

## Charlea Bing: An Interview by Alyssa Gabbidon

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Conducted on Zoom

Charlea Bing (she/her) is a 19-year-old youth activist from Tampa, Florida. Bing splits her time between college and her magazine *Black N' Tampa*. This magazine seeks to provide the Black community of Tampa with mental health resources, tutoring, and justice.

ALYSSA GABBIDON: Hello, everyone. I'm here with Charlea Bing, 19-year-old youth activist. How are you today, Charlea?

CHARLEA BING: I'm actually feeling really good. The weather is nice. I'm from Florida so stuff like that makes me happy.

GABBIDON: Of course, of course. So this interview is part of a larger class, and we've been gathering information on youth activists since 2010. We find that a lot of information is missing, so we'd like to add to the archive as much as possible. This information will be used for educational purposes in case someone wants to research youth activists or something along those lines. Your voice matters. It's important to us and we really want to hear it. So let's dive right in. What was your childhood like? Tell me all about it.

BING: My childhood for me in one word that I can describe was adventurous. I know me growing up as a Black kid, I had a lot of expectations put on me earlier as well as my other two siblings in my household. My mom always wanted to give us everything that she didn't have growing up and so that meant allowing us to really capture and do whatever we wanted at the time within our interests. So I could be like "Mom I want to do Taekwondo" one week, and she would find a way to sign me up and take Taekwondo. If I got bored, I was like "Mom I want to do chorus," and then she would sign me up for chorus. So my mom instead always made sure that we were able to be well rounded at a very young age so that we can have experiences with different themes, whether it's academic or purely for entertainment. Which as an adult now, I greatly appreciate because a lot of my counterparts don't have the same experience. Outside of that, we moved around a lot simply because places are being gentrified. Rent in itself would go up or the people would sell the house. So it always was a lot going on, but where I credit myself to growing up the most is definitely the Seminole Heights area/neighborhood.<sup>1</sup> That in itself was an experience. But yeah, I feel like I was in a sense an average kid with of course a few minor difficulties. Nobody's childhood's perfect. But for the overall spectrum of what I got to do, I'm very appreciative of what happened in my childhood.

GABBIDON: What expectations would you say your mother had and how do you think that was different because you were a Black child growing up?

BING: My mom will always tell us that our only job was to go to school. That was our only job, to go to school. You don't have to pay bills. You don't have to stress about this. You have to stress about that. Just go to school and get your education. So for me, the way that I like to learn versus the way the education system is set up, I had a struggle with that for a very long time as well as being outspoken. So I would always get phone calls home for stating an opinion or something like that. So my mom would always reiterate. "Just go to school. Just go to school."

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<sup>1</sup> Neighborhood in Tampa, Florida

Just go to school.” I didn’t realize until I got to college how much it meant to her for me and my siblings to want to get our education, and it is a job. We will see it is a job, and a lot of people take away that aspect of it by saying “Oh, you’re just at school.” No, it’s a job. It’s hard, but outside of that, the expectation was to act like I was raised in a house with morals and ethics, don’t act like a fool in a plain sense. So there would be times where I would learn something at home that I would morally carry with me. Then I would go out into the world, and I would see people do something of the opposite of what I was taught, and the expectation was like “Show your character. Show who you are regardless of where you are. Your word, your morals, your ethics, who you are – that should stand with you no matter where you are.” And so that expectation I keep to this day I would like to think so. Outside of that, the expectation of trying your best. My mom would always put us in stuff, and she’ll be like “I worked really hard to get you here. I really want you to try your best.” Sometimes it would feel like “Oh my God, you’re making me go here. I don’t want to go here.” But then you would have to add into account the sacrifice of being able to be in certain rooms. Your parents don’t have it financially, and then you would try your best. So I would say that aspect made me more of a competitive person in my life as well as to try to be the best in anything that I do.

GABBIDON: I can imagine. I know growing up, I feel that expectation. We’re told we have to be better because of our skin color by our own parents to be at the same level that everyone’s at. So I definitely can relate to that. So how many times have you moved? What impacts or influence did gentrification have on those moves?

BING: I don’t even remember an exact number. I want to say three, I want to say three. I may be wrong. I know my mom’s going to watch this like, “girl.” I’m going to say three, and I only remember three because they had the most prominent effects on my life. The first neighborhood that I remember living in when I was way younger was around the Seminole Heights area. The second neighborhood was an apartment complex, and it had a very big Hispanic population. That’s when I started understanding Spanish a little bit. The third time was when I think we moved officially back into Seminole Heights. We had a couple of other areas, but it wouldn’t be for years. It would be for months. So I say three, (indiscernible) which is where you’re living consistently. I would say gentrification had a big toll on me personally because I remember growing up looking at neighborhoods where I would have friends. Our family members stay at and then one day we’ll be riding by that neighborhood, and that neighborhood wouldn’t be there anymore. It was confusing at first when I was younger, I didn’t know the effects of gentrification or how bad it was. I was like “Oh my gosh, this is where they’re staying now. This is such a nice place.” But then, you start seeing white people jog around the neighborhood. Then you start seeing more dogs. You start seeing less police. You start seeing less Black people. Then you grow up and you’re like, “Ok, Where did all those people go?” It’s very disheartening to have to witness quite frankly. Especially when people are personally affected by it because it’s a moment of scattering, all over money.

