

Interview with Shubhangi Bose, conducted November 6, 2023

Shubhangi Bose is a political, environmental, and racial justice activist, and a first-year student at the University of California Berkeley. Shubhangi began her activism journey advocating for police reform by trying to remove in-school police officers from her school district. More recently, as a leader within the Raven Corps, Shubhangi spearheaded vegan-based initiatives in schools to support disproportionately harmed students of color. Through an approach of collective liberation, Shubhangi strives to bring justice to these students.

SITARA KUMAR: Hi! First, I want to say thank you so much for being willing to share your experiences with us today. I'm going to briefly explain how the process is going to work. I'll essentially, after the interview, transcribe it and then send it back to you so that you can make any edits for accuracy and anything you want to protect for privacy, and then you can send that back to me. I'll upload the video and the transcript to a Duke archive, and you'll get a copy of the video and the transcript. Do you have any questions about that or in general?

SHUBHANGI BOSE: No.

KUMAR: Okay, sounds good. For these questions, you can share as much as you want or as little as you want—totally up to you. My first question for you is, when did you start becoming interested in activism, and can you describe what led you to become an activist?

BOSE: I just want to make sure you can hear me alright, because I'm wearing my AirPods.

KUMAR: Yeah, I can hear you.

BOSE: I have been politically active and interested in politics since around 8th grade, but I got more genuinely interested in activism once COVID hit and once I started working with the Raven Corps.^{1,2} Before that, I hadn't really had much exposure to activists or activism in my life, and working with the Raven Corps exposed me to that being a form of action that I'd be interested in or potentially effective with. That was kind of my entrance point, which kicked it into high gear.

KUMAR: Yeah. Going back to 8th grade, what sparked your interest in politics and being politically active?

¹ COVID refers to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019.

² The Raven Corps is an organization that Shubhangi discusses later in the interview.

BOSE: Yeah. It was around 7th grade and 8th grade because we were at the height of the Trump presidency, and politics was in the news more often.³ It's not that my parents were particularly politically active, but we discussed a lot of it in the house. It was kind of the beginning of there being a split in my parents' political ideologies versus mine. I think the Trump presidency and seeing the disconnect between what the electoral beliefs were surrounding me versus what the president actually believed was making me question how this stuff works and why it's working the way it is right now.

KUMAR: Yeah, definitely. So you talked a little bit about your parents, and if you're willing to share, I would love to learn more about what that dynamic was.

BOSE: Yeah. Honestly, they wouldn't mind me saying this because they're well aware of the dynamic. They're completely justified in having whatever beliefs they do. My parents are more conservative than me. I think in my household it went from me seeing them being against Trump to warming up to his economic policies. But while that was occurring, I was getting the side of what he was saying and his social ideologies. So I think there's that split about how we weigh the economy— my parents like to say that they're fiscally conservative and socially liberal, and I like to say I'm not just liberal, but far-left on all of it— so that split occurs.⁴ The thing I've had trouble wrapping my head around is how those two things can exist at the same time when they're voting. But, if anything, and I don't know if my parents will love this, their voting behaviors have made me that much more interested in political science. I don't know if it's a statement that we can say that a large portion of the Brown community has this “fiscally conservative, socially liberal” ideology, but it's something I've seen other families of my friends also believe in.⁵ And it's not just that; there's a large immigrant population that believes in that. I think that sort of split with trying to dissect it and trying to question them on it made me that much more interested and that much more equipped with being able to question my own beliefs.

KUMAR: Yeah, for sure. That resonates. You mentioned your beliefs just now. If you're willing to share, could you talk to me a little bit about what your beliefs are and how they shape how you approach activism?

BOSE: Yeah! Through my work with the Raven Corps, we believe in this ideology of collective liberation, which is that the liberation of people of Color, of the environment, of a lot of the problems we see in the world, in general, are inherently tied together— that's both socially and economically. So, if you were to ask me where I am socially, I would say pretty far left. I would

³ Donald Trump was the 45th president of the United States and represented the Republican party.

⁴ The left refers to individuals whose political positions are liberal, or democratic, compared to conservative, or republican.

⁵ Fiscally conservative, social liberal refers to people who believe in conservative economic policies and more progressive social policies.

potentially identify as a democratic socialist right now.⁶ I don't believe that capitalism is really working out for us in the current state of matters.⁷ I think it's inherently tied to war, and I think we need a huge revamp when it comes to society, to put it lightly. I think it's a thing that, in the leftist community, there's a lot of emphasis put on labeling yourself. There's a lot of internal debate between Marxists, Malists, Trotskyists, and people who just believe in different forms of communism and different forms of socialism.^{8,9} I have my own trouble with the emphasis on labeling, but if I had to label myself, it would be that right now. It's something that I'm definitely trying to work on as well. I feel like, as a leftist, one of the hurdles to labeling yourself is the amount of theory that you have to ingest before being comfortable in labeling yourself, and I'm just not as well-versed in theory as I'd like to be. That's where I'm at right now.

KUMAR: Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. Something you mentioned, a term that I'd like to learn more about, is collective liberation. Can you talk to me a bit about that?

