

# Constance Shabazz

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Autobiography of Malcolm X, Nation of Islam, African American, MeToo movement, activist, education, civil rights, Chicago, health care injustice, Sickle Cell Foundation, social Justice, welfare, Muslim woman identity, segregation

## SPEAKERS

Constance Shabazz, Tiffany Puett

- C** Constance Shabazz 00:01  
My name is Constance Shabazz, and I am delighted to be a part of this.
- C** Constance Shabazz 00:08  
There's a little bit of a background about me. I was born and grew up in Chicago, Illinois. My parents migrated there from Missouri and Arkansas - my dad from Missouri and my mom from Arkansas. They met in college and came there after World War II. And just to think because of the segregation and housing in Chicago, these are college educated people who couldn't find a place to live, and had to actually send my oldest brother for six months to live with my paternal grandparents.
- C** Constance Shabazz 00:46  
I was born in 1952. As you know, that was towards the beginning of what we know as the modern civil rights movement. I was, I think, three years old when Emmett Till was killed. Actually, I've lived across the street from his mother for 30 years, so we knew that story very well.
- C** Constance Shabazz 01:10  
My parents were kind of different in terms of their awareness in terms of civil rights. My

mother was, I would call her an activist, she was always engaged in what was going on in the civil rights movement and social justice. She was an educator and was very committed to making sure that children in our community, because we live in predominantly African American communities, were well educated and able to take on the challenges in society - that there was no excuse that they could not succeed. So that's the environment that I was brought up in. Education obviously was a really strong factor in my life. It was always touted as the way to success. I go in my teenage years -

**T** Tiffany Puett 02:01  
Do you mind? For some reason the video just stopped. Sorry about that. [SESSION BREAK].

**T** Tiffany Puett 02:07  
Okay, sorry to interrupt you. I just started it again.

**C** Constance Shabazz 02:09  
I found that I was really curious about religion. For many years in my youth, I gravitated from one church to another, you know, looking for a message that resonated with me. I was even a member of the Youth For Christ in high school, and I was always looking for something. But a very interesting thing happened when I was about 15 or 16. At that time, The Autobiography of Malcolm X was very popular. And my father, who I never remember in my life even introducing me to a book or giving me a book, and this was a avid reader, [who] read newspapers all the time, it was just that for some reason, he offered The Autobiography of Malcolm X to me. He gave it to me [and] he said, "Here, I think you might be interested in this." I was like, okay, if my father is saying this, [there] must be something in here. Not that I had not heard of the book, I just had never read it.

**C** Constance Shabazz 03:24  
In fact, I lived in a community for many years, probably 30 years, where it was the major area in which the Nation of Islam had the majority of their businesses on the south side of Chicago. So, it was not foreign of me to see people of that community. My mother and I patronize many of their businesses and I always felt a sense of respect for them because of the way they carry themselves and the fact that they had invested in community with businesses that were well respected.

C Constance Shabazz 04:06

Reading Malcolm X's book was kind of getting more of an inside view of that community. Plus, I remember my mother being a supporter to the extent of she would buy the newspapers. I remember when we had a situation where the Nation of Islam was actually trying to acquire some land right in our community. There was a petition against that [with] some of the community members. I remember someone coming to my door [at] the house and asking my mother to sign the petition against them putting - they were going to use the land to create a hospital, which is something we definitely needed in the community. But because of the reputation, and there was fear, and these are African American people who are fearful even though they already had contact with [them] because they had existing businesses in the community. I guess it was just that fear factor. And so, they were generating this petition, and my mother refused to sign it. She said, "We need this thing." That kind of laid the foundation for me.

C Constance Shabazz 05:20

When I read Malcolm's book, contrary to what people think, it was not about hating White people or anything like that. It was really about, what I saw in his autobiography was human transformation and that's what really resonated with me because that's what I was looking for. I mean, my search going from church to church, you know, being involved in religious activities was about a search of finding that spot, that spiritual spot, that was going to nurture me spiritually, and was in alignment with all the morals and ethics that my parents had taught me. I wanted something that was not going to say, "Oh, well you go to church on Sunday, but then we leave off everything else when you go into the workspace or into the classroom." I wanted something to integrate at that.