GABBIDON: What would you say your schools were like? Were they predominantly white? Were they diverse where you were?

BING: So when I was younger, I feel like my mom tried to put us inside schools that she felt were the best schools ever for kids to be in. So I remember preschool. It was a private school. Then for elementary school, it was a STEM performing arts school and it was majority white people there. Then for middle school, I went to a performing arts middle school and it was majority white people there. Then, I transferred to the neighborhood school because we had

moved and that's when it started being less white people. That was actually a D school.<sup>2</sup> That was the first D or C school I had ever been to. So it was very different. There were fights every day too. Then for high school, I went to one of the two historically Black high schools in my county. That was also a performing arts school. It was 80% Black people.

GABBIDON: Did you see a disparity between the white middle school and elementary schools you were going to and the predominantly Black high school in terms of education and what they're offering?

BING: So the interesting part for me is that we have this thing called the magnet program.<sup>3</sup> So it's you're either a magnet student or a traditional student. If you're a magnet student, you're in a specific program. You're going to this high school, for a certain reason. You have to audition to get in. So I was a magnet student for the TV and film program. I had a lot of friends who were traditional and they were from the neighborhood we were in, West Tampa. West Tampa used to be a predominantly Black neighborhood before they tore it down and gentrified it mostly because the Super Bowl was coming. But nobody knew that at the time, and so basically what I would notice is that the academic rigor in path was completely different for me versus my friends. So as a magnet student in order to graduate or be acceptable to graduate, I had to have 24 credits. For my traditional friends, they only had to have 18. Then I often noticed that whenever I would be easily allowed to be in AP or honor classes, my traditional friends had to fight for the right to be there. Most of the traditional kids were Black kids, and most of the magnet kids were white kids. So it always felt weird to see that divide. There's a greater expectation put on us. Then there's more funding that went into us versus them. You could see it with the activities and the lectures that we got to do. You could see it with the way that people would speak to us. It felt like if you were Black and in the magnet program here, you were in a sense privileged.

GABBIDON: How do you think not being labeled as a magnet kid sets kids up for their future? Do you think it's hard hitting to know that you're not a magnet? Or do you think it's the same outcome regardless?

BING: I think it was psychologically hard. You're going into high school at the end of the day to learn. Just simply to learn. Seeing the way somebody else is being treated over you simply based off of a title and an audition like, "Ok. Why am I not getting that same treatment?" Then to find out that I can't really be in rigorous courses for whatever reason, because there's not room for me or whatever – it's almost weird. I would reflect and look at myself. "Like what do I need to do?" Then you're going to try to start to make your way towards being a magnet kid but for a lot of people, they couldn't do that. I remember towards the end of my junior/senior year they started allowing traditional kids to take magnet electives but it would be they would have one class that was an elective for them. Teachers wouldn't require them to do much in those classes because they felt like, "Ok. You're only here for this. You're not dedicated." They wouldn't get a chance, and I feel like that transpires into the real world. You're not giving Black teens a chance to be creative or show you their abilities. So it's like why would they ever dare to do that in reality, like in a real aspect of life?

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<sup>2</sup> Schools who get grades A-D based off the performance of their students

<sup>3</sup> A program in a public school that usually focuses on a special area of study, such as science, the performing arts, or career education.

GABBIDON: So your school would only let non-magnet kids take one magnet elective?

BING: It was based off of what your schedule was, but for the people I knew, they only had room in their schedule apparently for one class.

GABBIDON: Wow, that's a clear divide. That's insane. So you said that your mom placed a lot of expectations on you. So what kind of person do you think your mom was like as you were growing up? How would you describe her?

BING: Strict. My mom is the strictest person I know. It comes from the place of genuine love and wanting me to be everything that she imagines. Sometimes it's hard because, at the end of the day, you're setting a reality for me that I may not want to step in. I do think that my mom, being on top of us the way that she was on top of us, definitely set all of us up for success. In every aspect of our lives, regardless of how I felt about it at the time. Besides her being strict, I think my mom was very funny. I think I have a great sense of humor. I don't know who I get it from but I'll say it's from my mom. My mom would always instill life lessons that I don't think she realized were life lessons. For me personally, I never realized how calming Sundays or cooking was until I moved to college and did it without my mom. Then I was like "Wow, I understand why you do this now."