BOSE: Yeah. From the general viewpoint, it's definitely not a term coined from the Raven Corps. I wouldn't even be able to tell you where the term came from, but it's used in a lot of leftist circles as a term that means everything is interconnected. Like we can't solve climate change without solving capitalism. We can't solve the exploitation of the Global South without, again, that's tied to solving climate change.¹⁰ One of the best, and it's a really timely example right now, is if we look at the conflict in Palestine.¹¹ I think you can see the intersection of so many different topics, and that is a matter of collective liberation; Palestine exists because of the military-industrial complex.¹² It exists as a problem because of racism, not just in America but globally. It exists because of exploitation and all of these things that show how collective liberation really rests on the fact that we can't really solve anything without solving it all. And it usually goes back to the roots that we have to solve for capitalism, and we have to solve for the impact that colonialism has had on all of us. I think we need to talk a lot more about "Yes, we're against Palestine and Israel as a settler state— we have to be against our own state as a settler colonial state because we are living in a settler colonial state."¹³ It's a lot of making these connections and recognizing that, in a lot of liberal activism and liberal ideology right now and the way that Americans treat politics and interest groups, they divide us, so we cannot come

⁶ Democratic socialist refers to a political ideology where production is collectively publicly owned.

⁷ Capitalism is an economic system rooted in private ownership and production for profit purposes.

⁸ Marxists, Malists, and Trotskyists are labels for different communities that believe in particular political ideologies.

⁹ Socialism refers to a political theory where production is controlled by social ownership instead of private.

¹⁰ The Global South refers to lower-income countries generally located in the southern hemisphere and is a term commonly contrasted with the more wealthy Global North.

¹¹ The conflict in Palestine refers to an ongoing land dispute between Israel and Palestine that dates back to the mid-1900s.

¹² Military-industrial complex refers to the relationship between a country's defense industry and the military it supplies.

¹³ Settler colonialism refers to colonizers who invade and replace territories that had existing societies.

together and recognize that all of this is interconnected. You're going to hear politicians talk about specific interest groups like Civil Rights or Black Liberation, or criminal justice is one section, and climate activists are another section, and we have to deal with these problems separately.¹⁴ When, in reality, it really doesn't work like that. The systems that exist work to affect all of these areas at once, so we have to approach our activism and our action with that same ideology and with that same systematic approach. I feel like that was a really long-winded way of just saying that.

KUMAR: No, that's okay. Thank you for going through that. So, how do you think the division you talked about impacts the way people show up in their communities or the way people organize?

BOSE: This is something I'm still struggling with myself, which is that if you talk to a lot of young people who want to get involved in politics and activism, one of the first things that they'll share is that they feel really stretched thin. They feel like they're trying to care about everything and all of these issues all at once, and it's taking up a lot of their brain space, which is justified because we live in a really sucky time. I don't think a lot of us have processed the fact that we lived through a pandemic, we're in college, we've lived through the Trump presidency, and we're thinking about another one. The world kind of feels like it's imploding, and I think a lot of young people are trying to rationalize that by saying, "These are all separate issues that are all just blowing up at once, and I have to care about all of them." That's also because that's how the news portrays it. If you go to CNN, you're going to see "Breaking News: Israel-Palestine. Breaking News: Biden-Trump. Breaking News: This. Breaking News: That."^{15,16} It's advertised to you as all these separate issues that you have to care about. And I think what collective liberation does as an ideology is it lets you sit down and look at all these issues and realize, "No, I'm actually caring about these core root problems, and by caring about these root problems, I'm able to care about these larger issues and see them as symptoms of a larger disease, instead of individual diseases that I have to treat."

KUMAR. Yeah. I liked what you said about symptoms. That's something that's really powerful. Going back to something you mentioned about youth and young people, how do you, as a young person, deal with feeling stretched thin?

BOSE: I wish I had a good answer to this. I'm still struggling with it myself, especially right now. I also think being on a college campus and being politically active is way different than being in high school and being politically active. I think it's a matter of realizing that you can

¹⁴ Civil Rights and Black Liberation are examples of complex movements fighting for racial justice for Black communities.

¹⁵ CNN is a media company that is commonly known for showcasing liberal news.

¹⁶ Joe Biden is the 46th president of the United States and ran against Donald Trump in the 2020 elections.

have the best intentions and put in the work and realize that the system is so large that when you don't see the results you want, you can't fault yourself or those around you. You have to recognize that standing up and not falling to the propaganda that we're fed every day sometimes has to be enough. And that's an incredible level of privilege that we have as Americans. To be able to say that "The system is larger than us, so sometimes we might have to recognize that." I can't imagine what it must feel like for literally anyone who isn't in America or Western Europe to hear us complain about having to care about these sorts of issues when they're living through it. But it's also of a sense of, genuinely, what are you capable of doing? Because you're not going to be able to help anyone if you're burnt out. You're not going to be able to help anyone if you burn out an entire generation of activists, and I think that's kind of what's happening right now because we've been fed this idea that, "You're going to save the world," and then we're trying to save the world and the world isn't getting any better. My advice would be that the guilt's going to be there, but you have to find a way to wrestle with it, and you have to find a way to let yourself rest because otherwise, it's genuinely going to be for nothing and we just can't let that happen. I think there needs to be more of a balance struck between that.

KUMAR: Yeah, definitely. Switching gears a little bit, can you talk to me a bit about Raven Corps? I know you mentioned that a few times.

