

The Guardians: Reshaping History Project and Exhibition

Interview with Tayler Mugar, 2021

Tayler Mugar ([00:00](#)):

My name is Tayler and I grew up in West Baltimore. I'm in the Sandtown area. I am a 28 year old, young, black and gifted woman. And most of my childhood was, was spent at my grandmother's house because my mother chose to go back to nursing school. And so my grandmother gave us the opportunity to come back and live with her. So my mother, she can help with, you know, the kids and things like that. When my mother finishes up school. And I didn't realize the sacrifice that my mother made when I was a child and how it was impactful for me growing up, because she chose to go to nursing school, which made a difference in, you know, my life financially, especially coming from where I come from. It gave me more of it gave me more opportunities if that makes sense, because she went because she chose to go back to nursing school.

Tayler Mugar ([01:09](#)):

It gave me more opportunities, which I'm, I'm grateful for her and the sacrifice that she made when she did that. And I was more so protected from that outside element because I was blessed to be under my grandmother's protection. And I had babysitters who were older and who took the time to nurture me and, you know, pay me some attention. And that was opposite from my peers, because they were subjected to, you know, parents who were victims of drug abuse and things of that nature. So that kinda made me stand out and it created me being an outcast in my own community also because, you know, I was looked at as me not being hood enough for me not being black enough. And then, you know, I go into society, , then, you know, I'm not accepted in the white culture because, of course, I'm black.

Tayler Mugar ([02:10](#)):

So I wrestled between those two worlds, which is very difficult for me because when people see me, they don't see my struggle and, oh man, it's hard because it goes into that saying of, you know, thank God I don't look like what I've been through. Like, that's really real for me because I am very good at putting a mask up because I'm always the strong person, especially in my family and in my peer group, I'm always the optimistic person and always seeing like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, , which created a n bness in me, , recently, because it's like, you can be optimistic, but it's like, you still have to accept like when you're hurting and when you are in pain and you have to heal from that. And as, , as black people, we're taught, you know, how to survive and not how to heal.

Tayler Mugar ([03:25](#)):

And, you know, I can go into my community and I can get, you know, they try to G check me, you know, G check me. Cause you know, they'll say, you know, you ain't from around here or, you know, you ain't been outside. Yes, I have not been outside. Yes. I was protected from that element, but I'm not gonna feel guilty because I was protected from that element. You're not going to make me feel shameful because I had the same access to go out and, you know, do drugs or n b myself because I was still in that element. You know, I had the choice to say, Hey, do I want to do this? So do I want to do that? And what I'm realizing as I get older is how dare you make me feel bad because of a choice that I made to be better.

Tayler Mugar ([04:13](#)):

And that's something that I still wrestle with still to this day that I'm trying to learn how to overcome. Like, I'm happy that I chose to heal. Like it's, I think it's, I just finally was able to grieve my grandmother's death was like two months ago when my grandmother died and like, was that June. And she died around my birthday month, which is, which was crazy for me because me being the strong person again, you know, people don't check in on me, so therefore I am alone. It's hard being alone and like healing on your own and yes, it's really hard. Who do you feel closest with for that?

Tayler Mugar ([05:17](#)):

Well, when I met my mentor, Will, who also introduced me to turn around Tuesday, I'm able to express myself with him. He's kind of like a father figure for me, so I'm still able to reach out to him. But it's like, you know, he's older. So it's like, I still don't have a bit of someone of my age group that I'm able to, you know, fellowship with and, you know, pour out my emotions and things like that. Even with my family, you know, I'm kind of outcasted as well. I kind of separate myself from them, due to, you know, judgments being placed and you know, me sometimes just not being comfortable, expressing myself due to the fact that, you know, I feel like I'm going to be, you know, rejected in that sense, so I kind of, I've stayed to myself for most of my life.

Tayler Mugar ([06:32](#)):

And not saying that I don't have people that care for me. I do feel like they care for me, but I feel like they don't know my internal struggles, the demons that, you know, I battled with, like from day to night is very tragic being in my head at times. But in a sense, I am grateful that, you know, I was able to overcome my struggles in an internal way. And like when I say it, if I can say it right. Me being alone as a child helped me to, you know, first learn how to love myself, which of course my grandmother introducing me into that spiritual foundation. Me knowing that it has to be something other than the universe or the sun that's protecting me because the things that I have been through in my life, I can only say that God or whoever you may address him and, you know, your religion and your spirituality, someone has to have had been protecting me.

Tayler Mugar ([07:51](#)):

Like that's something that I know without a doubt, me being alone helped me as an adult to, you know, not seek validation from people all the time, to not seek attention. Like I'm, I'm comfortable in my own skin. And I want to leave that behind too, for the younger generation, you know, that you can be comfortable in your own skin. Like it's okay to love who you are like as you are. , you are enough, like, you know, to my community, like I don't want us to have to feel like we always have to prove ourselves, like, you know, prove that street credibility, and always to prove that, you know, proven that you hard and that you tough all the time. Like it's, it's power in, you know, you being respected instead of you being feared. If that makes sense, it's more power and being respected than being feared.

Tayler Mugar ([09:04](#)):

I just don't want us to constantly be in a place where we, you know, are glorifying our struggle, but it, it is hard as a black person to have to work 10 times harder to feel like you're still only getting to, you know, see you trying to always constantly get to Z, but it's like, dang, I'm okay. But then it's like, dang, something hits me, and that's, that's where racism is real like that it is real because it's this something that, you know, we constantly have to fight for, which is, it's a, it's a draining battle. It's a draining bed. And that's why I want us to, you know, bring back more of that togetherness in our communities so we

can be better protected within our community, yeah. Cause, cause right now I don't feel protected. I don't feel protected one because I'm black.

