

## Ten Minute T(ea) with Ms. LaShawn Springer

*Interview conducted by Maxwell Vale  
April 13, 2017*

Q) How has race affected your life at Andover as a renowned member of the faculty? Are most of these effects positive or negative?

A) Interesting question. I was just talking to a student about how I felt when I first moved to the town of Andover. I literally cried in the Stop & Shop, doubting whether I'd made the right move. Primarily because community is important to me, and my community has always been quite diverse. Even though I grew up in a predominantly West Indian neighborhood, in college I was very intentional in thinking about my circle of friends. I'm used to being in community with multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and mixed-income folks, so moving to a homogenous place was hard. I've had racialized experiences in the town, including with the police, so I am keenly aware of my race and positionality here. It affects how I walk around in the town and when. It's important for me to contextualize race affecting my life in the town because PA is situated within this town, and when school is not in session, I still live here.

I've had both positive and negative interactions around race at Phillips. I am always thinking about what identities I bring into the room and what that means for how people choose to interact with me (or not), but I try not to let that affect how I feel about myself. I'm very proud to be a Black woman of Caribbean descent. The sense of self I derive from my racial identity is undeniable, so I won't give anyone the power to strip me of that. It's also inextricably linked to my gender identity so we have to be intersectional in conversations about identity.

Q) What social trends do you as a faculty member see in the interactions between white students and students of color here at Andover? Are there any repeated social trends you see in the interactions between students of the same race?

A) Sometimes people talk about Andover as being in a bubble, but the reality is many of our interactions here mirror what we see in the world. The different is we have a real opportunity to flip it on its head and be an example of what it really means to be in a diverse and inclusive community. Studies have shown that most people live in homogenous neighborhoods and have homogenous friend groups, so for most of our students and perhaps faculty and staff, this is in fact the most diverse place they will live. Think about that!

There are definitely spaces on campus that seem dominated by social groups, and I don't think that's strictly related to race, though it definitely plays a part in some instances. I hear mixed things about the den, about the different dining halls and who sits where, certain classrooms/ subjects, dorms and what their proximity to campus means. But, I'll talk about my own location on campus: CAMD. I have heard from alumni and current students that not everyone feels

comfortable coming to CAMD and that it is a space for some kids and not for others. That's usually code for white students don't feel comfortable coming to CAMD. Again, usually, not always. And, I always have to ask, is there something in particular happening in CAMD that makes someone uncomfortable, or is there some other interrogation of self that needs to happen. So maybe it's a projection on CAMD rather than CAMDs doing? I am genuinely interested in why this narrative is so enduring year after year, but for those who do come to CAMD, I think they'll tell you that it's a pretty loving space.

Q) As you know, I am going to be a cluster co-president next year, and with that responsibility comes welcoming new students, especially students of color, like myself, to Andover. So I was wondering, what can I, the other co-presidential pairs, and the school do to make new students of color feel welcome here? Do we do enough for students of color during the school year?

A) Here's what I tell families... Andover is not perfect. We don't have it all figured out, but there are many people working very hard across the institution to make sure that this experience is a good one for all of our students. It's important not to idealize or romanticize life at Andover because students deal with some pretty difficult identity issues here. But, you should be stressing that you are one of many that are doing this work. You have an opportunity to use your position to provide platforms for others.

Q) In your opinion, how important are organizations on campus for students of color, such as the Brotherhood, Sisterhood, Alianza Latina, and others?

A) Cultural clubs and affinity groups are extremely important to many of our students of color. Affinity groups provide a space for our students to share how they are experiencing Andover (and the world) in a safe space and allows them to be their whole selves. And then there are things you don't have to explain in these spaces and sometimes that's all students want... not to have to explain themselves but just be.

Q) Do you have any final thoughts about the topic, regardless whether or not it was in a question I've already asked?

A) Lots. We're usually hesitant to talk about race, but we actually need to talk about it more. Our silence about it doesn't make it disappear nor does it create change at our schools. We can acknowledge that it's both an uncomfortable and necessary topic to grapple with individually and institutionally.

*Ms. LaShawn Springer is an Associate Director of College Counseling and Director of the Community and Multicultural Development Office. Her interest in social justice and activism stems from her own experiences growing up in Crown Heights, a neighborhood that grappled with race relations following the Crown Heights riots in '91. At Andover, she is also faculty*

*advisor to the Sisterhood, an affinity group for Black Latinx girls and the Afro Latino American society. In her spare time, she enjoys reading and (re)reading works of literature by her favorite womanysts (including Audre Lorde and bell hooks), facetimeing with her seven nieces and nephews, and listening to any music that makes her dance. Right now, she's listening to Lizzo's Coconut Oil on repeat because honestly there isn't any ailment that coconut oil can't soothe.*