[00:17:06] Pennington: And then, like, in terms of like, cultural spaces, there's very little overlap between the communities as well, like you mentioned, like, there's a, like, there's Black pride. And then there's white pride.

[00:17:16] Nelson: Yeah. Right.

[00:17:17] Pennington: Separate events, like, can you talk about the history of that, and like, how you have found it to be?

[00:17:22] Nelson: So I don't want to speak too much to history, because I feel like, I'm also like, fairly new into these spaces. And so I only know what I've gathered in the past, like, year or two. But what I've seen so far is that, yeah, it like you said, it's, it's the majority spaces and the spaces that I speak of, it's like, sort of like, club life. So like, there's literally separate queer clubs in Jackson. I didn't even know that there were queer clubs to begin with, like I'm born and raised in Jackson, don't ever hear about this. And so to even know that there are queer clubs, and then there are separate spaces is like, What in the world? In Fondren. There are a lot of like, cafes, specifically, one of the cafes, Urban Foxes, they are like LGBTQ focused. And they often do collaboration with Black organizations, it's like not to take away from them. But I

do notice a lot of like, I've never met any like white queer people in Jackson, outside of that space, or like, outside of like, the organizing spaces that I do. When I do meet, like, white LGBTQ people it's usually in cafes, like that cafe, or other spots like that are specific to like, white queer people. Oh, there was another spot, I think is, I don't think is Fondren Guitars. But it's in that Fondren area where like, I went when I was like a bunch of other queer Black friends that I have. And like, I just saw so many white queer people. And I was just like, what? When did this happen? Where did this happen? Like, how did I not know about this? And why is this like a separate space? Like, why aren't there many, a lot of Black people in this space, if this is a majority Black city. Oh also you know, on the same note, and this isn't necessarily this doesn't necessarily have to overlap with queerness. But I do notice a lot of queer people in Jackson specifically meet up at the skate park. There's like an old, abandoned lot there. Like right beside the train tracks on Mill Street. And, yeah, there's a lot of microaggressions that come from the white skaters there. And these are usually queer people that are entering this space, at least the Black queer people that actually like, you know, go with our people. And so like, for the antagonism to happen towards us in the city, like in in Jackson, it's just wild. It's like, How are y'all taking dominance or like to like having territory over this space? That is not I don't I could see or see that it was built or abandoned and like turned into whatever it was by like, Black people like this is for Black people. And then for you to come in and like you know, do your own thing. So that regardless, like I say that regardless if there's like a, like discernment, or maybe what am I trying to say, a disdain for Black people, if that's like, not at the forefront of their consciousness, and their actions and the biases in the way that they group themselves and share resources amongst themselves and not with Black people. There is obviously a racist mindset that is like disregard or anti-Black inherently. And it bleeds into

queer spaces in Jackson. Yeah, and these microaggressions there's things you're very, very familiar with, like you've tangoed with all your life. Yeah.

[00:20:35] Pennington: So, you know, is there is, you know, do you think it's like an it's an awareness that from coming from, like those skaters that that is how because skaters tend to be, like, territorial as it is.

[00:20:48] Nelson: Right.

[00:20:48] Pennington: Add like, the microaggressions on top, and it's just like, okay, feels weird.

[00:20:53] Nelson: Right.

[00:20:54] Pennington: Like, not feeling welcome. You know, but is that like a cop? Is that, because you said something interesting is like, you know, you're skating on the grounds that we're kind of, like, built by, like, you know, the Black community and stuff like is that another sort of common trend? But—

[00:21:11] Nelson: Oh, yeah.

[00:21:11] Pennington: Like, yeah, like, like LGBTQ community, like, you know, sort of, or any space, like, you know, in Jackson specifically, it's like, okay, this was grown from the roots of

African, you know, the Black population, and then came in and did something different with it. Are there other situations like, that's happened before?

[00:21:29] Nelson: Of course, like that. So Fondren or Belhaven, like, is like a big example of that. And how like, this area like white flight happened in like the 60s. So there are Black people that like, a lot of like white people that were living in Jackson, for, like, instance, like, a lot of the white schools, like high schools were like, majority white. But like after the 60s, or the 70s—I think this is like, around the time the Freedom Summer and like all of the civil rights movements were happening throughout the South. People started to leave Jackson, white people specifically. And so like, there were majority Black people left. And so of course, like, there was not enough resources poured into the city, Black people had to like built the city quite literally, work with what they had and like, build from what they had. And so now, you see, there is a slow return of like white people coming into the city specifically into like the Midtown area, the Belhaven area, the Fondren area. And these areas are being gentrified. It's very evident when you see like hotels, and when you see like—what am I trying to say. Like, there's, there's a certain architectural style that you see, that is popping up just so conveniently.

And it's just like, this is not the way that the rest of the city looks not even two miles down the street, it does not look like that. There are potholes galore, you know, people are still struggling with like to get access to water. So this is not a realistic glimpse into the city. Where did it come from, you know? That's one instance. And it's like a physical instance, I feel like a lot of like movement spaces also have that mark, where Black, specifically Black queer people—and it's so interesting, because a lot of Black people are at the forefront of a lot of movement space in

Mississippi, specifically Jackson. But anyway, there are a lot of Black people who are doing the work and the ideological work. The actual on-the-ground work, you know, to combat a lot of the oppression that we face as a community and not just a community of Black people, but a community of oppressed people in all ways. And you see, like a lot of white organizations, specifically in non-profits and this is what can speak to right now. But come in and swoop in and try to attach themselves to the work in some way. And then in some way, still distance, how it was sourced or where it came from. And try to like, take that onto themselves and be like, Oh, this is something that is maybe common knowledge, but even in that assumption that it's common knowledge is there, the erasure happens. So that's another big way.

And you know, I mentioned about the Pearl River. A lot of that information was not really known to the public because I did a speech—I don't know if I said this already, but I did like a speech and there is a thing happening like every other Monday called Moral Mondays with poor people's campaign. And they're basically having people within the city tell their testimonies and share their stories with the water crisis and how it's been impacting them how it's affecting them now, you know, that to garner support from like the feds. But yeah, I went there one of the Mondays I think this is like the second Moral Monday. And I basically like made the connection that like that was something that was gatekept, whether it was legally or not or whether like people a lot of people knew about it or not, there is still an overwhelming amount. Because I asked the question like how many people there were a lot of like Black, specifically Black Jacksonians in the crowd. And I asked a question, I was like, how many people knew that there was a trail in Belhaven that led to the Pearl River. And nobody could raise their hand like, there were only—and I remember somebody recorded the video—there

were only like a couple of folks in the crowd that raised their hand, they were white. And like, I have to assume that they also live near the Belhaven area, or the Fondren area. And so yeah, like it was very evident. And then I've also asked in my interpersonal interactions, like, Did y'all know this? And like, a lot of people are just like, No.

