

## Kiyoshi Taylor

Kiyoshi Taylor is the co-Founder of Justice Vanguard, which is a local organization that does anti-racist work and education. He went to Los Altos High school and now lives in San Jose. He does activism work in the South Bay and is part of other organizations like the Haiti Action Committee.

**Transcript:** Filmed on 3/11/23, San Jose

0:00

**Kiyoshi:**

My name is Kiyoshi Taylor, I'm a former Freestyle alum, actually, and I currently run a non-profit based out of Mountain View/ Los Altos/ San Jose called Justice Vanguard and that's what I do for a living. One of the things Justice Vanguard does is we help out other organizations and one of those that I help/am a part of is Haiti Action Committee.

0:22

**Alex:**

Alright, so what type of events do you do with your organization or with Haiti Action Committee to raise awareness about Haiti?

**Kiyoshi:**

With my organization and Haiti Action Committee everything is basically based around education. So, for example for our Juneteenth, one of the things we do is we make sure we have a Haiti tent, where people can come and learn about not only the happenings today and what's going on in Haiti, but also Haiti's past and its connection to Black liberation. Those who may not know, Haiti was the first fully liberated country by Black people and ever since, they've been actually kind of paying the debt that that liberation cost. Other things we do are events such as webinars, teachings, we actually still do protests, banner droppings over freeways, a litany of things, but all based around educating people on the history of Haiti and what's going on now and the US connection to the pain and suffering currently going on on the island. Yeah, so the banner drops are basically Haiti Action will team up with a couple of other organizations such as the one at Los Altos High, Haiti Solidarity Club, and we'll spray paint on a giant sheet, saying "US out of Haiti," and maybe put our website at the bottom, and we'll go and pin it up so everyone who's stuck in traffic on the 101, they can read our sign.

2:11

**Alex:**

That sounds cool. Ok, and then for the Haiti Action Committee specifically, how do they support people living in Haiti right now?

**Kiyoshi:**

Haiti Action Committee supports the people living in Haiti through a variety of ways. Getting funding there is very complicated so we have a lot of people on the inside that we trust we can send money. With the amount of corruption going on in the area, it's very hard to actually get through the normal paths that you would be able to, say here in America, it's a lot harder to get that money to the people who actually need it in Haiti. So, we team up with schools we help fund such as UNIFA. We actually teamed up with Ms. Aristide who is the former president's wife and we raise funds for the UNIFA school which is an amazing school, actually. It helps train doctors, nurses, all kinds of students, and also gives more affordable healthcare to people in Haiti. So yeah, we do fundraisers in the Bay Area and throughout the country to raise funds for things like that. Another thing we do is, through those connections we have, we'll send money to certain individuals who we know are part of the larger grassroots movement out there. So that helps get them internet so they can stay up to date and stay in contact with each other and stay safe. That helps provide resources for the schools, and a litany of things. Yeah, we work very closely with Lavalas, which is one of the big people movements out there that are asking for a true democracy and freedom out there, so we work with a lot of individuals within that community and that movement.

4:20

**Alex:**

Can you talk more about Lavalas, what exactly it is?

**Kiyoshi:**

Lavalas is a movement by the people out there who are against this very oppressive regime that is currently being supported by the US government. They want a fair and free election, which they currently do not have. The last time they had a fair and free election, the military overthrew in a coup in 2004. And ever since they have been living under a dictatorship. And even though the most recent president was assassinated, the people in charge now still do not have the people's interest at heart. So, the people have been speaking out and a lot of the people who do speak out are part of Lavalas. And they want everything we are fighting for out here, in America—better wages, healthcare. But they're not just fighting that. They're also fighting, well also, like here, they're fighting police brutality and oppression, and white supremacy. So some of the fights are though similar, they are a lot more serious out there because it's life or death out there. And they've been putting their bodies on the line in protest for a better tomorrow. Lavalas is one of the major heartbeats of the liberation movement going on in Haiti.

5:48

**Alex:**

Yeah, you kind of already answered this but it's pretty clear that the struggles we face in the US such as police brutality and stuff are really closely related to the issues in Haiti. So can you just say how is the struggle in Haiti connected to the antiracist movements here in the US or in the Bay Area?