BOSE: Yeah. Raven Corps is a small nonprofit based in Portland, which is strange now because the founders moved to Arizona, so now we don't have anyone in Portland and that sentence might be changing.¹⁷ But it was founded in Portland, and it's basically a band of youth activists focused on collective liberation via being what we would traditionally think of as vegan. They take that approach of veganism as their way of enacting collective liberation and being anti-capitalist.¹⁸ Do you want me to talk about the organization itself or my work within the organization?

KUMAR: It's up to you— both or either.

BOSE: Okay, so that's a bit about the organization. As for my work within the organization, I came in during COVID, and they were shifting to a decentralized, fully online sort of space that would allow people to join, train, and then be able to effect change in their own communities. Initially, I was doing content creation for them, and I was helping make podcasts and videos about decolonizing food. And then, I shifted to a more executive role, for lack of a better term. From there, I was able to shift gears from looking at a bunch of different issues to really making a campaign focused on one. From that general strategic advice I provided, we were able to design our current operation, Operation Mind Over Milk, which looks to provide alternatives to milk in American schools. This is because if you're on the free and reduced lunch program, the

¹⁷ Portland is a city in the state of Oregon and Arizona is another state in the U.S.

¹⁸ Veganism refers to a dietary practice that involves abstaining from animal products.

only beverage you're provided is milk. You're not provided water, and you're not provided any alternatives unless you have a doctor's note, and even then, federally, schools aren't required to look at a parent's note. They're only really required to look at a doctor's note. It's more expensive for districts to provide soy milk. There's a whole host of issues when it comes to the actual policy side of things and the sheer number of kids forced to become sick while in school. Most of the kids becoming sick are because they are lactose intolerant, and most of the people who are lactose intolerant are people of Color, and then it becomes an issue of race. We saw this issue and can really tie this to, again, kind of everything as a matter of collective liberation. It was obvious that the issue was really important, but it also became a really nice vehicle to explain collective liberation through because you can attach so many other different problems to this policy issue. That's what we've been working on for two years, and it has been more successful than we could have anticipated. We've had over one hundred students distributed oat milk to in schools, we had a rally in DC, and we got more involved with federal policy in a way that wouldn't have been anticipated because they (Raven Corps) weren't really active politically.¹⁹ I was able to contribute some of the political knowledge I had and some of the connections I had to them in a way that we were able to also have a rally in DC. Then, we recently hosted a fair in Portland in Pioneer Square— kind of like a vegan fair and a little Halloween party— and we were also able to get hundreds of postcards written to Rep Blumenauer urging him to co-sponsor legislation.^{20,21} I think it has been a variety of trying different tactics, seeing what sticks, seeing what doesn't. It has been a really educational experience; it has exposed me to a lot of things about running a nonprofit and building strategy that, at this age, I don't think is really easy to get access to unless you have the right connections.

KUMAR: Right, yeah. That sounds like such a valuable experience. Can you share some of your takeaways or stories from your work with Raven Corps?

BOSE: Yeah. There have been a lot of valuable lessons. This past year, I have learned a lot about credit as a woman of Color— from Raven Corps and my work with SROs.²² Within Raven Corps, we recently had this issue where we worked with this coalition, and they came out with a lawsuit challenging a statute that's involved with this policy area. Initially, the idea for the lawsuit and the implementation of the lawsuit— that strategy was my idea, and we pitched it and communicated with other lawyers about it too. Then when they approached us about the nonprofit being a plaintiff, we realized that they didn't want the Raven Corps to be a plaintiff in the lawsuit. They wanted us to find a student of Color and poach them. And First Amendment lawsuits— that's the type of lawsuit they were looking at— are not easy, and to tell us to try to find a low-income student of Color who would be a good plaintiff for this and put them through

¹⁹ DC refers to Washington DC, the capital of the U.S.

²⁰ Pioneer Square is a public space in the center of Portland downtown.

²¹ Rep Blumenauer is a U.S. congressman representing a district in Oregon.

²² SROs refer to School Resource Officers, who are police stationed in schools across the U.S.

something that would be really expensive and time intensive was something we just weren't ethically comfortable with.²³ So we rejected the lawsuit, thinking that they wouldn't go through with it. Instead, they poached a Raven— that's what we call our members in the Raven Corps— who had worked with us and who was a white woman who was my age and then kind of plastered them all over these news stories without yet giving us any credit for the initial idea. We tried to rectify it, and we tried to deal with it. We went through a variety of strategies to try to get our names out there because we started with the policy and then kind of got co-opted by a much wider organization. I think it definitely taught me a lesson when it stung seeing something that I had worked on just get swept away without any credit given. I hate to say this, but it's definitely not going to be the last time that that happens to me. So I think it was good to experience— having to deal with the press in that manner and having to go through that. Because now, when I go into the workforce, I'll have tougher skin for that sort of stuff. And it sucks that that's the world, but that's our world. I was also able to sit in on meetings with lobbyists at the federal level and learn about the different tactics that lobbyists take, and that really opened my eyes to the fact that a lot of lobbyists and a lot of interest groups may outwardly seem tied to one party, but that's externally.²⁴ Internally, they're very willing to cross partisan boundaries when necessary. It's to a point where they may even forgo their own political beliefs in order to get their legislation passed. That was also another wake-up call for me; politics is, of course, a dirty business. I'd only been used to politics at a local and state level which is its own kind of messy. But I realized nothing really compares to DC when it comes to what people are willing to go through and the people that people are willing to talk to. All I can say is, anytime you wonder like, “Oh, I wonder how someone like Matt Gaetz is in the House of Representatives.”²⁵ I wonder how they're able to function in DC. I wonder how these really conservative people are able to even function in government,” just know that government interest groups are lobbying, and they're completely willing to talk to whoever they need to talk to in order to get their bottom line, which is usually just money. Everything in the nonprofit sector is also just to get next year's funding, to get more funding, and to make sure that jobs are secured. That's a really cynical take, but it kind of exposed me to how, no matter what side of the problem you're on, because of how systematic everything is, you're going to have to deal with some form of corruption or just generally problematic behavior. That's where we're at.