So like, there is a tendency to like, because I know that the Pearl River is, is or once was, if not still used for like shipments and like, because it still was like a system. I know, it goes all the way up from Mississippi, yeah, the state of Mississippi. But yeah, so I know that it is like something that people used to travel in also, like it's capped off by like, the reservoir. So like, I don't—I see that there's definitely like a use for it. But like people also have a use for it recreationally is basically what I'm saying. And that is not being shared evenly or distributed or made known by the rest of the population. And so like, I don't know, I feel like it also like bleeds into like, how, if we want to just bleed it into like LGBTQ life, a lot of white LGBTQ, I have to like, assume because there's there not a lot of white, white people in the city, there's like, less than 20% in the city. I have to assume that of that percent, who are queer, they're also still living in these spaces, like Belhaven and you know, whatnot. And so they also, they can bleed into their social life, and how they have more options and so where they can go out and what they can do, because a lot of things are gate kept specifically for classed and white people in Jackson. So yeah.

[00:27:00] Pennington: Yeah. What cuz you mentioned movement spaces. When you, when you say movement spaces, what do you, what do you, what do you—what specifically, what does that mean?

[00:27:10] Nelson: And for me, I think that means when organizations, entities, individuals, community members are attempting to organize other members of the community. And not necessarily around like a personal agenda, but around what community, the community has already said, like needs to happen. And so the movement space that I'm speaking about is the actual movement, like the ideological movement, the political movement that comes from that.

[00:27:42] Pennington: Okay, alrighty, interesting. What other areas of Jackson do you feel are gate kept and it can be that specifically pertain to the Black community or Black LGBTQ community what other spaces do you feel really gate kept?

[00:27:55] Nelson: Hmm. I feel like food is definitely another area. Like I I've lived around food deserts all my life. Like yeah, South and West Jackson are like, there not really many, except for like Walmart. And then you can also not really be too sure that everything is fresh that you get from Walmart like especially with everything else that go to Walmart so like there's only like two Walmart's. There's Walmart and Clinton which is up 80. And 80 is a highway that divides South and West Jackson. And then there's one on 18. And these two highways intersect so they're not too much far from each other. But they're like right there and they're the only two that are like within radius. Because the next Walmart will be Byram and then the other Walmart will be in North Jackson well actually, Ridgeland, it's considered Ridgeland. And so like other than that you got a Kroger here and there with the other Kroger's in Byram of there's one Clinton. I think there's one in North Jackson so like all of the other areas in South Jackson,

West Jackson they don't have an immediate access unless they're going to like Walmart you know. I think that's like a pretty far distance from a lot of people.

So you have to rely on the foods from spots that are put there and a lot of times they're not—like when I think always like a Rally's, or like a Krystal's, or McDonald's, or like a Burger King. There's nothing like I don't know, I'm saying this without like a, like a consciousness of like finances, but like Olive Garden or other spots. Like there's no variety. There's always like the same ones. And then there's also not like market options. Like there's really not many farmers markets or markets to choose from to go get fresh produce from. There's also with Mississippi being like, I would say like one of the most prominent places for like agriculture and like have a very fertile ground. There are not many like farming spaces, or well-known farming spaces. I don't know, gardens or I don't know, really what's called farms maybe, that have or provide that for the community. So those spaces are definitely like gatekept and pushed out to the other areas and surrounding areas of Jackson. But I know for sure they're not in the Black communities because of like, my history with them. And then also because like, how even when there were markets, like there was Bows, and that had like, fresh, fresh produce. Or like, even like a Save-a-Lot, or something like that, like they had, like you could, the way that they gained their produce is different from Walmart, like, you know, and so like, you could maybe guarantee that it's a little bit fresher, a little more. They're just carried in different ways, or like, you know. Yeah, they're carried in different ways. And so I feel like, even then, from that time, when they did exist, a lot of them have like, been closed, or shut down, and then like, a restaurant will pop up in place. So I know that, for sure, that is another area.

I'm trying to see. This is a really interesting conversation. Oh, I definitely think education is another one. But I feel like this one is a lot more nuanced, because like, there are a lot of schools in Jackson public schools and in the Jackson public school system, but that's also because Jackson has a very big, like city. For it to be like the city in Mississippi, it is a very big city, and it carries a lot of people. And so it has a lot of children, you know, to think about. And it covers a lot of areas too, because Jackson is actually pretty, like widespread. But anyway, like, even like people's access to education, when I was going to school, JPS like is as—what is it, like a district was rated like D or like F or all of these, like really low ratings. And then there is never like a call to like, put more money into the education system. There's actually since I've been like, since I've joined my organization, Black Youth Project, 100, they, we were trying to see where the funding was going, from like city council and like what they were pouring into. And they were often taking money away from education systems, away from family systems, like, community centers, all those things and putting them into policing. Um, and so like to see that on the back end, but then to also like, see a heavier police presence in schools. To see like us get outdated books, and I get access to like proper, like, even when I graduated from grade school, I did not feel prepared for the real world. And I went to undergrad immediately afterwards. And like I shared that experience with a lot of my colleagues or classmates from high school, like, we did not necessarily feel prepared to go into the real world. So I feel like that definitely is something that is gatekept is like access to like resources or resources that will push you to the next level, if that is like the goal, right?

But I just don't honestly, I'm also a person who is anti-Academy, because of my experience with the academy. But like, I just see in the ways that like the academy is, is I don't think

gatekept is even, like, like the word for because it was it would mean that like, the information is dispersed differently, but it's not even that just that it's like it's gatekept, and then it's also like, Y'all are barred from those resources, like they're not meant for you. And then even when you do get like access like so for me, I didn't, I didn't necessarily have to be a person that had to like garnish debt in receiving an education. So like I got a free ride to like Jackson State. Like, even with that, because like that definitely plays a part into like, how you navigate the rest of the world is your like, the bit that you have where you're like your class. Even with this, I still see how like, I may have to go back and get an education, or may have to get you know more education to get where I need to be because of how these things are gatekept. Not even just the information but like how, even how I'm perceived when I like get these certifications due to like my race. And so yeah, it is, it, I feel like it's a more in-depth conversation, like for sure, for sure. I'm leaving a lot out but there are a lot of things that are gatekept from Black people in Jackson that like other people have direct access to or don't have to necessarily worry about, worry about the barriers that come with being Black.

[00:34:38] Pennington: Yeah, right. And then you throw like, another minority label on top of that, which would be queer.

[00:34:46] Nelson: Yeah, right.

[00:34:46] Pennington: One set of issues to worry about or actually or in academic spaces once you are there and like a whole other stuff shit to worry about. But you mentioned I don't know if we talked about the project, you're involved with by Black Youth Project 100. Yeah?

[00:35:02] Nelson: Mhm yeah.

[00:35:03] Pennington

All right. I don't know if we talked a little bit. Could you talk a little bit about that organization and how it like how it came to be and how you came to be involved?

