

Mary Alice Yeskey

Welcome to the Johns Hopkins University Press podcast. I'm Mary Alice Yeskey with the JHU Press Journals Division. I'm thrilled to be joined today by Antar Tichavakunda. Dr. Tichavakunda received his Ph.D. in Urban Education Policy from the University of Southern California. Born and raised in Washington DC, he is a product of DC public schools and earned his Bachelor of Arts in Education Studies from Brown University. Prior to his doctoral studies, he worked as an 11th grade English teacher in DC Public Schools. Using qualitative inquiry, he engages in research on college readiness, Black student experiences at predominantly white institutions, and more broadly, the sociology of race and higher education. His latest paper, "Black Joy on White Campuses: Exploring Black Students' Recreation and Celebration at a Historically White Institution" was published in the Spring 2021 issue of *The Review of Higher Education*.

Thank you so much for joining us today, Antar. I really appreciate your time.

Antar Tichavakunda

I'm super excited to be here, thanks for having me.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Can you tell us first a little bit, what I like to call, your academic origin story? How did you find your way to studying education and focusing specifically on race in higher education?

Antar Tichavakunda

So, number one, I love that question. It sounds like I'm some sort of a superhero, so I appreciate that. But, yeah, so I think my origin story has to start with my, kind of, like, my grandparents. I'm a third-generation college student so I kind of have always had that academic, you know, let's focus on education type of foundation. So, I don't take that for granted and that's kind of really helped me on my path here, just recognizing where I come from. My grandma was a teacher, my grandfather was a lawyer, so I have to always acknowledge that in my origins, right. I'm a product of DC public schools, that carries a lot for me and that's often what, I often point to DCPS as why I even got into education, because I went to probably the best, by whatever metrics you want to use, the best public school in Washington DC and when I went to college, I went to Brown University and I still felt pretty behind a lot of my peers. And I ended up taking one class kind of by accident, or just randomly, a first-year seminar called "Controversies in Education", and that was the course where I found myself doing all the reading, the supplemental reading, going to office hours, I was of course really being a good student and one of the reasons why was because I was very passionate about it, and a lot of the readings I was in some ways reading my own story, reading my cousin's story, reading my friends' stories, so you know, I really started to think about how education shapes life chances. How I was afforded certain chances, other folks weren't, and

even with the privileges that I had how far behind in some ways I was than others. So, I always have to go back to my roots of DCPS, being in DC, coming from, you know, a pretty well-to-do family in a lot of ways, you know.

I taught for two years after I graduated from college. During that time, I taught in a DC public school, so that was just, you know, I had to reflect and be like, wow, I wish I was a little nicer to my teachers. You know, I feel like as a teacher, I was like, okay, wow, wow. So, that really gave me, it was a great experience being a teacher, during that time period I really, I kind of go the research bug and I got really interested in the narratives, policy narratives, other research narratives that we tell about Black youth and Black people in particular, right. Like, you look at my story, right, I often say, you know, I'm from DC. If I just said, Black male, DC public school, an image comes to mind, right, but it's so much more complex than that and I think we, as researchers, as scholars, as writers, as teachers, as people who care about others, we have to embrace that complexity. And I thought, through my research hopefully I can show more of that complexity and show kind of the dynamism and fullness of Black student life.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Your paper is part of a larger study that is examining how space on campus shapes Black student experiences at historically white institutions of higher ed and their perceptions of the climates there. Can you tell us first a little bit about the larger study and sort of what's already happened with that and what may be coming up in the future?

Antar Tichavakunda

For sure, yeah. So, you know, when you think of campus racial climates, you're really thinking about race relations on campus. So, I'm very interested in that, and I think we can learn more about racial climates by just examining, you know, Black students' daily lives. I feel like, when I look at the research space in places is oftentimes taken for granted in how space shapes race relations on campus. So, that was kind of my, the impetus for the larger study. I had students, I probably interviewed about 30 Black students at the same institution and one of the interesting activities I had them do was to kind of, you know, tell me about the school that they go to, while also mapping it for me, right. So, show the important places to you, just map X institution, so that was really interesting, seeing what mattered to students, places that they go, places that they avoid. One student told me as he drew a map of the institution, he was like, yeah, I try to stay out of this area, and it was just a computer lab, and I was like why would you stay out of this area, and he said, oh because the police at this school have approached me there twice. So, I just feel really...

