

**Asali DeVan Ecclesiastes**

In New Orleans we have so many white-led organizations, even though the majority of our population is African-American, you know. Therefore, these institutions are always bringing the cause and the advocacy and the wishes, dreams, and desires of white people to the forefront of government and policy. And these are the voices that get lifted inside of those conversations, even though the decisions that are being made are negatively impacting the majority of the population. And so it's so important for Ashé because there are hardly any anchor institutions that are black-led in the city. You know, and that's a real tragedy and it's reflected in the inequity that we experience economically and our health outcomes, and our education attainment, in our transportation access, and our ability to even remain in the neighborhoods that our culture built. That our ancestors and elders built, and to enjoy the benefits of an economy that our talent fuels. It's still enslavement, you know, it's still at the start of this city, at the founding of New Orleans, the people who were enslaved during the colonial period by the municipal government, and by hotels and restaurants, that's who enslaved black people, and that's still who we work for, right. And the economics are pretty much the same. And so there has to be a shift. And I think that Ashé is uniquely positioned to leverage its influence for advocacy of those communities who've been intentionally excluded.