[00:35:10] Nelson: Oh, yeah. So this all happened summer 2020. Um, yeah, that was, I came out well, you know, I was out to my dad, I graduated college. And Trump, I think, I don't know, if Trump was causing, I forget what monumental political thing was happening. It was so many things happening. And it's like, oh, this is COVID as well. But I think Trump was, you know, causing havoc in office. And, yeah, I was like, I don't feel comfortable— navigating my life that I the way that I used to being in the closet, not having not being able to express myself politically, creative—creatively, like any of the ways. And so I just had like a deep soul search. And one of my friends, we're not, we're not friends anymore. But at the time, like, She was my best friend. She was telling me about a organization, because I was telling her that I was looking for a way to get involved in Jackson, Like being from Jackson, and never hearing of any kind of like political movement, or any kind of political spaces, any kind of organizing. I just wanted to find something. And so she told me about that. And I went to a meeting and like, I've been a part, I've been a member ever since.

But yeah, the organization is a membership, led organization, of Black, queer youth our ages 18 to like, I think 32, I want to say is like the age range. And I mean, we, we service, like, well

not service, but like our target is that but also like, other people can join, like, it's not just like, like that specifically. And they can be involved in whatever ways but anyway, that organization was, like, we tend to, like do a lot of organizing with a Black, queer feminist lens. And like, the belief is that we're not all free, until the, the one that is the most impacted is free, or the people that are the most impacted are free. So a lot of the times we organize through an abolitionist lens, or through intersectionality, which is like, you know, realizing that people have multiple parts of their identity that makes them up. And they experience oppression, not just one way, but multiple ways, and what that looks like and how it's tied or whatever. And so like from that, I had a realization of like, not necessarily the root of corruption in Jackson, but just really like how politics work. Because like, it's so vague, being a person from Jackson, seeing the news and seeing how like our government is like, broadcasted over national news. We're like a laughingstock. But a lot of people don't even recognize the politics and how—interconnected how futile some systems are, or like how they're structured.

Like, for instance, we have a city council, and our city council has more power than our mayor. But a lot of people don't know that. And when you hear like city councilor versus mayor, because of how mayors are prioritized, or like how they are seen in United States, we automatically think that our mayor has like the final say, so and like, you know, like, heavier decision-making power, but that's just not the case. And so, like, a lot of people don't know about that. They have city council meeting. And this was like my first time engaging with like, local government. We used to sit on city council meetings and like, would basically be literally asking the city council, like, really tough questions they had like. What am I trying to say? Oh, they had a surveillance camera. They still do. But this is the beginning. Like, I think it's 2017 or

2018 to begin a surveillance camera system in Jackson. And I think they mirrored it, mirrored it off of New Orleans surveillance system or police department. But anyway, and he basically is like, very high tech, like advanced cameras that can see like a blade of grass from a couple miles away those like really high-tech cameras placed in like, every other block of the city. Like at that time, it was like not as many so that you could probably say it was maybe like 30 or 40 something cameras. From then it has like increased like a lot like it's double or triple, if not triple. And you can tell with cameras like if it's a camera, because it looks like a police light, but it's literally just a light on top of like the camera maybe like a traffic light or like, along the block or something like that, but yeah, that and they have, what is it called? A crime time system, I think is what it's called, which they basically literally just watch crime.

And so when you think about that, it's just like, Okay, how does that help you all fight crime or solve crime? And they literally answered at one point I think this was like, 2020, somebody here asked question. And they were like, Oh, it doesn't, we just, it literally just helps us be able to like, I don't know, I don't know what the explanation was. But it was not enough to be like, this is a great enough investment to spend a million dollars on or over a million dollars on in investments and like taking actual tax dollars, like funds, or like, you know, resources that we need into other parts of our community and putting this into this to just watch crime happen. And then crime. Every day, I'm hearing that crime is getting worse in Jackson. I'm just like, This doesn't make sense. If you have already put forth the necessary funding to stop these things, then why isn't it stopping because like, you know, that's not, I've realized, like, as in this organization, that that is like not the function of the police is not to like necessarily stop crime. But one can even argue that it exasperates crime. And like a lot of police, especially in

Jackson, Jackson is very much over policed. Like, we still have to navigate, like, random—what am I trying to say like police stops, where we would literally just be driving anywhere, you could literally be stopped by the police, because they like blocked off one part of the street or blocked off, you know, yeah, a road or whatever, to get people's license and registration. And this often results in people being either arrested or ticketed, because they don't have insurance, or they don't have access to their license right now, or they don't have a tag or something very petty like that, in an already impoverished area. And so it's just exasperates a lot of things for people, and it does not solve or help the issues that we already have.

But yeah, that is an organization that like really is like my, I think I may have mentioned it, but I say that it's my political home. But I think my—I'm still changing. And I don't want to like say that is like that is like something that I'm stagnant in or static about. Because like, the way that I see a lot of things change over time. And I have to like, you know, make room for that. So I think right now, it's my political home, I can say, but yeah, it is the way that I've been able to, like, organize and like be connected to a lot of the organizing and movement space in Jackson, and just see what work people are doing. And really like leaning into, like, the fact that we need each other, and not that one of us will save us or like a group of us will save us but we will truly save one another.

[00:42:56] Pennington: Yeah. Do you think it's an organization that is well known in the community? Or there definitely or definitely probably like a bit of more outreach, like couldn't hurt, you know?

[00:43:09] Nelson: Oh, yeah, for sure. I feel like but also is, is not that it's difficult to organize in Jackson, but like, organizing also takes time, it takes resources. And so this organization is pretty popular, like it started in Chicago. So like that was the first chapter was established in Chicago. It's really big in Chicago, actually, when George Floyd was killed in the ruling came back out, they got they were able to get in the streets and organize, and like do like protests and like really cause a lot of like, I wouldn't say havoc, but havoc for lack of better words around the issue. And they've since been able to do a lot of work, you know, within the community. And that is also—and this is what I was speaking to about, like my political home possibly change. It is also a nonprofit, like where it's becoming, it's starting to structure itself like a nonprofit. And so it had started, like, you know, with a couple of chapters across the United States, there was like Chicago, there was a chapter in or there is a chapter in Durham, there was a chapter in New York. There was one in Atlanta, I think there is still one in New Orleans.

Jackson is like the newest chapter, and there are a couple of other like, I wouldn't say satellites, but like members or national members, but anyway, since they've like structured themselves in the way that they do and like organization and like leadership, they it goes right back into like, the anti-Mississippi or anti Jackson like rhetoric, where all of these other chapters garner a lot of support, and like immediate like access to resources, like we've been a chapter or I've been a part of the chapter for two years. But I like up until like this summer. I had never engaged with any national member. I knew no mem—like national member organization or structure I knew not to call to get access to funds. And then we also had like a

good amount of money like, stored where we did not have access to. Because it was really hard to get in contact with them. And so like, in the ways that we even organ—because we were going to have to do the organizing, like outside of the chapter or the organization, because of how we have to organize in Jackson, like or in the south, like we had, like, we literally have to do outreach, we have to go and talk to community members. And so because of that, we often—and I say we I'm speaking to like the Jackson chapter, we often organize without the title, VYP, because we're going to do the work anyway. We just now been trying to organize like, in the past couple of months been trying to organize as a chapter.