Mary Alice Yeskey

Wow.

Antar Tichavakunda

Right. There was another student, in her map, she had, you know, I forgot it was just, like, an intersection. I was like, why would you include this intersection? She was like, I always think of

this intersection because one of my friends, you know, she said, he's a white guy drunkenly, you know, just urinated in the street some Saturday night.

Mary Alice Yeskey

College (laughs).

Antar Tichavakunda

College, right? But she remembered that because the campus police just kind of gave him a slap on the wrist. "Come on, man. Don't do that," you know, and just let him go about his merry way. And, she juxtaposed that with other experiences of campus police giving Black students a really hard time for not doing infractions like that. So, that space is, like, marked in her memory to show, kind of, like, the unequal justice that Black students kind of face. So, I have some work on that, I have another work where I'm still taking the idea of mapping and space, and I ask the students, alright, I want you to map the Black community here. In a lot of my work, I try to show that the Black community is, it doesn't have a priori status. It's something that Black students make, and intentionally make and sustain and labor to, you know, make affirming. You know, one of the things that I often tell people, and you can talk to most Black students at most PWIs or wherever, there can be Black students at a school and there can be no Black community. Because if students aren't making that effort, hey, let's put together a Black Student Union, let's hold events, let's have parties, then you have Black students, but not necessarily a community.

Mary Alice Yeskey

If they're not doing it for themselves, yeah. Sorry.

Antar Tichavakunda

Exactly. No, no, it's all good. Yeah, so that's also one thing I wanted to see was how space mattered in the creation of a Black community, where the places where they hung out. For this particular school, a lot of the students looked at off-campus places as Black places.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Interesting.

Antar Tichavakunda

Because there weren't many, kind of assigned Black places on campus. Like, there was no Black residence hall, they didn't have a Black cultural center so that often came up in these maps, but places where they would party, hang out, were often times off-campus. So, I really wanted to get into, these, the social world of Black students and I argue that if we really understand how Black students move about and navigate campus, we can learn not only about race relations, we can also learn about campus life in general, and I think that one of my, I don't think it's a bold argument, but I often say that I think that we can learn about campus life in general from learning about Black students in particular. Obviously, there are nuances there, but I really want to, you know, when you think of, like the typical college student, oftentimes I think researchers,

you know, scholars, you know, writers in general, they think of, a white face, college life has a white face, right. And I really, kind of, want to trouble that notion and say that, you know, what if we make the generic college student a Black student, right. What are the problematics with that, what about their experience can inform other students, so I just like to kind of play with that, play with that idea.

Mary Alice Yeskey

It's so fascinating, and when you say mapping you mean, like, literally drawing?

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah.

Mary Alice Yeskey

They're taking pen to paper and that's, I just think that's so interesting, and how that would be so different for any, you could just ask everybody on campus to draw a map and you'd get 20,000 different maps.

Antar Tichavakunda

Exactly, yeah. Some students had, like, pyramids where they were ranking different parts of the Black community, where, like, okay, like, folks in the Black Greek letter organizations, they're at the top of the Black community.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Cause they're having the best experience.

Antar Tichavakunda

The best experience, they're throwing the parties, they're kind of like the mini-celebrities on-campus, because they have these letters, you know, they're holding a lot of the events and then there are the folks who are really involved in the Black community, then there's another tier there's, the Black, you know, college athletes. So, folks had different ranking systems, that's how some people, kind of, wanted to map the Black community. Other people really took the map to heart, so they had brick and mortar spaces, and they ranked those places as well. So, it was really interesting seeing how people configured or mapped the Black community.