KUMAR: Yeah. These sound like some really frustrating experiences, for sure. That cynical take you mentioned— can you talk to me a little bit about where that take about money came from?

BOSE: Yeah. So we were part of a coalition with those nonprofits that I was initially talking about who took the lawsuit idea and ran off with it without giving us any credit. It became

²³ The First Amendment from the U.S. Constitution refers to freedom of speech and freedom to petition the government.

²⁴ Lobbyists are professional advocates aiming to influence the policies and decisions government officials make.

²⁵ Matt Gaetz is a controversial American politician who served as a U.S. representative for a district in Florida.

increasingly apparent to us that they were doing it to secure funding for the coming years and to secure funding in a way where they would be able to because we— and when I'm saying “we” in this situation, I am referencing to the Raven Corps— are one of the only youth organizations that focuses on collective liberation and collective liberation through food and veganism. That's really important because there are tons of groups who focus on collective liberation. But it became increasingly apparent to us that a lot of these groups working on animal rights, who we worked with, were looking to take that niche and inhibit it and then be able to take up that space despite not having that many youth for them to be able to use that in their funding materials to get more funding and to get more money. So it became increasingly apparent to us that they weren't doing it as much for advocacy; it wasn't for the issue as much as it was for needing more money for next year, despite the fact that these people are working with multimillion-dollar budgets. We were working with budgets of a couple hundred thousand bucks. So through that entire process, it became clear to me, especially working with lobbyists, that the bottom line for a lot of these nonprofits who are working at the federal level, no matter how radical they may portray themselves to be, is to secure funding. So despite the fact that they're nonprofit, there's still a focus on profit and on capital, which isn't surprising considering that we live in a capitalist society. But it was just a testament that there's no functioning outside of that. Even in the nonprofit sector, you kind of have to function within it. And I think this isn't just an issue unique to the animal rights sector. I worked at the Beaverton Youth Advisory Board and Bill was the city official who was in charge of running the board for the year that I was on it.²⁶ I remember talking to him because he knew that I was really involved in activism and he used to be really involved with a climate nonprofit in Portland. I remember him sitting down with me and us talking about burnout and general experiences of activism and that sort of stuff. I remember him telling me that his nonprofit, which was against climate change, was funded by Shell.²⁷ And they had no other option because that was their primary form of money. So Shell was polluting the same area that they were paying this nonprofit to lobby to clean up. That shows you that greenwashing exists, pinkwashing exists, and that corporations are going to find a way to try to clean up the story about how they've messed up the world.²⁸ But that opened my eyes to how, no matter what sector of this you're in, it's going to be tainted by people putting profit over other people. And that's just something that we're going to have to work around and work with.

KUMAR: Yeah, definitely. Thanks for sharing about your takeaways. So, in the nonprofit sector, or in Raven Corps specifically, how does being a young person influence your activism and the way you show up?

²⁶ The Beaverton Youth Advisory Board refers to a group of students who advised the mayor of Beaverton, a city near Portland in Oregon. It is also called MYAB, or the Mayor's Youth Advisory Board.

²⁷ Shell is one of the world's largest oil companies.

²⁸ Greenwashing and pinkwashing are the ways organizations falsely portray support for the environment and LGBTQ communities, respectively, to downplay the reality of their harm.

BOSE: I think within the Raven Corps, because it's so focused on youth activists, you're not really going to see another nonprofit functioning at that level because there were adults in the place. But you won't see other nonprofits where adults and youth are working side-by-side in an official capacity. I'm really grateful to have that privilege so young because it has opened my eyes to so many of these problems. I think what was the most eye-opening for me was seeing how I was treated within the Raven Corps. It's definitely quite the feeling to be able to make a recommendation, provide strategy, and then have that implemented and see where it goes. To have that within the Raven Corps and then to go outside, and when I'm talking to other nonprofits on behalf of the Raven Corps, and when I'm trying to build coalitions, to see how I'm received outside, and to see how I was kind of dismissed because for a lot of nonprofits and for a lot of movements, you are secondary or a rank below. Everyone says, "We're the future, we're the future," but no one really understands we're in the present, too. We're right here, right now. We care about the stuff right here, right now. This is affecting us right here, right now. That doesn't mean that we want to be trained. We're not looking for just education or just assistance. Yes, we need that because, of course, we're still youth, but we also need a seat at the table. That's really necessary. At the Raven Corps, I got a seat at the table. And when I was sent to these nonprofits at that level as an equal to them— of course, I can't imagine how jarring it must be as someone in their mid-thirties having a 17-year-old email them in an official capacity. But I'm not emailing someone in Apple and I'm not emailing someone in tech or traditional corporate structures.²⁹ These are people who are self-declared activists saying "We love working with the youth, and we love the youth," but these are people who would be easily dismissive of the fact that I have my own experiences, and I have my own knowledge to bring to the table. If you want to engage, or if you want to build that sort of coalition, you can't just do that while sitting around thinking, "Oh, what are the youth into these days?" It also can't be you asking the youth, "Oh, what are you into these days?" It has to be a young person organizing other young people in conjunction. It has to be multi-generational. I think that's the thing that the Raven Corps was really good at, which was providing a seat at the table for young people while also maintaining an official structure to function within.