But usually, it's the like the same community members who do organizing, like maybe as their actual job, or have done community organizing before or just interested, who are usually like, we're usually doing this work on our own dime and our own, like, you know, time and resources. So we're in the process of trying to change that and change our relationship with nationals. But yeah, it is something that a lot of people because we actually are, I was telling you about art show that I was in, and I had that organization to come and table. And so we got a lot of support. And a lot of people like seem interested in, we're supposed to be doing like one on ones with folks to see like, what their other interests are. And like just basically, like get to know other people in the community. So we can know if they're interested or if they are interested in where to place them in like the organization. But yeah, it just, there's not really a lot of resources for us to like have a big presence in Jackson.

[00:46:55] Pennington: Yeah, but definitely do you like you said definitely the largest, you know, like the one you're gonna be affiliated with anyone? That's the one you're affiliated with?

[00:47:02] Nelson: Yeah, yeah, that Yeah, exactly. That that will be the one that I would definitely like to close down and say, That's my organization.

[00:47:10] Pennington: Right. Right. Right. That's the political home. So like, on that bent other than, like, the political homes, what are sort of some of the cultural homes that you like to sit in, in Jackson like, like, you know, events or spaces? You have or even like, people, persons, you know what I mean? Cultural home for you?

[00:47:32] Nelson: Oh, that is a really, really, really great question. I feel like I'm still finding it, I don't know that I've like, found it per se. Right now, the people that I'm associated with who helped or who put on the mashup, I always say that that right now is like, one of the cultural homes for me, because of like, how they, how we all pour into each other creatively. Like I came into that space, not really confident in my abilities as a creator, even though I had the experience like prior to college. I just wasn't really like confident in expressing myself in that way. Because I didn't see myself in that way. Or I didn't see my life path, like unfolding in that way. But yeah, since I've been in that space, I'm like, constantly being encouraged to create and like, not just in one way, because like, I have many talents, or I have many ways to express myself in that way. So yeah, they, I would say that, that, like the creative community in Jackson is a really big cultural home for me. And yeah, that includes so many things, because it's like art, in all of its facets like visual art, you know, photography, music, all of those things um fashion, all of that. Um, and yeah, I think that and wow, I never really just sat down and thought about this, honestly, I will say that and really like my organizing community or like, are

like the two homes, because they actually mesh. Like a lot of the people that are creatives are also organizers and vice versa. And so yeah, those are like the two big ones for me. That's not to say that it's like the only like, you know, communities within Jackson, or cultural communities within Jackson, but those are definitely my two big ones.

[00:49:31] Pennington: Yeah, okay. Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting how often like the two groups will bleed into one another.

[00:49:36] Nelson: Yeah.

[00:49:37] Pennington: Tiny community anyhow, you know, it's not, you know, that's pretty cool. Yeah. Yeah. So tell me about some of your friends in those spaces. How would you describe—how would your friends describe you if I sat them down for an interview and meet some of these people? You know, just a little bit, just a little social back history?

[00:49:55] Nelson: Yeah [laughter]. Oh, I think they would probably describe me as like a wild card. And I say that like, only because like, the way that I express myself is very wild. Express myself like aesthetically, like some days I come around with like a cowboy hat. And like, you know, like, what are the tassels, the leather tassels all of that stuff. Another day I couldn't like in a crowd top and like some bugaboos, it just, it really depends on what I feel. And like, especially like, as I grow more confident, and more like, sure, and who I am like, that becomes even more like outlandish, and I pushed the boundary even more. So like, I know that that is like a really big thing that people tend to notice about me. And I know that my friends will say,

like, something about that my fashion sense. I also, they will also say that, like, I probably have, like a very clear head or clear vision. And like, I'm very direct about what I want. And like, what I don't want, like, I love having conversations that are like, I wouldn't necessarily say heated, but like, could bring about controversy, I like navigating those kinds of conversations, especially with people who can hold multiple truths. Because like, we don't, I don't have to be right, you don't have to be right. But as long as long as we can acknowledge that, like, both of these things are true at the same time, and they happen at the same time, then I'm pretty sure I can have like, an amazing conversation, you know, with a person. But yeah. I tend to especially like, in the work that I do, like that is something that I have to do, like, I have to, like, hold two truths to be, you know, true at the same time. I have to talk about bias and break that down, I'm gonna see, you know, see how that exists within the communities and how layered that is.

And so it's something that I'm very interested in, for one, but it bleeds into my social life because of like, how I navigate topics, how I like call out things that are, would be considered norms, but like, are maybe harmful or maybe need to be unpacked a little bit more. And yeah, I think they will also say that, like, I am really like loving and like I have a really big heart. Like, I don't like to see my any of my friends down. I also don't like my friends being talked about or like, you know, being harassed. That upsets me so, so much. Like, I could be harassed, but let my friends be harassed and like, it's a whole other story. So like, that is another thing. Um, oh! And they probably also say, like, I love to eat. I love food. Oh, my God, especially finding new spots. In Jackson, like, when I've lived here all my life and like, I'm finding so many different new spots. It's just like, what, like, I didn't know this is here. Especially a really good home

cooked meal being from the south, that is everything to me. So yeah, is that I think that's what they will say the big things that they will say about me.

Oh, and then you also asked how to describe my friends. I feel like all of my friends are so different. And this is something that I just like, really love about even being able to have friends. It's like, even I don't I can't even say that I have a friend type. Like as long as you don't have like an ideology, or you don't navigate or act upon an ideology that is harmful like around other people. And you don't mind being held accountable. Because I don't mind being held accountable. We can usually have a pretty good friendship, you know, I like all kinds of music. Like, I think I there's not really a music. I was gonna say there's not a genre I want this to but there are a couple, but like, for the most part. I like all kinds of music. Um, I like to do nature like walks and like hiking. I just went hiking what was that? Tuesday or Wednesday of last week? We went to like Red Bluff is a great like, they call it the mini Grand Canyon. But it's a basically a canyon in Red Bluff Mississippi. But yeah, that was fun. And like I like I do all kinds of stuff like that. And yeah, like all of my friends don't necessarily have to like exactly what I do. But like they all they don't mind trying with me and I that's really what I honor and they and they all here in my life for a specific purpose like or not even necessarily a purpose or a role, but they all bring something for me and vice versa, that is like individual to them. And like I appreciate that they bring something different and not that they you know, are they have something that I value or something like that, like they all bring what they bring and I appreciate what they bring to me. Yeah.

[00:54:45] Pennington: Who is your oldest friend?