GABBIDON: What other woman in your family, would you say had a big influence on who you are today?

BING: Definitely my grandma, and definitely my sister. Simply because with my grandmother on my father's side, it's the same thing with her. I don't think she realizes some of the things that she says (from me being a kid until now) have sat with me. She really shaped me. My sister too because she's older than me and she (no matter how stressed or nervous or however she felt about anything) took it on with a brave face. She did whatever she had to do. So it made me realize I can be resilient too. It made me want to do more with myself than what I was currently doing. She always pushed me to want to do better.

GABBIDON: Did your grandmother or mom ever tell you stories that had a big influence on you as you were growing up?

Bing: I know my grandmother, she tells me stories for days. The kind that I remember the most was when she was working at USF.<sup>4</sup> This is when she was transitioning from training there and all the other stuff to start actually working there. Basically she was saying, I don't know the exact details now it's been a while, but I remember she was saying how she basically had to study for this test to determine her ranking and job, how much money she would get paid in a sense. She scored an 80, and she studied really hard for his test. Other people in that program who happened to be white scored higher than her, and one of the girls who scored higher than her ended up killing herself. My grandma would always say it was because the pressure to become a scientist or a doctor was too hard for a lot of these kids because their parents would buy their way into becoming this. A lot of people back in that era, if they had the money to, all they had to do was write a check and their child would pass. They instantly get their white coats. My grandmother had to struggle and go through school and actually work for the right to say "Call me doctor" or say that she's a scientist. For other people to have to paycheck and get it it's like, what? The girl killed herself and basically they made my grandmother clean out her locker.

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<sup>4</sup> University of Southern Florida

When she was cleaning out her locker, she found the test. It was the answers written in her boss's handwriting, so basically insinuating that she cheated for her score and that she did not deserve that. She also told me stories about how she had friends who were in the program. They couldn't take the stress of it and they would kill themselves. She also told me how her boss did not like her. Oftentimes whenever they would get grants (indiscernible) or something like that (indiscernible). She wouldn't get accredited for any of the work. It's getting money off of her. They would embezzle a bunch of money. If you look up USF, they have an embezzlement scandal right now. So that's not really surprising to me or anybody in my family. They would embezzle money to keep themselves rich. It's so many things. It's all those stories. I didn't have to hear about my grandma being successful because I know she was successful because she was able to work there for so many years. Even in the disparities of seeing what was going on. Can you imagine working a job for 10 years and your paycheck is the same? Then you see people working for two years and they're making more than you just because they're white, not because they're smarter than you. For her to stay there, because she really cared about the work that she was doing, to me as a kid, she was letting me know – if you want something you go after it and that's that. So I always acknowledge those stories and make sure that I carry the wisdom.

GABBIDON: So your grandma sounds like this super strong, powerful figure. Do you think how she parented your mom made your mom parent you in a certain way? Do you think your grandmother was very strict with your mom and had a lot of expectations?

BING: So the grandma that I'm talking about is actually on my dad's side of the family. So, no.

GABBIDON: Do you think that happened with your dad at least?

BING: Most likely, most likely. I feel like because even with all of my uncles and my aunts, I see it. She's a very big sweetheart at the end of the day. She gives to everybody, and so you see how our efforts pay off through our children.

GABBIDON: Did she ever tell you about a specific encounter she had with racist people that had a heavy influence on your desire to be an activist?

BING: I definitely know it was the one where her manager kept specifically harassing my grandmother. She did not want her in the department that she was in. She issued a complaint. She tried to get my grandmother's pay restricted from her. For no reason, for no reason at all. My grandma did her job and so hearing that made me upset especially since there is nothing that she could really do besides stick up for herself. Not having a clear sign, not having anything in place – there are no repercussions for those types of actions. This always bothered me as a kid because we watched movies. We have a clear distinction of who's the hero and who's the villain. Who's the good guy? Who's the bad guy? So here, in these types of stories, you're like, "Wait a minute. Why is nobody getting the bad guy?" It's because sometimes the way that our society works. We view the bad guys as the good guys. It's solely based on how you were raised.

GABBIDON: Do you think the stories that you've heard as a child still actively affect the decisions you make today or what you're fighting for today?

BING: Absolutely. That's the only reason why I even remember all this stuff she said. I was seven when I was told all this stuff. Every other time when I go see her, she would bring it up or

say something new. The stuff that she'll say that's new won't hit as heavy as the old stuff simply because I've heard this before it was resonating again. It keeps a fire in me, and you want to keep pushing. So whenever I'm faced with adversity, I know it's not new. I used to be in a headspace like, "Oh my, God. This is only happening to me. They're only saying this to me." No, there is a history of generational trauma on top of trauma on top of trauma that has transpired. So it's not only me, but I want it to stop with me and that's the reason why I'm here.