KUMAR: Yeah. That's great to hear about. Did you experience any backlash as a young person? And if so, how did it impact you? I know you talked a little bit about the lawsuit experience, so if you want to also circle back to that and talk about how that impacted you too, you can.

BOSE: Yeah. The lawsuit backlash wasn't as much about me being a young person because the person who was being highlighted was my age. It was more so seeing that everything you see in the media is produced. There is no story that is naturally occurring. There were people, places, and strategies behind getting that story to you, no matter how organic it may seem. But when it comes to backlash, I didn't feel it as much in the Raven Corps as I felt disrespect and

²⁹ Apple is a technology corporation that designs and creates popular software products.

dismissiveness. On the SRO issue, when organizing within my school district and within the city, that's where we got backlash. [Video and audio cuts].

KUMAR: Okay, I think we're recording again. I'm so sorry about that disruption.

BOSE: You're good.

KUMAR: Are you okay to start back up about SROs?

BOSE: Yeah. You're all good.

KUMAR: Thank you so much.

BOSE: When we were sending in our FOIA requests, Freedom of Information Act requests, to the district and the city, the district broke the law in the way that they responded to these requests because of how much information was left out. In one of my public testimonies to this school district, I explicitly stated that "You broke the law when you didn't give us the information we were requesting because it is the public's right to access this." It was the sort of thing where it became very clear, and then 10 minutes later, I'm getting pulled out by the attorney for the district and the person who is in charge of making sure that the district adheres to FOIA (the person who responds to FOIA requests). And I'm being told, "Oh, you didn't ask specifically enough." Then, me and the person I was working with said, "No, we requested this specifically." And they were kind of shell-shocked when they realized they actually kind of screwed up." It was sort of this circular dismissiveness of saying, "Oh no, I'm sure you messed up. I'm sure it was just kids." And I was like, "No, we're about to complain to the district attorney. We're going to file an appeal with the district attorney to make sure that you give us what we're requesting." In response to that, the lawyer for the district told us that she was actually very close to the person who's in charge of processing those requests at the city level. So she'd be looking forward to working with him. I've never seen such corruption in front of my face where someone's blatantly admitting to it. But I think through that entire process, whether it be reaching out to press, reaching out to city councilors, or reaching out to the school board in my interviewing of the public safety director, all of it had such an attitude of people saying, "Oh, young kids these days like stirring up a little trouble." Every single school board meeting we went to was always a situation where they thought it was so nice seeing kids come to these things. If I hear that one more time, I might genuinely vomit. I don't know what it would have looked like if it were two adults stirring up the same sort of racket. I don't know what that would have looked like, but I'm pretty comfortable in saying that it would have looked differently. I don't know if we would have been more effective, but I definitely think it would have been less of a struggle. We would have certainly felt less resistance.

KUMAR: Yeah, definitely. Thank you for sharing. You mentioned something about SROs and your activism in the Beaverton School District. Can you share a little bit more about that?

BOSE: Yeah, so SROs are school resource officers. They are the term that the BSD, the Beaverton School District, gave to the police officers who were in the school. In my junior year of high school, my first year back from the pandemic, I wanted to write a series of articles about school resource officers and what the district was doing in response to the 2020 uprisings that we saw and in response to a heightened awareness of the criminal justice system.³⁰ Through my investigation, I was led down a rabbit hole of realizing that the district had been in the process of committing review after review and not really doing much of anything to the program. It also led me to interview the public safety director, the district official in charge of the program, twice. Both of those interviews helped me learn that he was homophobic and racist.³¹ When it came time to talk about the latest review that the district had done, the public safety director told me to my face that he believed that students of Color, disabled students, and LGBTQ-plus students were overemphasized in the report.³² After hearing about all of these things and after seeing the districts in action, I shifted gears from reporting on the issue to trying to lobby on the issue. That's basically what I spent my summer before college, last summer, doing. I worked with someone else on MYAB to make a report about the status of school resource officers and how many reviews had been conducted. We sent those to districts like the city council and the school board, and basically what ensued was us trying to create a media storm. One of the main things we focused on in the summer was that the school district was told that they needed to change the contract that they had with the police department in order to put more limits on what the police officers could do. To address that, we were going with really baseline requirements. And I'm an abolitionist; in my perfect world, there would be no school resource officers. But I watered that down to let's reform, which is how I generally think these demands go. Before the request problem kicked in, when we requested the district's current IGA, we were told that there was no IGA and were told that there was no contract that the police officers were working under. So we were left with two scenarios where, one, police officers were working in the school with no idea what they were legally obligated to do and not do, which is illegal because the district was using federal funding that required a contract to exist. Or the district was withholding documents from us. And that's also illegal under the Freedom of Information Act. Then, it spiraled into the district withholding information and the school board being severely cut off from the district and internal ongoing actions. All of it led to us organizing students and getting petitions about reforming the IGA and demands of the IGA. We didn't get a single vote on the school board. We thought we'd get two, but we didn't get a single vote on the school board on that, and we got two on the city council. What's remarkable is that we don't live in a very conservative city. Most of the