C Constance Shabazz 05:20

The Nation of Islam tried to do that. They had a school because they have the businesses. They were about empowerment of community [because] they had no power for so many years. And also, self respect. So it wasn't until, like I said, I read that book, and I remember reading there was a continuous reference to God's name as being Allah. It so resonated with me, that after reading that book, I could say that the takeaway that I had was that I recognize that my understanding of God aligned with their understanding - well, their representation at that time. It may not have been what we call traditional orthodox Islam, but what resonated with me is that the creator's name that I accepted to recognize was Allah because it embodied all of the things that I see - that this force is greater than everything [and] is in control of all things. I wanted to recognize that and I carried that even though I was not a hard carrying Muslim or anything like that. But that resonated with me for several years until actually I moved to New York.

C Constance Shabazz 08:18

I was in school. I took a hiatus from college, trying to apply myself. You hear people talk about that all the time. And I did, I really did. I moved to New York. It just so happened that I was working with [The] Sickle Cell Foundation and that actually laid the foundation for some of my social activism. I was always interested in the sciences, I thought I was going to go into research. I had taken some time off from college, and I remember seeing a television program that was talking about a sickle cell foundation in New York City and it was started by these two African American pediatricians. I say to myself, "I'm going to go to New York." I told my my family [and]then they were like, "What are you going to New York for?"

C Constance Shabazz 08:57

I told them about this story. And you remember now, this was pre internet, okay? These people didn't even have a listing in the phone book. I decided I was going to go to New York and find them and work for them. It took me maybe about two or three weeks to do that. I hit an old college friend who had graduated [and] moved back home to New York and she allowed me to stay with her family. I would just get on the phone with - I was calling hospitals, people would give me leads - "Oh, I think it's over here. I think it's over there." And finally, [I] got a lead. I wouldn't have found it just walking down the street because actually they were housed in an office on the first floor of an apartment building. I don't even think they had any signs or anything. But I showed up and I said, "Okay, I'm here to volunteer," and they thought I had lost my mind. But I said I was serious serious.

C Constance Shabazz 09:56

And I'll tell you, it was a transformative experience for me. As much as I love the sciences, and like the idea of doing research, I really enjoyed watching how these women had taken an issue that they saw in their practice and it was a social justice issue of that time. Because a lot of people don't realize that at that time, sickle cell anemia was like the HIV of the 60s and 70s. Because, one, it affected predominantly African Americans and we had the worst outcomes and also, poor access to health care.

C Constance Shabazz 10:11

And so, they mobilize, they recognize that many of their patients were not being treated properly. They wanted to raise funds to provide education to the community, to destigmatize the disease and let them know that - actually, the history of the disease itself

was protected and still is a protective mechanism that God has given us to protect for those people who live in areas where Malaria is prevalent. But because there was not a clear understanding about it, a lot of times people would think it was a death knell, similar to what we think of in terms of people finding out about being HIV positive.

**C** Constance Shabazz 10:34

I was really inspired by them. Not only to advocate on behalf of people who are out here, who are untested, but more more or less, more importantly, I was encouraged watching these women, what they did to become a physician. I decided at that time, I want to become a physician. And I saw how I can integrate both my desire to be a social activist and help out the community in ways other than just being in a hands-off position. That there were other avenues that I can also help to advocate for the health care of others. That's pretty much that part of this.

**C** Constance Shabazz 10:53

I ended up going to medical school. I worked as a short stint though, in between there, actually for Muhammad speaks. I became a Muslim [and] I worked for Mohammed speak. I actually started as, I call people a non-typing typus, and ended up working in a position [that] was similar to managing editor with no editorial background, but I was good at organizing things and very deadline driven. And I went back to school, finished my undergraduate degree, took another year off where I worked for the Muslim Health Center in Chicago while I was applying for medical school. I eventually went to medical school, came out, was working with community health centers.