GABBIDON: So you've faced adversity not only as a woman but as a Black woman in America. Do you think having those two identity identities has caused you to struggle with finding yourself in any way?

BING: I think for me, I'm starting by saying I always knew I was Black. I have always loved being Black. I never had a problem with that. I never had that phase where I hated myself for being Black. As far as being a woman goes, now that one was a little bit hard because for me, it was often people trying to put the "angry black woman" trope on me. The over-opinionated sassy girl with an attitude trope on me, and it didn't make me look at myself differently. It made me look at everybody else differently. I always knew who I was before I knew who I was. I stand in it wholeheartedly. I take those tropes and now I'm like, "Yep, that's me. I am angry. In fact, I'm pissed off." So in a sense, those moments only help me regulate how I decided to maneuver through society and its free ruling, however, I feel like doing it that day.

GABBIDON: How do you think you were able to become so confident when everyone was at your neck trying to tell you how you're supposed to be like your limitations? How are you so confident? What helps you get to that spot?

BING: I think it's acknowledging my insecurities. Like quite frankly, I feel like people oftentimes don't acknowledge that they have weaknesses in a sense, and I know mine. I know mine, and I pray for them every day. I try to work on them too, but I can acknowledge all the parts about myself that I don't like instead of harboring and sitting with that. Why not sit with the parts of myself that I do? Embrace it wholeheartedly, because then when I do, when I hear people say I'm "angry," I hear passionate. When I hear people say I talk too much, I hear outspoken. Those are the qualities about myself that have gotten me to where I'm at. So clearly it's working for somebody.

GABBIDON: That's very admirable. I love that. Do you think there is a certain activist or someone you read about that really made you want to be involved in the Black Lives Matter movement?

BING: In my head, there are so many people I know. For me personally, someone who always stood out is of course, Malcolm X. Of course, it's Malcolm X. Outside of Malcolm X, I really like to look at Fred Hampton a lot because he and I share similarities. As far as being in NAACP, as far as being at the same age. Not the same level of activism as of yet. The same age when we're doing these things and his massacre is ridiculous. Outside of those two, a modern-day example I can think of is definitely Stacey Abrams. I feel like what she has done with the state of Georgia is a miracle that only a Black woman could pull off. So being someone who wants to get into that particular field, seeing that she did that even after losing in such a major public way, and her whole entire thing was geared towards the youth. Getting youth to vote. I was impressed.

GABBIDON: What about Malcolm X do you think made you say “wow.” What characteristics stand out to you?

BING: When he left the Nation of Islam was my biggest, biggest wild moment because I know how hard it is for people to remove themselves from religious affiliations. They feel like they may be wrong in this aspect, but him, noticing everything that was going on, removing himself, him speaking his truth. No matter how anybody felt about it. Quite frankly, the way that he carried himself as a civil rights leader. It's very admirable. A lot of people oftentimes try to depict him in a way where he's a figure that shouldn't be looked up to. For me, this man is telling you all what needs to happen in order for Black people to be liberated. I feel like out of almost, not everybody, but out of a good chunk of the people in the civil rights movement – he left a blueprint. Not a lot of people left a blueprint. Granted, he didn't know that he was going the way that he was going but he's still, even without noticing – he took the extra precaution to release the blueprint on. “This is the work that I did. This is how I wanted to continue for people to rebuild in a sense.” Right now, I'm currently studying outside of the civil rights leaders, and we're still trying to study the architects of the civil rights movement, which are the people who knew they wouldn't be credited for the civil rights movement. They knew that they would basically be the people who actually did the work to make sure that everything transpired during the civil rights movement, but they don't go down in history. That in itself is admirable.

GABBIDON: What other architects do you think have set out in playing a huge role in the civil rights movement?

BING: I have not started studying them yet but I had a friend that ordered me the book. So as soon as I start reading it and stuff even outside this interview, I will send it to you in case you want to read it.

GABBIDON: Amazing, that would be awesome. Let's see. So I think in my perspective, there are obviously blueprints such as Malcolm X who actively made the choice to fight for civil rights. How do you think the victims of police brutality have also served as blueprints?

BING: That's a good question. To say that victims of police brutality in a sense are the gateway to the revolution? Protesting in general, but it always happens like that, right? I like to think that their legacy, who they were before they were publicly executed, is secure. I'm trying to just go off of that. I try to see them as a person because that's what they are instead of a figure that people make them into. I feel like as a community, as a whole, once people are executed in that fashion, we turn them into this pedestal and we stand there with them, and we don't know who we're standing with. I like to know them as people. So it's like when you're saying these people names, you're actually resonating that these are people and not just something to march for. I don't think that is right for people to be in the streets like, “Oh, justice for Breonna Taylor.” You're not even acknowledging the human aspect of Breonna Taylor. You're seeing her as a movement. She can be a part of that, of course, but we have to acknowledge who they are. I feel like that's something that I've been struggling with for a long time as someone who is like an advocate and activist. You start to realize that people are being used as tokens when they are murdered and it's very weird to see it happen on such a national level. Even to the point where the government is playing into it. This is not a pawn. This is not a game. This is a person's life?