³⁰ The 2020 uprisings refer to racial justice protests triggered by the murder of the African American man, George Floyd, in May of 2020.

³¹ Homophobic refers to discrimination against individuals who are gay.

³² LGBTQ is an acronym that represents the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community.

politicians who sit on the school board and city council are self-declared progressives. Privately, they agreed with us. They ran on campaign platforms of police reform, but when asked to reform the police, they refused. And the city council admitted that it was a politically dangerous thing to do. That opened my eyes to how you can work your ass off, get stories published, and have real students who have been harmed by this program, which the City Council and the School Board know about. There was an investigation done by an outside party telling us what we needed to do, and we did maybe two of the ten things that they requested of us. What we do have now is that they're no longer called school resource officers; they're called youth service officers because, I guess, that's a nicer name. They're also going to have some patches on their uniforms to make them look a little friendlier. They're still going to have guns, and it wasn't that they were requested to not have guns; it was requested that they be concealed, and even that was deemed too dangerous. That entire saga, that two-year chronicle, is the bane of my existence. If the Raven Corps opened my eyes to how nonprofits work, the SRO thing opened my eyes to how local government is just as fucked as lobbying on the federal government. Because you're either looking at people who don't know what they're doing and don't understand, or you're looking at people who do, but they have higher political aspirations. And at that level, it's genuinely a ladder of school board, then city council, then mayor or State House, then State Senate, and then you make a run for Congress. That's the ladder that a lot of people are looking at. I say that as someone who has helped people climb that ladder. I say that as a facilitator of that ladder.

KUMAR: Yeah. Can you share a little bit more about this ladder and how it impacts activism?

BOSE: Yeah. I think it's key to keep in mind the aspirations that politicians have when trying to lobby them. At the local level, a lot of politicians will be concerned about votes that they currently have that are politically complicated, and they will be obsessed with making the right decision in order to conserve their opportunities for the future. I wouldn't have as much experience at the state level because I didn't really do much lobbying on the state level. At the federal level, if you're working with someone in Congress at the House of Representatives level, you have to be extremely aware of where they're getting their money from—acutely aware—because these people are constantly fundraising. If you're running for reelection every two years, there is not a single moment in time where you're not thinking of your next campaign. So these people are acutely aware of where they're getting their money from. They're acutely aware of where they're going to keep getting their money from, and they're aware that if they don't keep getting money, they're not going to be able to run for Congress again. So when you're working with people at the House of Representatives, just really be aware that if, for example, you're calling a representative right now for Israel and Palestine, look at how much money they're getting from the pro-Israel lobby. If you're questioning the votes that they're making, look at how much money they're getting from people in the pro-Israel lobby. I haven't done nearly as much work in the Senate. I hope to, but I have more experience with tracking the House of Rep when it comes to campaign donations and related topics. Overall, I recommend being acutely aware

because these are people who may say that they're there to serve their constituents' interests, but the first thing— it's a very human thing— that they're concerned about is saving themselves and progressing their own wants and needs. And there are definitely people who defy that and who have given up their political careers, and those are true public servants. People who are truly there to serve their constituents and their communities are true public servants. I don't know how many people are really true public servants anymore.

KUMAR: Yeah. Thanks for sharing that. You mentioned a little bit ago about what a perfect world looks like to you. Can you expand on that vision?

BOSE: I'm still trying to figure out what a perfect world looks like to me. This was something that my high school senior literature teacher would talk about; a lot of questions that anarchists will get are like: What does the perfect world look like for anarchists, given that anarchy can't be sustainable?³³ But it's an ideal to aspire for. The ideal that I'm aspiring for is a world in which community is emphasized, and humanity and people are prioritized over profit. It's a world in which you don't have to believe that your growth comes at the detriment of someone else. I think that's something that we've been fed from school: that our growth is at the detriment of others, and that just continues on. I want to live in a world that's conscious of its past and aware of the land that it stands on and is able to honor those who have fought for it and continue to grow. I don't know if we're in an interesting moment in history. I don't know if this is a pivotal point, but I just know that there are good people doing a lot of good work out there, and sometimes that's your only comfort, and sometimes you have to be okay with that. There are people in Seattle right now trying to block a ship of weapons going to Israel with just their own bodies.³⁴ And if we live in a world where people like that exist, then I think anything is possible.

KUMAR: That's so inspiring and powerful, that sense of hope. I want to circle back to the SROs and your work with that because you mentioned it was a big part of your life, so I wanted to make space for that if you want to talk about some of your takeaways and what you learned from the experience.