[00:54:49] Nelson: Oh my gosh, who is my oldest? Oh, it may be Nat. Nat Ofia is my oldest friend. They are like 31, 32? Yeah.

[00:55:01] Pennington: Okay, cool. Wow, that's cool. How'd you meet as you? Nat you said, how'd you meet them?

[00:55:06] Nelson: Yeah, Nat in Black youth project that was the person. I would say at the time, they were maybe like the facilitator of the organization of the Jackson chapter, not to say like they were the leader or anything, but like, they tend to, like, facilitate a lot of the meetings, like the gatherings or like, you know, the things that we did. But yeah, they, I recognized, like how much, not first year I was in awe how much knowledge they had just about Jackson in general. But they're also like a creative. They're also very caring. Like, if I, as I've become friends with them, I realized that like, I really like being around them, having conversations, checking in with them, talking to them. Sharing ideas. Yeah, just going out with them all this stuff. We've become a lot closer. But yeah, now, and this is actually because I didn't a lot of the times, I'll become friends with somebody and like later on, I'm like, Okay, how old are you? And then like, when they tell me their age, I'm like oh [laughter]. I didn't know, that you this old, or this much older than me. But yeah, I think that I honestly think that that because when I'm thinking about friends, I'm thinking about people that I hang around regularly. And they maybe they're also trans. They're a Black trans person. But yeah, I think that they may be the oldest friend that I have. Yeah.

[00:56:28] Pennington: Okay, that's very cool. And you mentioned fashion. I'm just curious to know, what are some of your like, fashion icons, you see, always somebody dressed, you're like, Oh, I like that. What is it about the way that they dress is what you like? Yeah.

[00:56:42] Nelson: That's so interesting. I don't—I, honestly, I don't know. I feel like a lot of the times I'm looking at something and it is already aligned with me. So that of course they you know, goes into my bias about a thing. But I also recognize that like, I like things that are considered like edgy, like something about cowboys are considered edgy. I like a lot of lace. I love like mesh. I love leather, pleather, really skintight things. And it's so, so, so very weird. Because like before I came out as anything when I was in like, grade school, specifically high school, I would dress like with suspenders and fedoras and like, top hats, like [laughter] it was a very high-class gentleman-esque look, GQ kind of ordeal. Yeah, it's so weird. And then like now for me to like not, I don't even dress remotely. Like all of the things that I wore in high school had to have been donated or like, you know, excavated out of my closet and because like I don't wear them anymore. But yeah, I feel like now I definitely am like stepping into like a edgy era. And that looks like many things because I also like makeup, also like nail polish.

But yeah, I don't I don't know that there is a—you know, I feel like Grace Jones is a really big one. Because Grace Jones is very gender fluid in how she expresses herself. Prince is probably another person that I would definitely like to say that I try to emulate in like, the way that I dress. Also like I said, like cowboys. I like I like to look into like Texas, for like inspiration. Or like just maybe like early Texas, like cowboy Texas, you know, specifically, that is like a thing for me also. But yeah, it—I pull it from a lot of like, areas. It's not necessarily from one or

like, a core. But whatever just inspires me and did like in the day, I was just like, oh, I want to wear this or sometimes it's not even that I'm inspired. Sometimes I'm literally just like, I need to get out of that house. I need to put something on. And it just so happens that it comes together. So like I'm just like, oh, wow, I didn't even recognize and people like complimented me all day. So yeah [laughter].

[00:59:11] Pennington: I was about to ask how are bold fashion choices, what is what has been your experience with their, their reception in Mississippi? Because like it's, it's a conservative state. Right? You know?

[00:59:24] Nelson: No, yeah!

[00:59:24] Pennington: So you know, you're in your most outlandish like ensemble.

[00:59:28] Nelson: Yeah.

[00:59:29] Pennington: General public reaction is?

[00:59:33] Nelson: Generally, if you're, ooooo—because usually I'm in spaces where somebody knows me or I'm going out and like somebody knows me. So usually it's just like, “Oh, you did that” or “look, we need to go home! Darius is coming they're finna out show us.” So I'm just like, y'all, please it's not that serious [laughter]. But no, as far as like the space, like when I'm. Honestly, this is actually something that I'm, I'm noticing that I'm still navigating. And

I still have like a fear that I'm trying to conquer. But like, I tend to, if I know that I'm going to be in like a space where I'm not familiar with the folks, or if I'm just going out running errands, I usually will not dress outside of the gender norm. I will usually dress masculine, or I will, I will usually try to align myself to be perceived as cis. Just for like my own safety or my own, like sense of safety. And then also because like, I just don't want to get in a conversation with somebody you know about what I'm wearing, like, I'm just wearing it, you're gonna, it's gonna be okay, [laughter] you know.

I feel like, as I'm like, because of the way that like my expression is going, eventually, I feel like I'm going to have to face the fact that that is something that I'm making and navigating, and I'm gonna just have to like wear things and not be concerned about what other people are thinking. And you know that that means so many things. And that can be—also be just taken. Or I can say that and like, you know, that will look different in practice, or whatever. But yeah, I feel like, I think now I do tend to like, dress, the way that I dress now, in spaces that I feel comfortable, if I don't necessarily feel comfortable, I won't do it. And there are some exceptions, because like, I remember like, last year, the beginning of the summer. I went to Houston for my birthday with my, both of my best friends from college, because my best friend, my best friend from college lives in Houston. And so we went there and that was like my first time wearing a skirt. And I went into like Dollar General, and like I was with them, but like, I got some I had a mask on and but I got so many stares, and like so many people were looking at me and I was just like, I don't ever want to feel like this again. Because like it's just, it's there is—I don't know, like there's a certain like, visceral reaction that comes with breaking gender norms for people especially like, when it comes to the way that people like perceive you

physically. Like if they don't see they, what your body parts, or the characteristics that your body like, have or express or not aligning with the way that you are adding on to those things or expressing yourself in that way. Then like people will get violent.

And I feel like specifically with Black trans people, or Black trans women, that is like the norm, especially within our community. But you know, across communities, like there is a norm to like really be violent towards gender fluid, gender queer Black people. Or like trans Black people. And I don't know, I'm not I don't have the words for it right now. But it is something that like, I definitely sense. And I feel very heavily when I am dressing the way that I dress wherever I am, especially if it's like high femme. And so I'm cognizant of that, but it's also like my lived reality, and it's something that I will have to I can't like, let it when I'm trying to say it, it can't continue to haunt me, like I won't allow it to, like, overcome me. And that's so easy to say because like other like trans people don't get to say that, like they haven't got to say that they've been killed and murdered. And so they you know, but I just recognize that, like, my life will be so much more like fulfilling if I do things that fulfill me and that includes the way that I express myself. So yeah, yes, revered.

[01:03:42] Pennington: That's a big instinct and tango against like self-preservation in a sense, like you said, people can get violent. Has anybody ever confronted you in a negative way when you were dressed maybe a little bit more high femme?