GABBIDON: I think a lot of people struggle to recognize that these people didn't die for the cause. They were murdered.

BING: Sure didn't.

GABBIDON: It's hard to look at them as martyrs and be like "Oh, George, Floyd died so that Black people could live." Which is not the case at all. He was murdered, and I think a lot of people forget that. Who was the first victim of police brutality would you say that stuck out to you and hurt your heart? Who made you want to change how things are?

BING: The first person that I actually ever heard of growing up was Rodney King. As a kid, it was more so used as a story to tell you what not to do with the police. I remember being younger and looking up the video because I was like "Oh, my God. I hear this person's name all the time. Who is this?" When I saw it, I was like, "They are beating this man!" For me it set this feeling of like, "Ok. This is why I'm being told how to interact with law enforcement." Outside of Rodney King, I believe it was the exonerated 5. I remember them being brought up like twice in my childhood. Then as an adult now when "When They See Us" came out, I remember watching it and I was like, "This is so surreal."<sup>5</sup> As a kid, I heard of these people while they were in these facilities doing this time for a crime they did not commit. Now I'm watching the film of what they went through. I was in real time within that timeline of what happened and I'm seeing it. I bawled like a baby. Anyway, I don't know how I finished it. That's something I would never watch again. When I was older and was able to understand what was going on, Trayon Martin resonated with me. Especially because he's from Florida.

GABBIDON: What lessons do you think you were taught by your family as in, how not to end up like Rodney King? What were they drilling into you?

BING: I have a younger brother so most of those talks were geared towards him. I just got to hear them, but it was very much a "This is what happens while you're Black. This is what happens when you engage in a certain way. Watch your mouth. Yes, ma'am. No ma'am. Be home before the street lights are on." Basic things like I knew to be home for the street lights. It was just like a fun game until I realized each generation has a different form of trauma: sundown towns, police brutality. When it comes to being home before the streetlights, I realized that was an internal fear that was being projected onto me to keep me safe.

GABBIDON: How do you think your brother has reacted to these stories and how old is he?

BING: He just turned 17. I think he's such an amazing person, so he really doesn't get in those situations. He's so chill that I don't think he's ever had to encounter the police in that type of method. We've never had a conversation about it. I think he's one of those people if it happened, he would definitely say something. It scares me a little bit knowing that he's getting older. He's getting taller, he's getting bigger, and he's Black. If he ever were to get pulled over, he could be so sweet and still end up in a very bad situation based off of how someone else feels that day. I would literally break if that happened because that's unimaginable.

GABBIDON: Do you think teaching Black children, not necessarily to fear, but to look out for themselves when it comes to encounters with the police creates a divide between the police and Black community. Or do you think it's necessary to teach these lessons?

BING: It's definitely necessary. Anybody that I have ever mentored or will mentor in the future that is a child, I'm always going to give them that warning. Not warnings because of what I'm

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<sup>5</sup> A series aired on Netflix about the 5 young men accused in the 1989 Central Park rape case



afraid they'll do, or how they'll react. I'm afraid of what is out of their control. In every other situation that a Black person has been slaughtered or murdered in that sense. We're not telling these stories out of wanting pity or out of a sense of being scared for ourselves. Most of the time, we've already been through what we've been through. We don't want to see that innocence, and that preciousness of believing the world is all rainbows to go away so quickly from something that's out of your control. Quite frankly, because nobody wants to get that phone call, nobody wants to pick up the phone and hear that your child has been shot like a dog in the street.

GABBIDON: Do you think there's a certain age that we need to be telling Black children to look out for themselves or is there a point where they still need that inherent innocence?

BING: For me, as a Black kid, no matter how many times someone has ever brought it up, I didn't realize myself until I had my first encounters. I knew what was already happening, but I'm saying until you experience yourself (and God forbid anybody has to) you don't really know how you're gonna react. Your flight or fight is going to kick in. Outside of that, I feel at a certain age the way we say things could have more effect versus what we're trying to say. If I was mentoring somebody, I wouldn't be like "Watch out for the police." I may insinuate through whatever. Kids love stories. Through telling them in a way of protecting yourself. "Never travel alone. Always go somewhere with somebody. Make sure you're home before the streetlights." Those types of things have to stay because allowing your child to go into the world with no sense of what is going on, it's a setup for failure. They're going to believe everybody is on their side.

GABBIDON: Have there been any protests that really stood out to you that you've attended?

BING: Fourth of July (2020) in Tampa, FL.

GABBIDON: Set the scene. Who was the protest for? What was the day like?