Mary Alice Yeskey

That is fascinating. Are there gonna be, like, examples of those illustrations in your book?

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, yeah. So, in this, I'm writing the paper right now for this one. Yeah, so I'm hoping, hopefully it gets accepted, but yeah, I will be including some of the illustrations, or just adapting them to kind of give the reader an idea of what students drew.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Yeah, that's, I just would love to see that, I think that's so interesting.

Antar Tichavakunda

I'll let you know.

Mary Alice Yeskey

One of the things I found so striking about your paper was that you noted how little scholarly research there's been on the intersection of students, race, and joy on campus. So, my question to you is kind of a chicken and the egg, which came first, did you decide to research this topic because of the lack of prior papers and research, or did you go in expecting to find some and didn't find any?

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, that's a great question. I think folks have indirectly discussed joy in their papers and research, maybe not with the specific word joy but I think folks have definitely talked about positive emotions and being Black on campus. I think of Sean Harper's anti-deficit framework, where he pushes us to think about, you know, look for the good, look for, like, the success stories of Black student achievement, right. So, I think in different ways folks have talked about positive aspects of, you know, being Black in higher education or being a Black college student, but if I'm looking for joy, higher education, Black students in Google Scholar, there aren't going to be that much that pops up. So, I think this idea of looking for joy I think really came when I first started learning about the research on Black student life in higher education at PWIs in particular, because I'm reading all this work and it's so fascinating: I learn about microaggressions, I learn about, you know, the racial slights that Black students often endure, and I endured that, right, like, I remember so many times non-Black students at Brown would ask me what team I played for. And you know, like, I'm six-one, but at the time I was very skinny. I'm like, y'all really think?

Mary Alice Yeskey

(laughs) Do I look like I play?

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, like come on now. Without the reason of my race and gender, they're, you know, making that assumption. So, I experienced that. William Smith had put forth this concept of racial battle fatigue. The idea that you're just, dealing with racism all the time and it stresses you out physiologically. I was like, wow, I've experienced that, you know. So, all these different concepts I've learned about, you know, as a doctoral student, helped me better understand my experience as a Black student at PWIs and I think it's so, so useful, however, if you ask me just in general, like, if we're just talking, and you're like, oh, how was Brown? I'll say, oh, Brown was great, you know, and I'll tell you about, you know, it won't be about the microaggressions that I faced, it won't be about the fact that, you know, group projects were, you know, hellish for me because if I wasn't working with other Black students, they would often ice me out or just not talk to me when I saw them on the street. I could tell you about all these experiences of racism,

but what I'll initially bring up would be, you know, my basketball team, the intermural basketball team that I was on, winning the championship. I'll tell you about the freestyle battles that we had, right, like in the Black residence hall. I'll tell you about, you know, the fraternity that I joined, I'm a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Incorporated, the Monster Alpha Gamma Chapter. I'll tell you about that, you know, I'll tell you about the experiences we had, the life that we made either because, or in spite of the racial climate. And I didn't see that, I didn't see that dynamism, I didn't see that agency, I didn't see the full texture of Black student life. So, that really got me interested in, I don't know. So, the whole idea of joy kind of came up because, as I say in the paper, you know, we're seeing this "#BlackJoy", and I'm like, wow, wouldn't it be a cool medium for me to look for Black joy within the higher ed space and use this kind of as a concept to better understand the multifaceted nature of Black student life. So, it was kind of a bold plan, there was a lot of stuff I experienced that I didn't see and I knew Black students were experiencing. Yeah, so I feel like it was a bold plan. Definitely my own experience shaped this, but also seeing the dearth of this in the research also pushed me to do this work.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Excellent, thank you. Reading your paper, you note that one of your participants, who you call Madison, commented after your interview was over that it was refreshing having someone talk to Black students about something positive, that she'd grown accustomed to people only wanting to talk to Black students when something bad happens. Which, on a personal note that part of your paper just stopped me in my tracks, I reread that three times. But I wanted to ask you, how was that experience, hearing that from Madison, both as a researcher and as a Black man?