**C** Constance Shabazz 12:26

I have worked as a staff physician, as a chief medical officer, a CEO, and now I work as a clinical consultant for HRSA, which is a federal government's program that oversees the community health centers around the country, the Virgin Islands, and the South Pacific Islands. I also do consulting work right now with a Muslim Health Center in Chicago, its kind of like a mini, I call it a mini, CEO position. So, that's a little bit about me, my professional background, but also more importantly, my introduction to this.

**T** Tiffany Puett 13:03

Great, thank you. So, can you talk now about, I mean, you've just talked a lot about the work you've done, but can you say more about the activist or social justice work that you've done and what inspires you in that work?



Constance Shabazz 13:22

Well, I also want to integrate that with Islam. Islam is about equity, fairness, its about provision for those who cannot provide for themselves. And that all dovetailed into my belief about healthcare.



Constance Shabazz 13:46

I've worked primarily, I'd say almost 99% of my professional life, as a physician and now, as a clinical consultant in areas of health care disparities. When I finished my training, I worked in a community health center. The beauty of being in a community health center, and I tell people that actually, the community health center program is pretty much a cloud based on a foundation of Islam - that you provide care regardless of a person's ability to pay. So, the health centers provide care for people who are uninsured [and] underinsured people with insurance.



Constance Shabazz 14:28

There's a system where the health centers receive financial assistance from the federal government or through a billing process, which I'm not going to get into the details of that, but it provides income and revenue. The health center not only can bill for any insurance, but also it helps to create revenue [and] provide grant funding to cover the services of those who can't afford. So, that resonated me with me because I didn't want to just go out here and provide a service and always be worried about what insurance do you have? We can't provide this. No, for me, from a spiritual standpoint, from my understanding of Islam and it's push for equity, I felt that this was the best place for me to be. I wouldn't have to be challenged with making those decisions, that there was already something there that would allow me to not only practice my profession, but also practice my belief as a Muslim.



Constance Shabazz 14:42

Over the years, I've worked with a number of special populations. I've done work with substance abuse, HIV, AIDS, maternal, and child health. And now, I work with the community health centers, the same groups of community health centers, helping them to shore up their programs and operations, help them to come up with innovative ideas in this very challenged healthcare environment that we we're in. To be able to, even in the face of the cutting of the Affordable Care Act, and the challenges in terms of finding affordable insurance for people, we still have ways of providing people with the best care and the highest quality of care.

C

Constance Shabazz 16:14

That is a part of my religion, is to make sure that we provide the best for people. Because we know that expression [in] health as well, [that] in order for people to be able to function well, to reach their potential in society, and in their life more importantly, they have to have their health. And so, the health centers and the work that I've been engaged in have helped me to fulfill that part of my personal mission in my professional mission.

T

Tiffany Puett 16:45

Thank you. Can you tell me about some of the challenges that you faced in the work that you've done as well as some of what you consider to be the great successes that you've also experienced?

C

Constance Shabazz 16:57

Once, two friends of mine and I went to do a mini interview with a residency program director. We weren't interested in applying to his program, we just wanted to get a heads up [on] what we should expect in terms of a residency program. So, when he told us that one of the questions that was asked by one of my friends was, "What would you think about a female resident who decided that she would have a baby during her residency?" And he flat out said that he would think that she was irresponsible. Now, mind you, that woman as well as myself went on to get pregnant, but we did it right before we graduated. In fact, we had so many babies in my medical school class [that] we had a separate class picture with the moms and dads with the babies. Because we just felt like, "Hey, we just cannot stop life."

C

Constance Shabazz 16:58

As far as in my professional life, I mean, further on in my professional life, every once in a while I've felt like there's been a challenge because of the name [and] that I was [an] African American woman, especially after 9/11.

C

Constance Shabazz 16:59

Well, that's interesting. It's always the workspace kind of thing that gets in your way. I've seen that the politics sometimes, and being a woman, and being a Muslim, and being an African American Muslim woman have sometimes been challenges for me. And sometimes it's very subtle. People don't just outright say, "Well, I'm not gonna hire you because you're African American, you're Muslim, and you're a woman," of course. I have

seen a few people who have said it before they realize that may portend for losses.