BING: The protest, of course, was in honor of all the victims of police brutality but as well to protest the 4th of July. This country is celebrating independence while at the time, I wasn't free. So it set an example for me. I remember waking up that day. I had a bad feeling. Whenever my gut tells me something, I'm like "OK, I'm gonna lead with my gut." For whatever reason, I was like "You can't back out. You have to go." So I went. I went by myself to meet up with other people who I was just acquainting. The protest started. We're there for a good chunk of time. To not incriminate myself, we did a couple of things. Outside of those couple things that had transpired, the police of course showed up. When they showed up it was hell on Earth. Out of nowhere, you start hearing screams. I start seeing people run up. You start seeing people getting slammed to the ground. People being pushed. It was a lot at once. It was too much for me to fully process in that moment of time. I remember when it finally stopped, everybody was screaming. We were trying to figure out what to do. A couple more things happened so I ended up calling home. I remember going home. As soon as I walked in the door, I saw my sister and started crying because I don't want to keep doing this every day. I'm tired. I'm tired of doing this. Then of course, we wanted to bail everybody out that had been arrested. Seeing their faces, seeing them have so much energy after all that they've been put through – it made me happy at the time. To solely focus on what was going on. Even now we have people who are still facing charges. Facing time in prison, up to five years. Jamie Bullock. Chidi, I don't remember his last name so apologies for that. They are currently getting ready to go to court for all that transpired on that day. We're hoping for the best in that situation.

GABBIDON: What do you think about this specific day made the police escalate to the violence that they did?

BING: I felt like it was July 4th and they wanted to be spending time with their families. It's like "You're out here, mad on this day? What is wrong with you all?" I feel like they wanted to show brute force. It was a power play to show control. Beat you all so bad on this hot day. Put your face on the pavement to where your face is burning. To the point where we're not going to come out here ever again. For me personally, every time I go down there, I remember everything that happened that day. I have to space out to stop myself from getting so agitated. Even with the cases going on here, the video footage and hearing officers say to other officers "Get anybody and get as many charges on them as you can." It's like, you're out here bothering us for nothing at all besides the pure pleasure of beating people and knowing that you're going to get away with it.

GABBIDON: So you think it was a way to discourage people from coming out again to protest?

BING: Absolutely because after that protest, I cannot remember when the next one was. It had to be a couple weeks after that specific protest until people went outside again. Even then, when I went to the next one, I knew it was not the same amount of people. People did not trust that. People were fearful and people didn't want to go to jail or be tossed in the streets. It was weird because even now reflecting in my head, we had a lot of white counterparts come out and say that they were allies and things of this nature. As soon as things went and left, we needed them to deal with front lines. They fled and they knew in their souls they weren't being chased after. If you look at all the people that were arrested from the time that Tampa folks had started to the time that it ended, you'll see a couple white people in there. For the gist of it, all you're gonna see is Black faces because that's who they were going after.

GABBIDON: How do you think white people can be better allies in these situations when they know the heat's not on them but are still in the midst of it?

BING: I think they need to realize this is not for them. This is not your movement. We didn't ask you for your opinion. We didn't ask you to help. We didn't ask you, and I feel like a savior complex comes into play at times. They feel as though, "We created oppression and racism so let's tell you all how to get out of it." It's like, "No." There's nothing for me that I could take from a white counterpart and actually be like "Ok, that's what I'm going to do." I look at it myself. You know what I'm saying? I feel like a lot of times they try to take on these leadership positions not only for their own ego but for the sake of feeling like they know what's going on. You don't. You may have created this concept. You may have witnessed and observed this concept over the many years that it has been happening, but you're not the one experiencing these concepts. Your DNA is not being altered based off the trauma. That's me. So for being for a movement that's for my liberation, for my people – it needs to come from my people. If you want to be an ally, you need to wait until somebody calls upon you for help instead of jumping at the opportunity to put on a cape and try to save the day when nobody asked you.

GABBIDON: So you've obviously done a lot of protesting and that has profound effects on its own. What else have you done to work with the Black community and help elicit change?

BING: I started *Black N' Tampa*, which was basically at first a magazine. It transpired into being more because I feel like I could do more. Through *Black N' Tampa*, we have a list of different initiatives and things that we do for the community to make sure that we're addressing certain

issues. This year, school is starting up so I'm taking a step back but I'm always creating new concepts that I want to do. For me personally, education is such a big thing, especially when it comes to our youth and reading. The school-to-prison pipeline is also a very big deal for me. So Books to Barber encourages kids to read a book while they're waiting for a haircut. That was thought up. Or tutoring kids for 15 minutes and then requiring them to read for 15 minutes is something that's revolutionary, that's important. Outside of education, food insecurity (indiscernible), and communities that need the most resurrection. People inspired food from a multibillion-dollar company which is important. Having therapy for Black people and not making it taboo is important. Ways to engage that make people feel like they're being thought of.