**Kiyoshi:**

Well, it was actually through my involvement in Justice Vanguard that connected me to Haiti. And it was the movement in 2015 and in 2020 that really connected me to the similarities going on in that island to what we're going through as Black Americans and Brown people in America. We actually have a saying, "Black lives matter from Haiti to the Bay," meaning we recognize each other right, our lives matter. And as of right now they're not being accounted for, they're not being cared for, they're not being valued. And as I said earlier, a lot of the problems we're having in the US are amplified when you go to Haiti, from police brutality to having poor wages. But, you know, it's worse out there because people are actually starving. People are being murdered. The people, when they protest, are being dispersed by the police. Sounds familiar, right? Because the same thing was happening in this country in 2020, in 2021, or 2015 or in the 90s. You can pick a decade, we've had the issues right? So, one of the things that really connected me to Haiti and how our movements connect is one, during 2020, Haiti, with all their stuff going on, spoke out against all the stuff with the police and the prison industry here in the US. And they said, what y'all doing is messed up. Y'all look like us, actually. But they stood up for us. They were there with us. They supported us the whole time. And so, without a doubt, when I saw that, I'm like, well we need to do the same for them. That's how we're interconnected. And it's not just in recent history that they've done that. All the way back—if you look in the 1800s, I believe it was 1811, Charles Delondes. He actually was of Haiti descent and he led the most successful slave rebellion in the South, which went from outside of New Orleans almost to New Orleans and about, I think 500 slaves rose up because of this Haitian activist, right? So, Haiti has always been the heartbeat of Black liberation. They were the first country to free themselves from chains and become an established all-Black country. And they took in refugees of other people who escaped slavery. They said, come here and be Haitian. Because of that, a lot of Black liberation and freedom movements have been tied to Haiti and cannot and shall not be forgotten because of that.

9:29

**Alex:**

I actually didn't know that, that's pretty cool. So, with everything we talked about it's pretty clear we should support each other but just to people, like students in the Bay Area, why do you think it's important to support people in Haiti?

**Kiyoshi:**

I mean, it's very important to support people in Haiti. I mean, not just Haiti, but all over the globe. Of course, I'm gonna say Haiti because my heart's in Haiti because I've been dealing with these people and I see the damage the US has caused to Haiti. In fact, for example, the US and the UN, the United Nations is finally taking responsibility for the cholera epidemic they helped bring to the island which was devastating to the people there. And a lot of the hardships they're going through, the fingerprints of the US is all over it. I just believe it's upon us to take responsibility for our past actions, both here and abroad and make right what we've wronged. So not only that, but you may not have to see them every day to empathize with somebody. And I see the wrong, I see the hurt, I see the pain that these people are going through, but besides all that I see the resilience, I see the fight, and I see the power that these people bring. And not only that, but they stand by us, right or wrong. They've stood by Black America and the struggles we're going

through. So it's very important that we stand by them and help them and help them achieve what they've so desperately longing and fighting for, which is a fair living environment, true democracy, true independence from the US and the BS that they continually shift to the island, such as training their police and funding these corrupt politicians. So it's very important we support Haiti at a grassroots level to really help and give the people who live there a fair shake.

12:00

**Alex:**

Can you talk about Biden's approach to immigrants and how it's potentially connected to colorism and racism and even just contrasted from the Trump Administration. So what are your thoughts on that?

**Kiyoshi:**

So, when it comes to Biden's immigration policy with Haitians, you really can't teach an old dog new tricks. It is undeniable that what's going on with the Haitian deportations is, honestly, it's just pure racism. Here he's allowing countless Ukrainians in, as I think he should. But second it's a Black or Brown country, they turn their nose up. You don't even have to go very far to see the difference in the way immigrants are treated. Because you can look at the pictures on the Texas border of how the Haitian immigrants were being treated. When they fled a country where they were going to be killed if they had stayed. They were fleeing for their lives, literally because of mistakes the US government has made. So they fled to the US hoping for an opportunity, a better chance, especially since we're the ones who messed up. And they were greeted with, literally a scene from the cowboy days, on horseback with lassos and whips, beating on these innocent people. The way I see it, if we make a mistake and mess up these counties, the least we can do is give them a fair shake here. Because we made it to a point where they cannot return home. But apparently the Biden Administration sees it otherwise and it's very disappointing, the deportations because he's basically sending them to a death sentence on their island. It's complete colorism because you don't see it with any other group unless they're Black and Brown in this country. It's very upsetting and the thing that really pisses me off is, like I said, as people should, be all for the people of Ukraine and bringing them in with open arms. But, second I say "What about Haiti?" people get mad. Even people in the Biden Administration or people who support them. They always get mad. I'm like, well why can't we do it with Haiti? I'm not saying it's either or. I'm saying let's have it be both. And it's very frustrating people don't see that.