**C** Constance Shabazz 17:40

For me, I was at that time, not as engaged as a Muslim. But when that incident occurred and the response that could occur on that campus, in real life, I felt like my religion, my beliefs, my understanding of the police was under attack. And so, I became much more active because I wanted to make sure that people understood that what happened with these people, who were so called "Muslims," who conducted these acts, these heinous acts, were not representative and normally co-signed by the religion in no way. It was a time where I didn't pull back. It pushed me forward and I wanted to make sure that people were aware that there were visible representations, the right representations, rather, of the religion.

**C** Constance Shabazz 18:56

I had the fortune of being accepted as a fellow at Harvard University at the Kennedy School of Government back in 2001-2002. It was a public service fellowship and it was wonderful. I just actually completed a dual graduate degree and masters, Masters of Public Health and Masters in Business Administration. I was doing all these things. I love school. I was really doing all these things because I really wanted to do more healthcare policy and I felt like I needed to have these tools to do it. So, I was selected to go to Harvard for a year. And within the first month after we were there, 9/11 occurred. The tenor changed dramatically. I mean, when we first capped, it was all about kumbaya, globalism, olive branch, you know, all of that. Then all of a sudden, it was like the wolves [had] came out because many people who ended up being interviewed on Homeland Security were right there in that same school. So, it turned to be a very hostile environment at times and kind of contentious.

**C** Constance Shabazz 19:40

Actually that year, they had three speakers for graduation in 2002. One of them was from the undergraduate school and this was a young man, about 6'5, with a beard. He was selected as one of the speakers for representing the undergraduate. The title of his speech was "Jihad." Now you're talking about an uproar, because remember that this is like maybe 6, 7, 8 months after 9/11. There was such a public outcry about the title of his speech. They just thought he was going to get up there and log what happened at 9/11 and the effect. They were demanding to see the speech in advance and the university said no. And I remember there were death threats against him.



C Constance Shabazz 22:19

I remember some Muslim sisters and I, we attended our Friday prayer service and we walked up to it [him]. It was funny because all of them are shorter and we were looking up at this guy. We said, "Well, we understand that things have been kind of rough." We kind of said it like that. And I said, "Well, let us know if you need any help. We're going to protect you." And this guy was just so calm about it and when he gave his speech, he really spoke to the real meaning behind jihad, which is internal struggle. The struggle with yourself in bringing out the fight between the bad things that come in our minor actions and the good things. He got a standing ovation, 40,000 people in pouring down rain. But we had to be there. I mean, and our class was one of the last classes to be honored. We're sitting there. We didn't care how long it's gonna take [or] how much it was raining. We were going to be there to hear that. So, that was that.

C Constance Shabazz 24:25

But back to challenge. I think the challenges have really not so much been [present] because I'm a Muslim [as far as] I can tell, no. [It's] not so much an overt thing, but you always get that sense. In my work, I travel all over the U.S. and Virgin Islands. I haven't been to the South Pacific of Hawaii. I go into some very very red areas, okay. And most times, I'm the only African American, looks like the only African American. I wear my hair covered, so I don't know what to expect, but I can win just trying to treat people as human beings. That tends to resonate with them like, "Oh, she's not different, she's just here, she's a representative [of] the faith."

C Constance Shabazz 24:48

There are times I feel I have to be very cautious and be aware that I don't want to get complacent or be naive about the environment that I'm in. But to say that I've actually had any real challenges because I'm a Muslim, in an overt situation, that I know of, I really say I've been very blessed that I haven't. Plus, I'm only there [for] two and a half days. There have been times, like I said, I felt like even in my own community, that a voice of a woman doesn't sometimes resonate the same way as a man. Sometimes in certain situations, I have to ask people to refer to me as Dr. Shabazz only to make them like, "Okay, she got something that's a little different, so let me give her respect." I don't like doing that. I don't think I should have to. I think my voice should be at least listened to, doesn't mean you have to follow it or whatever I say, but give me credence, give me respect. That's all. We don't have to use titles or anything like that. So, that's what I was saying would be some of my challenges.



Tiffany Puett 25:35

And, what about the successes? What do you count as your great successes? I'm sure you've had many, [do] they stand out?