Antar Tichavakunda

No, I appreciate you asking the question, and honestly, well, number one, the qualitative researcher in me, you know, she thanked me, and I'm like oh, yeah no thank you, like, I'm only giving you this ten-dollar gift card, you lent me your story, right.

Mary Alice Yeskey

(laughs) Right.

Antar Tichavakunda

So, thank you, and she's like, no, no, no. And, like, literally, as soon as she kinda said no, my like, you know, qualitative impulse or instincts were like, dang, I should have had my recorder on, because she she's about to drop.

Mary Alice Yeskey

(laughs) She's about to say something good.

Antar Tichavakunda

I knew she was about to drop something; I knew she was about to drop something heavy, and she really just, when she said that, I was just, wow. You know, and I think I often say, like, you know, students are brilliant, you know. College students, in general, are brilliant, Black students are brilliant, you have to, I mean it seems logical that for Black students to navigate these predominantly white, oftentimes hostile spaces, that they're, you know, creative, they're creative geniuses in their own right, you know, how they theorize a life into these hostile conditions, right. So, of course, she would say something brilliant like that, you know. So, I often, I remember number one I want to be like, wow, this paper is nothing without the participants, right. This paper was easy to write in part because of their very thoughtful, reflective, yeah, just comments that they made, you know. And I really, I mean I think I took a risk, I could have been a better qualitative researcher, but I was just like, you know, where do you see joy on campus, when I asked them that. They ran with it, you know, so it's really like, you know if you think about basketball, if someone's throwing a really bad alley-oop and someone else is catching it and dunking it, and these students, they were catching all of my bad assists, you know, I'm like y'all, they make my job easier, right, just, and I think in part it's because they wanted to, as Madison said in that right like, when someone, you know, when there's racial violence people want to talk to Black students. When we have to put on our activist hat, you know, and call the university out, they want to talk to us, you know. But how often do they really, you know, just ask about how our lives are on a daily basis. Am I having fun, you know, can I go to parties on the weekend, am I welcome to go to some of these parties? So, you know, it was a beautiful statement she had and in some ways it made me feel, it gave me more confidence in the work I was doing, cause I was like, okay, there's definitely something here and we need to talk about this. So, I was just, I mean I was thankful she said it, I was thankful she provided that reframing for me, right. Yeah, so I was just thankful she said that, and I think in some ways it's kind of an indictment or at least a critique, I think a loving critique, of both scholarship and student affairs administrators, you know, higher education administrators in general, right. How often do we ask Black students, you know, how are you having fun here? Is this an enjoyable experience? You know, what do you do on the weekends? What do you do after you leave class, right? And, so, I think it was, you know, a slight, it pushes us to reflect in different ways about the questions we ask and the outcomes we feel truly matter for college students.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Yeah, the reframing was just so, like I just said, it just sort of stopped me. It's like when someone say how are you and you say fine and they say, no, how are you, yeah.

Antar Tichavakunda

How are you? Yeah, exactly, like, okay, wow, wow, so...

Mary Alice Yeskey

Oh, you really want the answer, yeah. Oh, we're talking truth now, I see, I see, yeah. One thing that I think was touched on by several students in your interviews was that universities police Black parties entirely differently that white ones, noting that, and I'm gonna quote you now,

“the racialized emotion of Black students’ joy through partying was rendered much less important than the racialized fear of Black students’ congregating,” which, that sentence I read four times, so thank you for that sentence. How can, in your opinion, how can universities hold their campus police accountable for this racial profiling?

Antar Tichavakunda

That’s a great question.

Mary Alice Yeskey

That’s a big question too so I’m not expecting you to get the one answer to it (laughs).