BOSE: Yeah. What hurt the most is that a lot of the politicians that I went to for assistance and for the promise that they help us with the problem that we're highlighting are people that I campaigned for. The people that I was talking to were the ones who gave me my first shot in politics. I phone banked for these people. They were mentors to me. I did that because I believed in them and believed in what they stood for. I think it was disheartening to see that they didn't continue to stand for what they stood for and that they truly were just standing on the right side of history for maybe a month or two because that's what was popular at the time, and now they've shifted back, and not because they had any moral backbone. That did make me lose faith

³³ Anarchists are individuals who are commonly known for opposing authority and order.

³⁴ Seattle is a city in Washington, which is a state in the U.S.

in a lot of elected officials that I'd helped campaign for. And it's not a unique experience; look at even the highest level of government with Bernie Sanders' staffers.³⁵ These are hundreds of people who've worked for this man, saw him fail on the promises that he made internally on his campaign, and they had to resort to writing a public letter to him. It definitely made me more aware and made me more interested in seeing what happens to politicians once they actually get into office and what sort of powers are at play to make them deviate from the promises that they initially made. You would think by now I know that politicians love to lie, but it was a matter of realizing how local politicians that I helped and who I thought were different will still succumb to that trend. That was really eye-opening for me because I realized no one's safe, so we have to figure something out about that.

KUMAR: Right, yeah, that was a personal experience you learned from. Yeah, definitely. In general, what do you wish was paid more attention to in activism?

BOSE: God, what an excellent question. I think there should be a lot more focus on mass movements and less on individuals. My favorite example to go to is Greta Thunberg, who is a fantastic activist, but I can't imagine how many more people would go to Fridays for Future Actions and climate walkouts if there was more of a focus on the movement, the organization itself, and the mass number of people who are interested in it as opposed to Greta Thunberg, savior of all.³⁶ She herself is acutely aware of the image, has made moves, and advocates for a focus on people in the Global South who are advocating for their homes that are falling apart. But I think if there's more of a focus on mass movements and on the numbers of people that are caring about these things and coming out in support of these things as opposed to individuals, it would make things a lot more accessible mentally. Because the media tells us that you're only effective if you're Greta Thunberg and not if you're coming out to a couple of rallies, which makes people think, "That's inaccessible to me. That's unachievable for me. I can't be effective." However, history hasn't been won by just singular actors. It has always been mass movements that have taken power back. It will be mass movements that take power back in the future. And if there isn't a focus on community and togetherness and on trying to bring as many people out as possible, then we're going to lose that. Because right now, I think there are a lot more power dynamics at play in these communities than there should be. There's a lot more focus on who gets credit, who's highlighted, who gets the news story, who gets the media attention, and who gets the money. I think if that's what we're spending our time on, then this is going to take a lot longer than it should.

KUMAR: So you mentioned the idea of community a few times. Can you explain why that's important to you and what role that plays in what you were just talking about?

³⁵ Bernie Sanders is an American politician who ran for president in 2020.

³⁶ Greta Thunberg is a popular young climate justice activist who founded the climate movement Fridays for Future.

BOSE: A community that's important to me?

KUMAR: Yeah.

BOSE: A community that's very new to me, one that I just recently joined at Berkeley, is YDSA, which is the Young Democratic Socialists of America.³⁷ The activist community here at Berkeley is not something that I was really a part of in Beaverton. I didn't think that there was that sort of community of activists and people who had the same beliefs that I did for me to tap into. But being able to talk to people who care about these issues— I hate to say it— not just for college applications and not just for the resume builder, but because they actually care about these issues has been really refreshing and has given me more energy to continue fighting for these things. That's one that comes to mind. I think finding the right people is hard, but it's definitely not impossible to find a community of people who are taking action.

KUMAR: Yeah, thank you. A follow-up on that: for people who don't feel like they have that community or don't know how to get involved in mass movements, for example, or how to make an impact, how do you recommend they do get involved and take those first steps?

BOSE: I think this large community of activists is something I've only very recently found. A lot of this work that I've talked about, like the Raven Corps, is a very small group of people. I was the only one in Beaverton who was a part of the Raven Corps. The SRO work was genuinely just kickstarted by me and then by two students total. I know I just said mass movements are really important, but they always start with someone caring and someone stepping up. And no action is too small, especially at the local level. Talk to your city council members, talk to your school board members, and get involved locally. At the college level, there's the pressure of state and federal, but there's a lot of university money in a lot of fucked up places, and that's another pressure point that can be utilized. I think, especially at this moment, it's important to recognize that you may feel alone, but as soon as you start taking action, there will be people who come out of the woodwork, surprisingly, and you'll realize all you had to do was take a step forward because you're not the only one who's feeling alone. I promise you that you're not the only one who's feeling alone— someone just has to take the first step, and then all the people who feel alone will realize that there's someone who cares too.

KUMAR: Yeah, definitely. I think this might be related, so can we circle back to the idea of “youth are the now, and everyone is saying youth are the future, but we're here now?”