Constance Shabazz 25:43

My family is a great success. I have three sons, and my husband passed away about two and a half years ago, and he was my cheerleader. Whenever I would come to him and say, "Babe, I'm going to do this," he would kind of [say], "Okay, is such and such going to be taken care of?" He said, "I trust you." So, having a successful marriage in this day and time I think is a big success. And having three strong sons who are bright, intelligent, young men, who also give back to the community, that's really to me my biggest success.



Constance Shabazz 26:29

As far as professional successes, like I said, I've done various things, but I look at myself as a being a worker bee. In fact, right now, the position I have with the Hilton in Chicago, I laughingly say that [because] they know my title more than I do. Seriously, every time I have to write it down because I [just] took this position. A colleague of mine became ill some months ago and he had to leave. I took the position and that's it. I said, "So, what is my position?" Somebody sent me a text [saying] the CEO. Every time I have to type an email I have to go back and see what it is. I'm just interested in being engaged in the action. I love taking on projects that maybe need some [help] to get in there, work with people, like my trying to develop things that are going to address the needs of the people. So, my successes, I don't really look at as one thing.



Constance Shabazz 27:33

I think my success is my ongoing desire and ability to get engaged with different things in the community - unmet needs. Whether it be health care, I'm really very interested in what's going on as far as portable housing and our homeless problem, because the two are inextricably related. Because when you think about it, if people don't have a dime aside, a stable dime aside, then taking care of their health care problems becomes less and less of a priority. So, people out here have chronic diseases, which many of them do, including the mental health with diabetes and hypertension. I've gone places where people have been given 15 minutes notice from the police department to move out of the area, and they've taken these people's possessions, including their medications. So, just having that lack of stability, like I said, inextricably impacts upon out-term mental health and physical health and longevity. It's things like that I've been very engaged in more

recently. And this is where I'm hopeful that perhaps we can collaborate on this.

**C** Constance Shabazz 30:16

With the Me Too movement, I was concerned that - my thought was that I think people are thinking that the Muslim community got it on lockdown. The Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammad was always one of pristine character, but it also says in there if somebody does this, somebody does that, there's certain consequences to that. And so, I was concerned that we would not really be transparent about what's going on in our own community with regards to domestic violence and sexual abuse amongst other things.

**C** Constance Shabazz 30:56

About six months ago, I was asked by our Imam to come up with something for women's month. And the first thing that came to mind was we need to talk about the Me Too movement in our community. I felt like I needed enough time to do this. But I said, "I don't have enough time to do this, and we [should] do it in March." Rather, I said, "I need more time," because I wanted to not only engage our community, I wanted to engage all communities.

**C** Constance Shabazz 31:43

I put together a program that we eventually had at the end of June at the - I'm sorry, I don't know what location. I think it's on the east side by one of the Austin Community College locations. And it was a good program, but we didn't have as many people as we wanted and needed to be out there, but we made a good start. We had members from Safe Austin on our panel and we had the man from my community. We had a woman out of Dallas who does domestic violence work. And also, we had a former football player, who's actually a PhD in psychology and went to UT and also played professional football and he's a pastor and a really great guy.

**C** Constance Shabazz 31:43

We had the panel discussions, and then we did breakout sessions for men and women. And then we had a closing session for combined. So, that's one of the things that I've done recently in terms of social justice and issues. It's called - we changed it from "we" to hashtag "building healthy relationships." And the reason why we did that was, as we were advertising and announcing it, I saw that the men were withdrawing. There's this fear that a lot of men have that, "Oh, if I go, I'm saying that I am a victimizer, not a victim." I knew that was an issue. So we tried to soften it a little bit and we integrated, not just domestic

violence things and sexual abuse, but just building family relationships. We ended up saying this is a good program, we just have to try to figure out a way to move it to the next step.

**C** Constance Shabazz 32:53

Just within the past few days, I've been fortunate enough to talk to two men, revered and devout, in their respective masjid, which is another name for mosque. And they have said, "Okay, I'm interested in working with you." I'm excited about that. I'm a type of person who will volunteer you for anything, just like snatch you. People say, "I don't understand how I ended up doing this." I said, "Because I asked you, and you heard, you heard that this was something you should be doing." It's not from me, it's through me. So, those are some of the things I do.