GABBIDON: What made you want to start *Black N' Tampa* and who helped you build it up?

BING: What made me want to start *Black N' Tampa* was, well it started as a magazine and I went through the magazine simply because I was like "Oh my, God. I want people to know about all these businesses and things that we have." Tampa is a big city and everybody's been talking about Tampa because of the Super Bowl or other stuff. I wanted to make sure I had a magazine created that highlighted a couple things that were going on specifically to the Black community and to raise money for bail bonds. After that, it transpired more. As far as who helped me? I'm going to be so honest with you. Nobody really helped me. I came up with the idea and executed the idea by myself. As the idea started going, when I started realizing I want to do certain stuff – I may have called somebody and they're like "Hey, do you know somebody who ...?" That would be a form of help. As far as executing the idea and making sure that the idea is standing tall on its own, that was directly from me.

GABBIDON: So as a student, you talked about the school to prison pipeline. As someone who's in the shoes of students, what do we do to fix the results of these schools and the SRO's in schools? How do we combat the educational inequalities that take place in predominantly Black schools?

BING: Be a mentor. Be a guide no matter how "bad" the kid is trying to talk out. I feel like a lot of times people see the issues within our community and are very smart in knowing what they wouldn't have wanted as a kid. Anything that I wouldn't have wanted as a child, I try not to be for other kids. If I know that I hate it when people yell at me, I try to talk with love and sensitivity no matter how the kid is trying to talk out. As far as the actual educational aspect of things, in order to prevent the school-to-prison pipeline, the first thing that we need to do for our kids is to make sure that they know how to read. A lot of times, people will say, I know a lot of my friends, I asked them, "Do you like to read randomly? Do you do it for enjoyment?" The answer is always "no". That's because there was never a platform built for them to feel like reading was cool or reading was fundamental. It has a historical context as well, that's so hard to swallow. So for me, with kids, I don't think people realize, but you can make anything cool with kids. You can make a kid like a vegetable if you do it the right way. Anyway, so with reading, that's a skill that is absolutely necessary. So you start making their peers do it, along with themselves, and it'll catch on like a trend on Tik Tok.

GABBIDON: What do you think has been the biggest takeaway you've gotten from *Black N' Tampa*.

BING: The biggest takeaway that I've got is that community is everything. Focus solely on your mission and don't worry about anything else besides the mission.

GABBIDON: One of the points you talked about when you were trying to make *Black N' Tampa* was mental health. How do you think and why do you think there's a lack of mental health advocacy in the Black community and what was your goal in making therapy an important part of your magazine?

BING: It's like the same thing with reading. It's such a taboo concept, and I feel like my goal with it was simply to start a conversation and again, to make it trendy. I know when we started group therapy for Black women, I made my friends go. I was like "This is something that we can do as a group. We can hang out. We can go get dinner. We're going to therapy." People here are like "Oh, I don't have any problems." One, everybody has problems. Two, even if you don't have problems, you still should go to therapy. It's always good to have somebody who you can lay it out to and who is not going to give you an objective point of view so you feel like you're being heard. That's the biggest thing that I feel like people don't understand. Everybody wants to feel like they're being heard, so having access to that is one of the greatest kept secrets I have discovered because therapy has made me a better person. I want people, even if they don't want to go, to have the opportunity to say they don't want to go. I don't want people to be like "Oh, I want to go to therapy," but there's nothing there for them. That's the biggest thing as well with *Black N' Tampa*. I'm trying to create opportunities and resources for people so that they can have the option to tap into, but that's the main part of it. Having that option. Not having it is what's causing all these issues most of the time because people don't acknowledge their mental health when they're Black because it's such a taboo topic. Saying that you have depression or otherwise, as a Black child, will get you scolded. We're constantly trying to reverse that narrative and if you, as a Black child, send it to your parents, ask your parents if they want to go to family therapy, group therapy. I'm saying we have to start that conversation somewhere. We have to start initiatives somewhere. We have to push it steadily and so I'm now starting group therapy for Black men. Honestly, that was the hardest challenge that I've had thus far with *Black N' Tampa* because of the fact that I'm trying to frame our work with group therapy for Black men, and I'm looking at both of us, we're Black women. I was like "Wait a minute. Let me take a step back. Let me check myself." So I have to ask close guy friends "What are the issues that you feel like you have as a man that you want to talk about in therapy?" It took a while because of that and through that process, I realized more than ever that Black men really don't talk. It was more so of an idea. "What am I comfortable talking about in therapy?" (indiscernible)

GABBIDON: So you've done a lot of work in your community and now you're at school. What do you think is your goal moving forward? What do you want to focus your studies on so that you have a certain type of job?