BOSE: Yeah. I think sometimes the youth element to activist movements is seen as: “Oh, look at all of us, even the youth are with us,” or like, “These youth, they got off their phones and look at them, they're finally being effective or doing something.” I think youth are definitely tokenized

³⁷ Berkeley refers to the University of California, Berkeley.

in these movements and then not prioritized or listened to. And I think that leads to a lot of burnout, and that affects which youth activists right now become adult activists in the future. I think it would be better for the people who say, “Oh, it's so nice to see kids come out to these things,” to instead say, “Kids are also impacted by this,” so that adults trying to get more youth in their community to come out to events like school board meetings and city council meetings can do so. I think people also underestimate how much youth want to get involved. I think there are a lot more connections that can be built and bridges that can be built between different generations. I think that's a problem that we face; it's the youth movement and the youth being tokenized.

KUMAR: Yeah, that makes sense. I liked that phrase you said, “Tokenized, not prioritized.” That was really powerful. So you mentioned ideas like burnout, and it sounds like you've been through a lot of frustrating experiences with your activism. How do you balance your personal life with everything that comes with activism?

BOSE: I don't think I do. I don't think I've learned that yet. I think I'm still struggling with burnout, and I don't think I've even started balancing work life. I think I've begun to in college, but in high school, I was definitely the sort of person who was like, “I'll work, and then maybe I'll give myself some rest.” So, I'd love to be able to answer that question, but that's definitely a weakness of mine. I tend to like to stretch myself too thin and then later recuperate the effects of that.

KUMAR: Yeah, I resonate with that. Thank you for sharing. I know it's not easy to deal with all the time. I will wrap up with a few last questions. What goals do you have for your future in activism or in general?

BOSE: I want to get more connected. I want to become more of an organizer on campus and try to become as well connected here, locally, as I was in Portland. I also want to keep learning. I don't want to become stagnant. I want to keep questioning my beliefs and keep questioning the things around me because that's what has gotten me so far now, and I hope it can get me even further in the future. Career-wise, I'm looking at law school. We'll see what law school looks like, but I'm going to a law school. And maybe trying to strike the work-life balance, but we'll see if that happens. But yeah, I don't want to become stagnant; I want to keep learning and growing, whether that be through learning materials myself or in connection with other people. I think the Bay Area is a really interesting place to be when it comes to being an activist. I'm really excited to learn more about the history around me. Oakland has been known for some really radical movements, and I think Berkeley as a campus is a really special place to be as an activist.³⁸

³⁸ Oakland is the city where Berkeley is located in California.

KUMAR: Yeah, thank you for sharing. That sounds really exciting. So you've talked a lot about work across the Raven Corps, SROs, and the Youth Advisory Board you mentioned. What would you say you've learned as the most important thing to remember in activism? And this is a tough question, so take your time.

BOSE: I think it's: have people you can lean on and trust that you work with because the systems that you're working against and the people you're working against are so unapproachable. They are so large in how they affect society that I think it's really important to not go about this work completely alone, but instead to have people you can trust, to have people you can lean on, and to not be afraid to lean on and trust those people.

KUMAR: Yeah, definitely. That's a really powerful insight, thank you. Is there anything you felt like I didn't touch on or went by too fast that you want to share more about? If there's anything at all you want to say, this is your time.

BOSE: No, I think this has been a very enlightening conversation.

KUMAR: Okay, great. I'm so glad to hear that. Thank you so much for sharing everything that you did. Do you have any other questions for me?

BOSE: Just one. What's the assignment?

KUMAR: Yeah. This is for a class called Youth Justice Movements, and our assignment is to conduct three interviews with youth activists. These interviews are going to become part of a Duke University Archives that is documenting youth activists. It's for people down the road to learn about who the youth activists were making impacts in this time.

BOSE: That's a super cool class.

KUMAR: Yeah. It's really exciting. I'm excited about it. So once this interview ends, I will transcribe it and send it back to you for edits.

BOSE: Okay.

KUMAR: Thank you so much.

Shubhangi Bose Interview Index

Activism, page 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15
Activist, page 1, 3, 4, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16
Backlash, page 8, 9
Beaverton, page 7, 10, 14
Berkeley, page 1, 14, 15
Black Liberation, page 3
Capitalism, page 2, 3
City Council, page 9, 10, 11, 14
Civil Rights, page 3
Climate Change, page 3, 7
CNN, page 4
Collective Liberation, page 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7
Community, page 10, 12, 13, 14
Corruption, page 7, 9
COVID, page 1, 5
Criminal justice, page 3, 10
First Amendment, page 6
Food, page 5, 7
Global South, page 3, 13
Immigrant, page 2
Israel, page 3, 4, 11, 12
Lactose Intolerant, page 5
Lawsuit, page 6, 7, 8
Lawyer, page 6, 9
Lobbyist, page 6, 7
Legislation, page 5, 6
LGBTQ, page 10
Milk, page 5
Nonprofit, page 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11
Oakland, page 15
Operation Mind Over Milk, page 5
Palestine, page 3, 4, 11
Pandemic, page 3, 10
People of Color, page 2, 5
Police, page 1, 10, 11
Policy, page 5, 6
Politics, page 1, 3, 6, 12
Portland, page 4, 5, 7, 15

Raven Corps, page 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15
School Board, page 9, 10, 11, 14
School Resource Officer, page 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14
Student, page 1, 5, 6, 10, 11, 14
Thunberg, Greta, page 13
Trump, page 1, 2, 3, 4
Veganism, page 1, 5, 7
Youth Advisory Board, page 7, 15