**C** Constance Shabazz 33:51

Those other areas, like I said, the HIV AIDS, I actually ran a HIV AIDS alternative therapy program. I did acupuncture. I also started an acupuncture detox program. I trained staff at a couple of drug rehab centers to give acupuncture to help people to detox and to wean off of [drugs], even those who are on methanol. I had my own nonprofit that I started, it was called Chicago Health Initiative. We were interested in trying to develop educational programs. My working with a large child welfare agency was a success because we started with three small health center sites and we built them into what we call a federally qualified health care center. Now, it's one of the largest community health center networks in the Chicago area. We're proud of that. I've always tried to kind of stay below the radar because sometimes, when you're up front, they start doing target practice on me. I feel like I'm just as effective. I don't need the title, I can just go out there and do the work. That just gives you a little idea of what I call my success.

**T** Tiffany Puett 34:28

Great. To slightly shift directions a bit, tell me something about what Texas means to you or what it means to you to be a Texan.

**C** Constance Shabazz 34:44

I'm new to Texas. I came here in April of 2016. I came here intentionally. People say, "Well, you're from Chicago, so had to be the weather." And I always say to folks, "No, not that kind of weather." It doesn't bother me that I'm missing this, no, but that's not why I came. I happened to come down actually to the Dallas area for a little fun. I'm a artsy crafty

person and had found out about a woman who does metal engraving and etching and stuff like that. I came down and I was just so impressed with the environment. As I was walking around her community, it was very diverse, people were friendly, and it wasn't a bad thing that the weather was decent at that time. And I actually went back home and I said, "I'm moving to Texas."

C

Constance Shabazz 35:45

My family thought I was kidding because I really had no idea or no thoughts about moving to Texas. I mean, my husband and I kind of toyed with the idea of moving and then we would get angry at the taxes, and the weather, and all kinds of stuff up there. As you can imagine, we can still say a lot of things about that, but it was really nowhere on my radar. Another thing that encouraged me was - there was a woman - my husband had a physical disability, so he had a physical therapist, fixtures, occupational therapists - and I saw her on Facebook and she's said, "Oh, I don't live in in Chicago anymore, I'm in Texas." So, we got together. She just seemed like she really, really loved it and I said, "I want a piece of it."

C

Constance Shabazz 36:38

It took about a year and a half and actually, I had taken a job as interim medical director in Houston right before he passed away. I delayed the time, but I did go to Houston. And then I was looking for a place here to live and I'd been working with a real estate agent and found a place.

C

Constance Shabazz 36:52

Because my work does not obligate me to be in an office, I travel all over the place, which is another reason why it wasn't difficult for me. When I counted up the days, and this had been like 10 years or 11 years of consulting work that I had been doing and all this traveling. When I counted up the average number of days per year that I was actually spending in Chicago, I was spending more than 50% of my time outside of Chicago. I was actually being disconnected from it. That whole feeling of "Oh, I'm leaving family and friends and whatever," I didn't have because they knew I wasn't there anyway. It made it a lot easier for me to come here.

C

Constance Shabazz 37:54

Why Texas? Because I found myself as a part of a movement. I didn't realize until I started looking around because I had to decide where I wanted to live. I didn't want Houston, I

didn't want Dallas, [and I] didn't want San Antonio. I said, "Austin, okay." My younger son had come several times, he's in the music industry, so he comes to South by Southwest. And so, the little he told me about it always seemed to be a nice place, and I really started diving in. [I] found out I had a friend here. I knew she was in Texas, [but I] didn't know she was in the Austin area.

C

#### Constance Shabazz 38:15

I found out this movement was going on here. These people were coming here from different places. And when I got here, I said, "I felt so much freer." I felt like every time I would come to visit as I was searching to see where I was going to live, I felt freer. The first time I actually came here, I did a test. I said, "I'm going to put on my friendly meter when I come here [and if] these people are not friendly enough to my satisfaction, I'm not coming." So, I ran it. I remember standing up at the rental car counter and the guy was saying something about how maybe I was over [because] I brought the car back late. I was all irate with him and he said, "No problem." I said, "Sir, I apologize, I thought I was still in Chicago." He looked at me like [laughs].