BING: My degree will be in political science and mass communications. The goal is to always become a political media strategist, but as of right now, even though I'm on that path, I really want to forever focus on community work solely and not really work for politicians in America. More so make sure that I'm rebuilding almost a nation in the sense. While I'm getting that degree, I'm making sure I'm making the right decisions, because right now, that's the plan.

GABBIDON: So your current goal is to work in some realm of politics?

BING: Yes!

GABBIDON: If you could picture yourself in a dream job, dream setting, dream location, what would you be doing and where would you be?

BING: As far as politics goes? Ok, I'll be a political media strategist, political commentator living in Washington DC.

GABBIDON: That should be a pretty successful life. How do you see the Black Lives Matter movement developing in the future and what are your goals for the movement?

BING: I definitely like to say with Black Lives Matter that I feel like I really do not associate myself with that organization. I associate myself with the phrase because I believe the phrase wholeheartedly, but the organization itself in the way that it's framed I don't know if I fully agree with it. That's ok to say, but my hopes for it is that in the future, it becomes something that I can stand alongside and truly invest my time and energy into helping with. If we ever did a collaboration, I feel like that would be dope. (indiscernible) Outside of that, I want to build *Black N' Tampa* to be everything that I don't see in these other organizations. Specifically for my community in Tampa. I truly believe for myself at least, I can say I want to change the world. I can say America. For me, I like to live in a realistic aspect, which is why the name is *Black N' Tampa*. You may not be able to do all that in your lifetime, but I may be able to change the way that Tampa is. Through that, through leaving a blueprint, I'm setting my predecessors up to do what needs to be done for everything else.

GABBIDON: What about the Black Lives Matter movement would you say you don't align with?

BING: I don't align with how the funds have been disbursed. There's been a lot of scandals with leaders of Black Lives Matter becoming millionaires. There's been a lot of scandals of Black Lives Matter not really donating or reinvesting that money back into the community. I can't get down with that. That's a priority I can never corrupt for myself.

GABBIDON: So you more so align with the phrase rather than the people within the movement itself?

BING: Of course, because Black lives will always matter.

GABBIDON: Do you think there's any hope for America going forward or do you think police brutality, education inequalities, food insecurity will always be an issue for?

BING: I don't really have any hopes for America as a whole to be honest. My hope is more so for Black people in America, that's really all I focus on quite frankly. I can't speak for every other racial-ethnic group and as far as what's going on, I have to focus solely on my community, the people in my community, and working to rebuild and tear down everything that has been in the way of us being liberated and successful in our own right. That's the top comment and I definitely have hope for that.

GABBIDON: Are there any other experiences or things you would want someone not only studying you but studying what you stand for to know?

BING: Read. I feel like a lot of people form these opinions based off of the internet and based off of somebody else's point of view. You can go on Twitter right now and read something, agree with it, and not because of someone's pain and personality – without knowing where this person got their opinion from. On Tik Tok, you see somebody making a video and are like “Yeah, I agree with this because of your entire personality and opinion.” I miss when people were like “This is my opinion. This is cited from this source. This is why I believe this opinion this time, applying this opinion.” (indiscernible) As soon as they figure out that person is wrong

they're like "Oh well, that's not my opinion. I didn't say that." By cosigning and agreeing with that, that is your opinion. So people need to read, people need to read. People need to study. People need to study figures they feel are within their field or whatever they're trying to do so that they can have a framework and a blueprint of what has worked and what hasn't worked. "The past is your greatest lesson for the future," is what I like to always say.

GABBIDON: I agree with that, 100%. Do you have any final remarks, anything you want to leave the audience thinking about?

BING: I would like to say that for anybody that genuinely feels that they want to pursue something and they're just scared, I understand what it's like being scared. I understand what it's like chasing the impossible. I understand what it's like to face adversity. I understand what it's like to be a Black woman in society that hates you but we only get this time once. Do whatever it is you need to do to pursue whatever you want to do. Wake up each day inspired by the world and ready to give inspiration back to the world. Wake up thankful, meditate, pray and quite frankly, do what's overall best for you and your community. If your community and yourself is always in your heart (indiscernible).

GABBIDON: That's amazing, I think a lot of people can learn from that. I want to thank you for meeting with me this long, and I appreciate you sitting here through it with me. I hope that a lot of people will be able to learn from what you've said and the experiences that you've had so that we are doing something good for the Black community. Yeah, so thank you so much for your time. I'll stay with you for a second after I stop recording, but thank you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart and I'm sure my classmates' hearts for sharing with us.

BING: No problem at all actually. Thank you so much. Honestly, this is surreal. When I got the DM, at first I was like "Is this a prank?" So it's honestly an honor to even be included in this and to have great minds such as yourself. You, being a Black woman at Duke? Round of applause to you and I wish you the best in your studies.

GABBIDON: Thank you. I hope you have an amazing day.

BING: You too, bye.