[01:03:55] Nelson: No, I've not gotten any necessarily violent. And I say that like, recognizing that, like, I, I have a privilege and being able to be perceived as male. But also like, I also in

spaces that like, I know that for the most part, like I will be protected or somebody's gonna be like, okay, like, You need to calm down or something like that. So, I but yeah, I've not, I've not gone I wear heels. I wear like six-inch heels, or wear leather pants or skirts or kinds of things, and nobody has ever confronted me. And like, you know, like, This is wrong. So yeah, I mean that I guess that's definitely a good thing. But like, I know that it happens. So.

[01:04:37] Pennington: Yeah, just because it's not happening to you right now doesn't mean that it's not happening somewhere else.

[01:04:42] Nelson: Exactly. Exactly.

[01:04:44] Pennington: Yeah. But like, that's so but you're saying like, even the stares because, you know, it's wholly different. Like I'm never gonna know how that feels. You know, I gotta be in space where I'm like, kind of deemed like the other but not in the same way. Like, what were you when people were in like grocery stores giving you weird looks like what's the internal feeling that comes up is just like being rejected right now? Or like, I don't feel safe or like I just awkward or like, what's the feeling that you?

[01:05:14] Nelson: Yeah, it's all of those things it's like. So what I think what really, like, makes me like, or make, like really rattles me is like, what if I was like, what if I was a cis woman? Like what if, what if there are so many things that like can be at play here and there are so many assumptions being made. And like, I don't get to interject. Like, I don't get to emerge here. And so like, I think that's the big, biggest thing is like, this is very violent. And this is very much so

restrictive. And that's the goal. And so I immediately, like before even being able to articulate that, I feel that restriction, because I can't even be my full self. And if I am, I know that the violence will like, come like it will be it will magnify, because like it, there is one thing to be like, I don't want to see this, but it's also things like I don't want to see or hear like this, this, this thing doesn't need to exist at all. And I feel like that is really what it feels like to like, go out and like be trans and Black is like for one, people are trying to figure out what you are and place you somewhere, while also like perceiving you as lesbian, automatically. And it's just like, ah, like, and then, and then like, they—it's not even that, like one is emerging before they like they inform each other that the transphobia and the anti-Blackness, like it's like, they're both they come in at the same time. And they're magnified, like, yeah, it's, yeah, in your speaking to like being unsafe, I think that is another thing.

Like, I already feel like from what the perception of transness and Black transness, I'm already, like hearing the social, like, regards for it right and how, like, that's not really something that we talked about. And if we do, there's like, he she or like, just now no regard for like people's pronouns, or, you know, gender essentialism, and where we think that like, our genitals are what really drives a lot our interactions or like, our social status, and all of that stuff. So there's that. And those expectations that like I'm already aware of, and then like, when you're in person, you see people really trying to map something onto your body that like, just doesn't exist, and that I can't necessarily prove. And they can't also prove, but like, I'm not playing by my rules, you know, I'm playing by society's rules, and they're also playing by society's rules. And they have the upper hand at this point. And so like, yeah, like, I feel like, it feels very much so like, like, hunting season. Like, I feel like a doe, like caught in headlights. And like, there are

like, a lot of like, people, like guns, like, it's like, you're really trying to hit something, and I have to walk on eggshells, or I have to be really, really light. And I have to be perceived in a way that is not threatening. Or, you know, and then I have a moustache. And so like, there's another thing, like, I feel like, I—my identity is not separate from my mustache and that, like, I say that because like, I feel like, I'm like a hairy person. And so like, regardless of what I do, if, even if I shave my mustache like that, you're gonna see the stubble, like, it's gonna, it's gonna come back.

And it's something that I had to recognize, like a part of me even though like I didn't necessarily, I'm not necessarily like, fully accepting of it still something that I'm trying to, like, undo myself. But I reckon like I said, that it's not anything that I necessarily want to change initially. And, like, I just see how people's perception of like facial hair, and like how it like, when you mix that with other gender presentations that are not perceived as like, man centered or male centered or masculine centered. They're like, there's something like that is just, I don't even really know it's so thick the violence that like is in the air. It feels like almost like I am—what am I trying to say? Like, I am desecrating something sacred, and like people are having like a visceral like, like, this is their religion. That's what if that's what it is. It feels like a religion. Like I'm breaking religious code. And like, I'm like a heretic [laughter]. That's exactly how it feels like I'm like, some kind of witch or something like that. So yeah, like, I feel like I think that a lot of trans people, because trans people are not just people who, quote unquote, have “transitioned”. Because like, you know, what does it mean to finally transition like, you know, well, or, especially with us like having like a different perception of who we are. As we grow old, like, I feel like we are always transitioning.

But anyway, when I'm in this world, I feel like, Oh, dang, where was going on with it?

Mmmmm? I don't remember. But no, I guess my final thing, what I'm saying is that, yeah, you definitely feel it stick in the air. And, yeah, I really just want to say, oh, what I was saying was that, that I feel like a lot of people in the in Jackson are trans, a lot more people are trans than people think. Because like, our people's general perception of what trans is, is even still within the binary. And they don't even understand that, like trans people, like that is an umbrella term for multiple identities. And so like, yeah, people's perception of what trans is like, does not translate onto like a lot of people's bodies in the way that is affirming for them. And so like, a lot more people will be trans or like, be identify as trans or be able to walk in transness. You know, if we understood that, but I'm saying that to say like, yeah, I just know that there are a lot more people who probably are perceived as cis gender, or you know, as "passing" quote, unquote, when they are actually like, they want to do something else with their presentation, or they want to be referred to, in some way, whether it be like social, or political or whatever, like aspect, they want to relate to the world differently. They want the world to relate to them differently.

And yeah, I like notice a lot in Jackson, like in little things, and like, even when people just want to change, like the spelling of their name, like when they get older, or kinds of things. And, you know, that's not me, like putting the trans identity on like these people, but like, I just know, that, like, that aspect of wanting to be referred to as something different is not separate from the way that people, trans people want to be related to, or how they want to be related to. And so yeah, like, I just feel like, and being in a conservative place, like Jackson, or the South is

just a really, oh, and I was speaking to something earlier, I think this is before this conversation, but that other conversation, but like how, like we have mastered, like gendered language, and like, you know, using sir and ma'am, all that stuff, like, it was just so difficult to emerge in this world, as trans and be affirmed in that in this culture is really, really difficult to have that language because even like, as a trans person, I have internalized the the need to use ma'am and sir and like how that informs how I engage with people. And it's just like, that goes against, like my very existence. And so yeah, yeah, that's, that's basically it.

[01:13:05] Pennington: Right. Do you ever think about like, existing as a trans and queer individual in another city, or another space? And what that life might be like, like for instance here in New York, people bat eyelashes, at nothing. Okay. So have you ever thought about like, I can still be this same individual, same in person, but in a different space? And what that might be like?