C

#### Constance Shabazz 39:47

Because there are a lot of times you have to fight for everything. I thought, "Why am I fighting for this? Why am I having to argue with somebody about something that if they were on the other side of this counter, they would feel they had the right to?" And so, it was out of that experience. I remember being here a couple days, and just going around to different places, interacting with people - with the hotel I was at, everybody was so gracious and so kind and so friendly. And I'm like, "This is where I need to be." Every time I kept coming back, I felt like when I got off the plane, I was on a vacation. That the stress level was extremely less. After I moved here, having experienced that day after day after day, I said, "This is where I need to be." I've made the right decision, thank God.

C

#### Constance Shabazz 40:14

The other thing was from a spiritual and religious perspective. At first it was a little choppy for me, only from the standpoint of I'm still traveling. So whereas I was only half a year in Chicago ahead of all of this, I was only half a year here [too] because I was back and forth. It took a little longer for me to meet people. We have our Friday prayer service and our service is kind of small. We have the larger Eids, which are twice a year, but there's so many people there it's not like after the prayer service that we have [when] everybody's in one place. Oftentimes, they're going to different masjids or different venues to celebrate, so it took a while to finally get engaged.

C Constance Shabazz 40:20

I think one thing that has really been telling to me, though, about why I feel comfortable from a spiritual religious perspective being here, is [because] I was asked to participate on a panel that they were doing. They had several Muslim activists there. Sharia was on that panel also and two or three men. One gentleman was part of the Turkish community and two other masjids [were present]. The reception that we heard from so many faith leaders, who are in that space, was so encouraging. It was so supportive, so welcoming. And I told him, "That's part of the reason I'm here. I feel safe and comfortable spiritually."

C Constance Shabazz 41:18

Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't people out here who are misinformed, like most people are, unfortunately, about Islam. But I have not had this in your face, when I walk out the door, you know, "Why she got her hair covered?" I've never had anybody confront me like that. Just like with most places that we are, there are few people that you see regularly [and] talk to [and] sometimes you don't. I never felt any pushback. I feel a sense of freedom here and welcoming.

C Constance Shabazz 43:25

Back to your question about what it feels [like] to be a Texan, I feel like I'm part of the new wave of Texans who are here because we're looking for, I guess, the same kind of freedom. It's a good space to be in because I like the fact that some of that is a little bit more liberal. Yeah, and I'm sure there's a little bit of pushback, that people say you're changing our culture, but that's the way life is. It's all about dynamic changes going on.

C Constance Shabazz 44:01

What we're seeing right now in the upcoming elections is - a friend of mine who's very, very engaged with the political movement in California came here and was telling us, "I want to move." I said, "You got it wrong baby, things are changing here." So, your Texas of my mother's day and your mother's day is not the Texas of today. To me, it's a wide open space for so many things - wide open space spiritually, religiously, [and] politically. Social activism - this whole thing about immigration has brought people together to see this as a human problem and not an immigration problem. This is a human problem because if we look, this is emblematic of what's going on worldwide - that people are seeking a better place.



Constance Shabazz 44:01

I sought a better place to come here and it's no different from somebody else who is escaping some gang infested thing in Mexico or in other parts of South America. They want to feel safe, they want the same thing, and it's not like people are coming here to freeload off of America. We get so much out in terms of work and expertise from people who come here as immigrants. We underestimate that.



Constance Shabazz 44:01

It's a lesson on the human spirit. It's a lesson about - it's teaching us how to go back and look at whatever our respective religious texts say about brotherhood [and] sisterhood and using [that] and applying this to these everyday issues that we're dealing with. To me, being a Texan is being in a space that allows for me, like I said, to grow spiritually, mentally, physically [laughs], but also politically. And as far as being, I guess, an activist, it's a good space for growing here.



Tiffany Puett 45:56

Great. That was beautiful. Thank you so much. This was so good and so rich.