Antar Tichavakunda

That’s a great question and I think the short answer is they can’t. There’s no way, there’s no proven method of, holding police, whether you’re talking about campus police or municipal police, there’s no proven method of holding police accountable. They act, like, you know, upon their own accord, right, and I think a very small thing I think higher education researchers can do, and I think there’s going to be way more of this work and I’m very excited about seeing what type of work comes out, in that we’re having, like, folks doing work on, like, police free campuses, right, and organizing for that. So, I think, they’re, you know, campus police are under greater scrutiny, but we know so little, I think, generally about how they operate, right. Like, it makes no sense that I can get, you know, a 4.5 eval as a teacher, you know, and we can’t give evals to campus police. It makes no sense that, you know, student affairs folks oftentimes have to get master’s degrees and learn about student development, learn about, you know, be it student development, how adults learn, and learn about different aspects of identity, while our campus police don’t have to do any of that work, right. While they also have, like, you know, are carrying lethal weapons, So, there is no accountability there, so I mean if you ever ask me, I don’t know if we need campus police. I haven’t, I’ve never called campus police, I don’t know if we need campus police. For me at least, they’ve done more harm than good. So, I think we have to ask do we need campus police?

Mary Alice Yeskey

Right, not should we change it, but should it exist at all.

Antar Tichavakunda

Do we need it? Exactly, exactly, how can we better, you know, allocate our funds. And I think a great example, you know when we look at Ohio State pretty recently, we saw, like, you know, we saw the mobs of white students celebrating some type of game, and they’re destroying property, they’re destroying cars, with no, you know, with nothing happening, at all. Meanwhile, you know, like, Black students come together for, you know, a party somewhere, not destroying anything, and I think I often point to this example at USC, right, like, it was a graduation: Black students congregated, had a party and they brought out LAPD, they brought out helicopters. For nothing more than Black students coming together and partying. You know,

while you have, you juxtapose that with white students destroying property, literally, in revelry, but that goes, you know, there's no fear attached to that.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Right.

Antar Tichavakunda

But Black students coming together is automatically, like, oh no we have to shut this down. So, I think it, you know, I think it's beyond repair, at this point.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Or was set up to not be able to be repaired to begin with.

Antar Tichavakunda

Exactly, that's way better, that's a better way of putting it, yeah.

Mary Alice Yeskey

You note in your positionality statement that you attended historically white institutions for your post-secondary education, which you noted, Brown. Did the responses of your interview subjects align with your personal experience?

Antar Tichavakunda

In a lot of ways, it did, and I think in a lot of ways they way more eloquently described it, right, and I don't think any research is absent the researcher, so I look back on my experience and I definitely see a lot of what the students are saying and can completely relate. And also, it's just in thinking about that I think a way, I think, in my positionality, I really wanted to make sure, I tried my best to do this paper right, you know. I didn't want anyone to read this and say, oh, you know Black students are having a great time at these schools, you know.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Right, balance.

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, exactly, so I was like, how can I show this? How can I both show that for a lot of Black students a lot of the time it's very difficult, but there's also joy? And I was like, is there even a point in me talking about this, I was really wrestling with this, and I wanted to make sure this wasn't, you know, just some type of superfluous endeavor. So, I reached back to, you know, history, and I was thinking about, okay, if I want to do this right, I need to see how other folks talked about joy, of, like, how Black people experienced joy in subjugated conditions. So, I found a lot of inspiration in the work of Robin D.G. Kelly, his work of race rebels, I found inspiration in historians who talked about, you know, Black folks who were enslaved. There's a book, I think her name is Emily West, and it's called *Chains of Love*, and it's about, like, just the relationships and marriages that Black folks who were enslaved had, like, during that time

period in South Carolina, and just seeing the artful, you know beautiful but also very, kind of, you know, very melancholy portraits that the author was able to paint about Black students lives in such a subjugated condition, I thought was just, I just think it's important. You know, and just kind of looking at how historians talked about Black joy, Black recreation, Black leisure, I found the confidence to write this piece, you know. So, I just wanted to, you know, kind of note that this wasn't, I had a lot of hesitation before even writing it, but I think it's important for us to talk about the agency, the agency of Black folks, and also the interplay between structure and agency as well as, just kind of, like, the fullness of Black people's lives. So, yeah, I really appreciate the historical work that's already been done.