[01:13:33] Nelson: Yeah, I think I have a lot, I think, really, there may have been like, an internalizing of like, other people's projections of what I am and where I should be. Like, I feel like, since I've been younger, a lot of people have engaged with me like, and being like, you know, you're not, are you from Jackson, or like, you're not from Jackson. I'm just like—because you don't, because of your perception of what Jackson is, and what a Jacksonian person is supposed to look like, you know, that is really like informing how you're engaging with me and informing why you don't believe that I'm from Jackson. But even in that projection, like a lot of people have been like, well, you would do great in the, you know, in California, and or New York on the East Coast. And to which, like I've given much thought, you know, but like,

ultimately, I felt that, like, I have emerged the way that I am while I've been in Jackson, like, I've never left Jackson, I've always been here all my life, and I'm the way that I am because of my environment. And so yeah, of course, I've given it thought, but like, ultimately, I think that it comes from anti-Mississippi or anti-Jackson rhetoric that like there is no, there's like no possibility or like, no future, where I can be my most authentic self or thrive here as a Black trans person and that's just not true.

Sure, I don't have access to the same resources as these other cities. Sure, there's not like a prominent living, moving, breathing, like, you know, or what I should yeah, just stick with prominent, prominent like space or LGBTQ space, you know, in Mississippi or in Jackson, I would say. But, that doesn't mean that there aren't spaces, that doesn't mean that I can't find them, you know, but that doesn't mean that like, I can't make those spaces, even if I can't find them. And that seems to be like, like my life story, or like a life story as a trans person or by trans person in Jackson is like, literally creating things, pioneering things that have never existed or don't exist in the ways that you think that they should exist. Exist, like, we literally are constantly creating, like, we had me and Nat, my friend, that the organizer, we created a Black and brown like solidarity to trans. Like, we call it the community, community fairs, and they were erected from T-Door Trans Day of Remembrance of last year or the year before, one of their comrades was a trans Black man, and he was killed. It was like, shot, shot down. And out of that, they thought that we should create that space for trans people. Because there we didn't really see many spaces. It was basically a space where we did like what is it called, like a clothing, I wouldn't say drive like, share. So like people, community members, or bring clothing items, within any community member can come and take on. You didn't necessarily have to

bring anything to take them. But it was just there for people. We also had like, like, as we're also working, so a lot of the people who came together, it wasn't just me and that. And then also, I didn't really come up with it, they came up with it with someone else. But the people that they brought on board are also community members, and also do organizing, you know, individually.

And so we brought the resources that we have from those organizations into that space. So for instance, like I brought like condoms and like, you know, dental dams and like menstrual products, and somebody else was like a lawyer, and they were talking about like trans rights and like how to change your name. And stuff like that. As well, as we were providing free food for the community. And then any other things that like, I think we were doing, like COVID shots at one time or like, you know, vaccine shots. It's just like a big hub of like, resources for folks. And then it was also a way to network. Because like, you know, you get to know, the queer and trans Black and brown people that are in your city. And so yeah, like, there's often just a need for us to just make it if we don't see it to make it. And that's been my mentality, like navigating being in Jackson. And, you know, it's like, dang, got to reinvent the wheel. But honestly, a lot of it is not necessarily reinvent the wheel. Because these are not things that are like, have not been done before. For one and then two, like, once you recognize the needs, or once you interacted with the community, it's not hard to know what they need, like what their needs are. Because like, you're not getting the needs, or you not just, they're not erecting from like a eureka moment, you know, this is happening through like, actual engagement. And this is what people have said, overwhelmingly. So yeah, like, I've just never, or in my older self I've never just been like, I need to leave, like, of course, like I have concerns about like the water crisis,

and how that impacts my living conditions and just a bunch of other things that I have concerns but I don't have the desire to leave Jackson because like Jackson is not good, or because like, Jack—there's nothing in Jackson, like, I love the people. I love the community members. I love the culture. So yeah, like I just don't have a desire to like leave or have had the desire to leave.

[01:19:10] Pennington: Yeah. And it's like you said, if I see something lacking, like, I'll put in the effort to do something about it, you know? Because that's what it's like communities that are more shall we say? I don't I don't want to put the word like a substantial, but you know, the big difference between like community here in New York versus Jackson, but it all started with like the same thing, you know, grassroots thing, so to speak. So what part of you is like saying, you're Jackson you know? It the how the way that you are now is also a byproduct of like where you grew up, not only having to navigate certain spaces and around it but like, what portion is truly like a, like a Jacksonian? What do you say How do you say that? You know? Mmmmm? What, part of me is truly a Jacksonian? Or whatever. Like, you know, that could be like a, like a bullshit question, but you know what I mean? Like, you know, I can you know, everybody is, you know, we're all byproducts of the places we grew up, so to speak.

[01:20:17] Nelson: Oh, yeah. Okay. Um I feel like my tendency to want to go edgy is definitely Jackson. Even though Jackson is perceived as like, maybe lowly or like this place this not really like, hip to fashion. I have, in my environment in my immediate environment, seeing people who are very fashion forward in Jackson, to the point where I will even challenge because a lot of people say they like Jackson specifically. Yes. Yeah, Jackson is like the birthplace of American music. I will even argue and say like, it's also like, the birthplace of like,

American culture. And like, in that, in that sense, in fashion, because like, a lot of the things that I've pieced together are not I say that, like, they come from our own genius, but I had to go into my environment to find it. And so like, I've gone to, like simple like little stores, we have like a store called like, City Trends. And they have like, graphic tees, and like shoes, and like, you know, all kinds of like, like, maybe like locally designed, I assume, pants and other like, articles of clothing. But yeah, I will go in there and find pieces. And like, I will go into like the thrift store. I don't think I mentioned that there to you, is a place called Silly Billy's. I just like encountered in the past, like year or two. And that's where I've gotten a lot of great amount of like my new updated closet from.

And yeah, like, it's there are just so many different staple places in Jackson, where like, I have gotten my things from and I'm just like, where are you from? And they were all from Mississippi, or I am from Jackson. I'm just like, like, there's just a disregard for like, where, or how, how diverse Jackson truly is and like what Jackson really is. And so I went, yeah, I would argue that every facet of my being from the way that I eat the way that I present myself the way that like I even organize like, I recognize that like Jackson is like very repressive, like socially repressive. And so like, even like how expressive that I am.