Tayler Mugar ([10:19](#)):

So I can't call the police when I'm having a situation because it's not, uh, I don't trust them. And then, you know, I don't, it's hard for me to trust people in my own community. Cause you know, we don't have a structure where, you know, you can call somebody if you're in a situation and you know, they're able to detain the situation because I mean, this is, this is home for me. And it's, it's, you know, where I do want to, you know, rest my head at night or where, you know, I'm, I'm tied to my community. I'm very loyal to it. And you know, I, I just want us to be able to bring back some foundation where, you know, we've been, we can begin to, I mean, we can begin to like work together instead of, you know, being on attack mode all the time. I guess it's, it's hard walking the streets, and always having this mug on your face, always being in defense mode, always ready to attack. Like that's draining, like, you know, I want to smile, you know, I wanna say, "Hey, how you doing?" You know, that's what I, that's what I want to get back to doing that, yeah.

Speaker 2 ([11:40](#)):

Why do you think you in particular are so tied to your community? Like why not just be like, I don't want to get out of here and go to New York or I don't, I'm just . . .

Tayler Mugar ([11:53](#)):

Oh, trust me. Yeah. I thought about it. I thought about it. Yeah. I'm so tied to it because I want to, I want to say that, "Hey, I was apart of the groundwork for this revitalization." I was, I was in the trenches. I was, I was doing the work that I needed to do for us to have a better life. Like, and I think that's why I'm so loyal to it because it's like, then I feel I'm scared. Like if I leave and like, you know, things get better and I'd be like, like, you know, why wasn't that part of it? But then it's a part of me that say, Hey, you know, I was a part of it at one point in time. So is it time for me to, you know, transition? So, I mean, and I think this is why the guardian project is so important for me because this is a staple, you know, that I'm making to say, Hey, I was here, you know, I did try my best to contribute.

Tayler Mugar ([12:51](#)):

You know, I left my, you know, foot mark, you know, I left something behind to say I was a part of trying to make that change. So yeah. That's why it's important for me. Yeah. Yeah. Loyalty can trap you in a way too, when you're so loyal to something that you can't see like beyond it. And that makes sense. But I mean, I do want to say, you know, like once again, like I, I want a young black girl or a young black boy to understand the importance of healing, understand the importance of, you know, not constantly having to prove that you're this tough person or prove that, you know, you have this gangster that you tough. Like I'm able to still be comfortable with myself, even though that I'm soft, you know, I'm soft, I'm sensitive. That doesn't mean that, you know, I'm a doormat, but you know, I'm able to accept that softer side of myself and to, you know, still be able to love, thank God that I'm still able to love because you know, the betrayal that I've experienced, the pain that I've experienced, especially being on a journey by myself.

Tayler Mugar ([14:32](#)):

For most part now, I mean, when, I mean by myself, I mean, like when I go home at night and, you know, in those dark places that I have been, I'm still able to, you know, being nice, I'm still able to love,

I'm still able to see the good in people, you know, thank God for that because, like I said, it could it's everyday that choice can change. So, yeah.

Speaker 3 ([15:10](#)):

And, as you grew up, like, when did you want to become more active in your neighborhood and community?

Tayler Mugar ([15:21](#)):

I've always been like vocal about like racism and issues like that, especially I started developing that voice when I was in high school. , I always wonder like why life was different for me as a black child. And also life was different from me because of my, of how I was brought up. Most of my peers were brought up in like drug-infested homes and things of that nature. And I was kind of protected from that because when I was younger, most of the people that I live with, you know, they weren't victims of drug abuse. Or I had like grandparents who really took the time to like teach me. I had babysitters who, you know, were nurturing. And so I was protected from that element, from what my peers were kind of like subjected to. So that kind of also made me different.

Speaker 3 ([16:24](#)):

Yeah. And, what are some things that you're most proud of about your neighborhood or the work that you've done with people in your neighborhood?

Tayler Mugar ([16:34](#)):

I'm very proud of the volunteer work that I did at a jobs movement organization, which employed over 800 people in Baltimore city. I was proud to actually have a seat at the table with like, you know, the president of Johns Hopkins and to be at a seat where, you know, there was power and I was able to make a change and able to see what it feels like to have, to have a seat at the table that would bring about change within my community. So that was very big for me, having people who don't know how to relate to people within our community and finally being face-to-face with them, having the conversation, like telling them our story and the N the nest, the nest, uh, why was necessary for us to have a second chance, and the importance of putting people back to work and what it would do for our community. And also giving them the perspective of saying, Hey, you know, you have a responsibility as well. Like you're here providing something for community. I mean, but we live here, like, you know, you have a responsibility to us as well, but I think them actually hearing the story without it being like stereotypical, actually coming from people who actually lived it, was a big for me,

Speaker 3 ([18:07](#)):

I guess. What do you want others to know about you and your community? If let's say you were talking to someone that's not even from Baltimore or, you know,

Tayler Mugar ([18:19](#)):

Yeah, it's a hard one because I'm at wit's end sometimes when it comes to explaining it, I've always been an advocate of changing the narrative around Baltimore. And it's been hard at times, especially now with our increased crime rate, of course, you know, the depressed neighborhoods and things like that. And, you know, actually still being, being in the area and seeing it like zombied out because you know, of course people are [inaudible] themselves because they've given up hope, for anything changing, being

around it, it's like it's very devastating. But I did come to, you know, a realization that, you know, always will see the light at the end of the tunnel. And that's why I still do this work, even though it's hard.