Mary Alice Yeskey

You have a book coming out. Can you tell us what it's called and when we can expect to see that?

Antar Tichavakunda

Yes, it's called *Black Campus Life: The Worlds Black Students Make at a Historically White Institution*, it's coming out with SUNY Press in November 2021. The hardback will be out, hopefully, the paperback will be out soon after, soon after November 2021. And in this piece, it's a yearlong ethnography that I conducted following Black engineering students around for a year.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Oh, interesting.

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, hanging out with these students, skipping class with them sometimes.

Mary Alice Yeskey

(laughs) Excellent. Why'd you pick engineering specifically? Was there a reason behind that?

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, no, that's a great question, that's a great question. So, I think oftentimes, I really wanted to get at, you know, I'm really interested in structure, agency, and just Black student life, right. So, I was thinking about how to bound my research and I saw so much about Black engineering students at the time, my advisor was like, yeah, this'll be interesting, folks are really interested in the whole STEM thing right now, so I was like, well, I need to, you know, bound it, so I was like let's look at the research that's out there and I think oftentimes when we're doing research on STEM students, we're focusing on the outcome, we're focusing on how can we get more Black people in STEM, how can we get more Black engineering students to graduate, you know, how can we make this a better experience for them. But and I think just kind of because of that impulse of, like, outcomes, of how we can get more people in the industry, there's less about what's the daily life for these folks, right. So, I thought it'd be interesting just to kind of, like, alright, well, let's look at, you know the industry aspects of it, but let's also look at their daily

lives in general. Like I said earlier about how we can learn about student life in general from Black students, in some ways, we can learn about Black campus life in general, at PWIs, from specifically looking at engineering students, I think. So, yeah, it was a real fun project, I tried my best on it, very happy that it's finally coming to fruition, it was my dissertation. This'll technically be my first piece from my dissertation, so yeah.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Well, congratulations (laughs).

Antar Tichavakunda

Thank you so much, yeah, this has been three, going one four years in the making. So, I tried really hard on it and I think it'll be, I'm hoping that, you know, scholars, researchers, you know, teachers, even college students or high school students, parents, you know, who are debating, you know, putting their kids, you know, in a PWI, I'm hoping they can read this book and just, you know, learn something from it, appreciate it, you know. I tried my best on it, I think it's a good book, I'm a little biased, yeah, I encourage everyone to check it out.

Mary Alice Yeskey

So, now that your book is basically done, what are you currently working on, what's going on right now with you?

Antar Tichavakunda

That's a great question. So, I'm again kind of thinking about Black student life, and I mentioned earlier about how Black campus communities aren't, they don't just exist, they're there through work. And I think my next project, I wanna look at how, I'm thinking about labor, I'm thinking about Black student labor, right, so I'm thinking about, what work do Black student leaders, or just, you know, Black students who are involved in, like, Black affinity organizations, whatever, what work do they put in to create a welcoming, affirming, you know, lively Black community. So, I'm really interested in labor, and I think, you know, one of the things I push for is like, you know, if you're a Black student leader at a predominately white institution, your tuition should be paid for, at least for while you're doing that work.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Because of how much you're doing.

Antar Tichavakunda

Exactly, exactly, I mean we often think about the critical work that, you know, student affairs, student life folks do to create a welcoming environment for all students and Black students in particular, and they're doing a lot of the work, but that work would mean a lot less if the Black students themselves weren't doing so much work already. You know, I think about all the work that I used to do, you know, I was president of, like, the Black men's organization on campus, you know, president of my fraternity, and there were definitely times where the work that I did, you know, organizationally, rivalled that of the work I would do homework wise.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Wow.