Oh my goodness! And this is such a great example. There's a person named Macy Brown. She's an organizer and she's from Jackson. She's like, she's, you know, pretty well known, like as far as like the Jackson community and like, I would say nationally, as well, because she works with the ACLU now. And like, she's been in multiple interviews, speaking on behalf of like, you know, the city. We actually went to daycare together. And I never even knew that like,

she would go out to be like an activist and I will come out to be like, organizer. And like now we are in like, multiple spaces together, where we like, organize together, we're talking to each other, you know about certain things. As I was saying that to say like, just the community in the way that we even advocate for ourselves. Like that is also like Jackson because like, we need one another. And we see that and we also see that a lot of people don't say what needs to be said, like, the whole anti Jackson, anti-Mississippi thing is something that a lot of Mississippians know, like, through and through. Even if we can't articulate it, but like a lot of Mississ—like northerners don't see it and don't think that it's important to even like, like, you know, to name and so like, that aspect of myself has made me even settle more into like, my Jacksonian identity and like not back down for being a Jacksonian advocate, even like, loud, more loud or, you know, loud louder, about me being from Jackson and like, about people, like, you know, basically shittin' on Jackson. So, yeah, like, I feel like every aspect of me like, it's truly Jacksonian, in that [laughter] I was born here. I raised I was raised here. I went to, like, undergrad here. I've not left the city. And so like, what else could I be? You know?

[01:24:25] Pennington: Yeah, yeah. Your that's like byproduct of space? You know, it's like we are all sponges, and we take in everything in our environment. So that's pretty cool.

[01:24:34] Nelson: Yeah.

[01:24:35] Pennington: Yeah. But like, So, speaking of like, active community involvement in like, you know, with this project in volunteering, what do you hope to give back to the

community? And what do you want listeners and viewers both inside and outside the community to take away from your words today?

[01:24:56] Nelson: Mmm. Okay, I think that I want people to if they don't get anything else, from what I've been saying, or what we've talked about, I want them to get that I—well not just I—but like Jackson is valuable, and not valuable in like, it is less than or I feel like valuable in like, there are humans that live in Jackson, that are from the South that are overwhelmingly Black. That are people you know, who actually have, you know, day to day, goings and comings with other individuals that interact with people that really need to be poured into and valued not because of the potential or what other people see for what the city can be, quote unquote. But because these, this, these, we need access to resources, and we like are humans. And yeah, like, I feel like I say that, because I'm just noticing that, like, people's perception of Jackson, and I've said this multiple times in our interview, but like, it definitely overshadows or eclipses how people regard Jackson and Jacksonians. And like, people shouldn't be able like to have to code switch, to be able to like be perceived as valuable or, you know, worthy of respect. Like, I should not be able to have to come into like an interview or any kind of like space, and like, not be able to say what I want to say how I want to say it. You know, because, like, I'm from Jackson, and like, a lot of people in Jackson speak all kinds of like, there are even dialects from like, you know, South Jackson versus West Jackson, like, there are so many different ways to be a Jacksonian so yeah, I that was one thing, I definitely want people to just realize that, like, Jackson is as much as the city as New York, you know, and we should not have to be around here, you know, with polished streets, and overwhelming

celebrity support, or whatever, name the thing, you know, that makes whatever city a great city to be valued as a city.

And I just see that that is like, overwhelmingly, the reason why Jackson is the way that it is. Because people don't see a value in supporting it, and actually want to take away from it to take control of it and do what they think the city should be doing. And yeah, that's, that's one of the main things and also, I want people to take away that like, the human expression, the human like existence exists on a spectrum, and a spectrum that we not even I can perceive. And I really just want people to think about the vastness of humaneness. And how important it is to unpack our biases, and how we engage with people. And recognize that a lot of times that ideologies and bias may be the very thing that is in the way of somebody surviving, you know, or being supported. I'm sorry, my window is, and people are hovering by my door. But yeah, yeah, those are really the really two big things. Oh, and the last thing would be what Octavia Butler said is that change is inevitable. And I guess that change is as inevitable as God. So, you know, essentially, change will happen, and we have to be prepared for it. Or we don't have to be you know, [laughter] but it will happen.

[01:28:58] Pennington: Yeah, the harder you fight it, the harder you're gonna fall. It's like, it's gonna happen. She's inevitable. So, before we before we conclude, is there anything else you'd like to share or add to the record? Just like.

[01:29:14] Nelson: I mean, I don't I mean, I don't know when I share my social media?

[01:29:20] Pennington: I mean, sure. Yeah. go ahead plug yourself [laughter].

[01:29:21] Nelson: [Laughter I was gonna say people can follow me on Instagram at D-A-R,-E-E. No, that is not correct. Oh, my God is D-A-R-E-R-E-E-U-S. So dare, like I double dog dare you. R-E—R-E-E, and then U-S. That's really like the only thing that I'm like, active on for real, but yeah, and I love engaging with other people. So I mean, I gave my social media not just because I want more followers, but like I really like to engage with like people that are in the Jackson community and I like to meet new people. I like to make connections I like to like get people to where they need to be or the research they want to be connected to. So please do not hesitate to like try to get in contact with me.

[01:30:13] Pennington: That's good. All right. Hey, it's like it's going on a historical record forever. Yeah, your handles gonna be safely archived in the Margaret Walker Center?

[01:30:26] Nelson: Yes! That's awesome now that's, that's!

[01:30:33] Pennington: That's it. You set a record, you set your damn set. I like okay, hold on, let me keep it going for a sec. So what's the rest of your afternoon looking like?

[01:30:45] Nelson: Um, I think I might go to my mom and my sister's house. Just hang with them. Um, I was wanting to try to like do some more artwork. We have another mashup coming up in January and in February. So I wanted to, like be more prepared for that. But it

doesn't look like that will happen. [Laughter] Yeah, I'm probably just gonna tell my sister and my mom get something to eat. And then you know, get ready for my day tomorrow.

[01:31:13] Pennington: Yeah, yeah, sounds, it's already the end of Sunday. The weekend goes.

[01:31:19] Nelson: Just right. It's dark. That is so wild.

[01:31:23] Pennington: I know. Like as we have been talking like the sun I can see it's slowly slipping behind some ugly grey. Yeah, yeah.

[01:31:34] Nelson: What's your afternoon looking like?

[01:31:36] Pennington: Mine, I'm gonna go wake my boyfriend up gonna say goodbye to him. And I'm gonna go back to Harlem.

[01:31:43] Nelson: Awesome. Okay.

[01:31:45] Pennington: I've been here for the past like two days so teetering on the codependency couple. Yeah [laughter]. He's sexy as all get out. But you know.

[01:32:01] Nelson: I know I get it. You need your space, you need your space.

[01:32:04] Pennington: Independent lady before I met you [laughter].

[01:32:10] Nelson: For sure, for sure!

[01:32:11] Pennington: Okay. All right, how I'll let you go. Let you enjoy your afternoon. Thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of the project. And I really enjoyed myself learned a lot as well. So thank you for that.

[01:32:22] Nelson: Of course. No, thank you so much for this opportunity. I really appreciate this for sure. And I love the work that you're doing.

[01:32:29] Pennington: Thank you. Well, they were, they were lovely enough to include me. So I'm happy that yeah, Alissa Rae was like, Yeah, you will do. I like you.

[01:32:38] Nelson: Not you'll do!!!

[01:32:40] Pennington: You're good. You're good. You're pretty good. Okay, all right. Take care.

[01:32:46] Nelson: You too! Bye!