14:55

**Alex:**

Now we're gonna go back in time, talk about the history of Haiti. So how do you think the Haitian Occupation of 1915 connects to current events in Haiti? Like how do the things that happened, that the US did there, kind of lead to what they're doing now?

**Kiyoshi:**

History tends to repeat itself. Especially when it comes to Imperialist history. And unfortunately, Haiti has always been seen as more of a resource than a place with human beings. So the

occupation was to drain them of certain resources, be it what it was back then, maybe it was sugar cane or something, but now it's patrolling them. Whatever your flavor of the day is, when you have a country that has been weakened and cut off from the rest of the world, the occupation made it so not only are they cut off from the rest of the world, but you are now reliant on said oppressor, which in this case was the United States and later on the United Nations as well. And part of the occupation and just the history of Haiti is also their debt that it took to free themselves from France, which is now currently being held by city bank. They owe billions and billions and billions of dollars, that they in no way can be able to pay back to the French government. But on top of that, they shouldn't owe that money to free themselves from slavery and becoming an independent nation. So, you have this giant debt, you have this imperialist government that is oppressing them, and keeping them from really creating anything of value, of meaning. And then on top of that, you have no ability to row yourself. So you're gonna stay in debt, you're gonna stay oppressed, and that has just continued to this day.

17:10

**Alex:**

What goals do you have for the organization going forward?

**Kiyoshi:**

Going forward, we have multiple goals. One of them being growth. We need more youth to be involved, to care about Haiti, to care about the people and the suffering going on there, to understand what it's going to take. Which brings us to our other goal which is political engagement. We're gonna need everybody, it doesn't matter if you're right or left, you need to write to your senator, you need to write to your house representative and demand that we should no longer fund Haiti foreign assistance when it's all just going to the police that are killing civilians. Other things we're trying to do is just grow the awareness, raise awareness, spread awareness throughout the country of what's going on and the US involvement. I know it's what we are already doing, but once again we're trying to get it on a grander scale. And then just continue the assistance to Haiti and the people who need it, and help amplify the voices that are trying to be oppressed by their fraudulent government currently.

18:28

**Alex:**

So, do you have any suggestions on how people in the Bay Area can get involved with antiracist activism even if they're white and they don't necessarily have the connection to Haiti in the same way that Black people do?

**Kiyoshi:**

There are multiple ways people can get involved and help Haiti. You can go to the Haiti Action Committee website, which is [www.haitiactioncommittee.net](http://www.haitiactioncommittee.net). You can also go to the Haiti Action Relief fund, you can just google these things, they're also on Instagram. And if you want to be connected on a more broad base, you can follow Justice Vanguard since we work so closely with Haiti. Either way, you're gonna be tipped off to all the events going on with Haiti, different ways you can donate your money or your time and just different ways to educate yourself on the

happenings of what's going on with Haiti. You can also join the Los Altos High School club, Students for Haiti Solidarity or something, I think it's something like that. Like I said, just make sure you guys sign up to the newsletter especially, now I'm also gonna plug Justice Vanguard. We often promote what's going on in Haiti as well and different ways you can give your time and donate, and that's at [www.justicevanguard.org](http://www.justicevanguard.org). We also are looking for interns, so if you're interested in this kind of work, come on through, fill out an application or just contact me or ask Alex, and we're more than happy to get you guys on board. If you're interested in English or multimedia, so that's my little plug.

On a final note, I just want to say hello Mr. Greco, Florendo, and Parkinson, let's go Giants, I'm so glad that you guys are still there teaching everybody. I hope to visit the new campus once it's finished and built. Just keep up the good work. Hello from an old friend, and I hope our paths cross soon, very soon.