Antar Tichavakunda

If not more. You know, and in my book, I talk about one student, and I saw a lot of myself in this student, he struggled academically in large part because he dedicated so much of his time to upkeeping the Black community. You know, he even said at one point, you know, I've been the yes man to this community for so long. You know, his father at one point said, you know, you didn't come to school to be Martin Luther King Jr. But a lot of Black students, I think, probably have that pressure. You know, I'm really curious if we can think about this work, which, you know, I think it's good work, students are getting a lot of leadership skills, a lot of other, you know, skills from this work, but when we really think about it as labor, what does that do, when we think about this as labor of Black students. So, that's my next project.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Monetize it, yeah.

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mary Alice Yeskey

I mean, think about athletes. Think about athletic scholarships and what they bring to the school.

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, if they're doing that.

Mary Alice Yeskey

If they're selling tickets and selling t shirts and, you know, bringing money in it's essentially like, yeah, that was a really good point. Just monetizing the work, you were leaving the school a better place.

Antar Tichavakunda

And students are. You know, like they're doing that work, they're leaving infrastructure behind through Black Student Unions, you know, they're creating these big events oftentimes with the help of student affairs folks like I mentioned, but they're creating these big events that make these campuses welcoming, you know.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Right, yeah, I was so struck in your paper when you mentioned that. You said that, you know, I don't know if it was specific to the school you were at, or that I can make this broad statement,

but that most Black student centers or cultural centers came about because of protest, came about because of the work that the students did to create them.

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, and that was across the nation through the Black campus movement in the 60s, right. You had a lot of schools being responsive because of Black rage, right, thinking about that emotion.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Right.

Antar Tichavakunda

And, you know, just a very justified, righteous rage. But that's why you have more, you know, Black cultural centers, Black residence halls, you know, I think just specific ways to meet the needs of Black but oftentimes it's just not enough, you know, so.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Right.

Antar Tichavakunda

If we know it's not enough then we should at least be, you know, alleviating the financial burden of these students who are making the campus welcoming.

Mary Alice Yeskey

And asking the right questions, which is exactly what you do with your paper, you know, it's not waiting for the conflicts, it's saying, you know, what's working right now, where do you find joy. That being said, where do you find joy as a Black faculty member on your campus?

Antar Tichavakunda

That's a great question. So, I mean I work with a great department, I'm friends with the folks in my department, you know, we're just across different races so that's, I'm very thankful to have a department where folks get it, you know, I'm not dealing with the daily microaggressions going to a department meeting, and I'm friends with them, so, like, I can grab a drink, grab coffee with them, so, I find joy just working with folks from my department. I'm also very lucky to, yeah, just be at an institution where there's a Black faculty association, so, just having that Black space for faculty has been invaluable for me. I told a couple of the more senior Black faculty, who are women, I told them they're my adopted big sisters, or I'm their adopted little brother on campus, so whenever we go out to eat it's on them.

Mary Alice Yeskey

(laughs) That works out well for you.

Antar Tichavakunda

Yeah, well they pushed back, so. But it's nice to kind of have that family feel, you know, and just be able to exhale. I find joy in working with students, I love teaching, I'm continuously inspired by the student's I'm able to work with, by the students I research as well on other campuses, that brings me joy. So, yeah, I think it's important to, if anything, I often say that good research changes the way you view the world and makes you a better person. I think if you really think and wrestle with it. So, with this piece I hope that folks one, glean everything they could for Black college students but also for themselves think about how they're intentionally seeking joy and cultivating joy for themselves. That's been a big thing for me in general, especially during this past year during the pandemic. You know, and I think even in writing this paper I've been way more intentional about fostering joy for myself. So, what am I doing today that is centered on joy and that's for me, and it's not just going to happen, I have to create it, so, I hope they'll take that away as, you know, something that can be applied to anyone.

[Mary Alice Yeskey](#)

Thank you so much Antar this was such a pleasure and this conversation was a delight. I appreciate it. We will put links to your paper in the podcast write up so that people can read it and once your book is out we will also make sure that people know where to find it at SUNY Press.

[Antar Tichavakunda](#)

Thank you so much, I really appreciate it. Thank you for the questions and thank you so much for engaging with my piece. I really appreciate it.

[Mary Alice Yeskey](#)

It was a pleasure, it was a great read. Thank you.