

Transcript – Jennifer Currier, Staff

Narrator: Jennifer Currier

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist

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Amanda Knox (interviewer): All right, good afternoon to our listeners. My name is Amanda Knox. I am the Assistant Archivist at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women. It is Tuesday, June 16. It is 1:30 in the afternoon, and I am here today with another interviewee. My supervisor, Mary Murphy, and I have generally been doing an oral history series lately on COVID-19 and the global pandemic that we're currently in, but we've now been experiencing, in the United States and across the world, several other events that we did not want to miss. So, today, I'm here with my interviewee via Zoom to talk about some of the, the protests against racial injustice and racism in the United States that have come out of the death of George Floyd at the hand of a police officer in Minnesota. So, I would like to, to [1:00] have my interviewee introduce herself now.

Jenny Currier (interviewee): Sure. Hi, my name is Jenny Currier. And I'm very thankful to be here and be included in this project. I am currently working as a Publications and Programs Coordinator in the Portuguese and Brazilian Studies Department, and I've been there for, full-time has morphed in weird ways now, but actually, I guess seven or eight months now, it feels very recent. But, before that, I worked at Brown for five years in the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies. And, so, I took, took like a, I guess a gap year, if you would, and then came back into my current position. So, this is my, going on six years of, of working at Brown. I'm originally from New Mexico, and I moved to Rhode Island seven years ago this summer, and I had no, like, [2:00] job or, like, family or friends or school or anything that was bringing me here, I just felt like Rhode Island was where I was supposed to be. So, I quit my job in New Mexico and drove out here. But, Brown was actually, like, my dream. Like, I always wanted to be a part of the Brown community since, I had visited, when I was in graduate school, I went to Dartmouth College, and I had visited Rhode Island and drove around Brown, and I was like, I

just, like, feel this, like, magical connection. So, yeah, and then I ended up getting a job, so it worked out.

AK: Well, perfect. I'm so happy to have you here with me today. I'm glad you took that kind of circuitous route to get here.

JC: It was crazy, yeah.

AK: It must have been crazy, starting a new position, and then like three months later, going into a self-isolation situation and working from home pretty quickly.

JC: Right. Yeah. So, I, [3:00] so the role that I am working in is, like a, we publish e-journals for, for Portuguese. I don't speak Portuguese. So, I mean it, it tells you like they were at the bottom of the barrel of applications. But, I, so, and, the person who had done this position before had been gone for several months, so there was no one to train me. So, like last November, December, I was just like a crazy person like trying to train myself in all these programs. And then I finally kind of felt like I was getting into a rhythm and in January, February, and then, of course, we, we transitioned to home, but I'm also a writer, that's what my degree is in. And, so, last year when I took my, my year off, I was working as a, as a freelance writer. So, working from home actually, like, that transition period where you're like, "I don't know how to, like, deal with my time, I'm at home all the time, like I need fresh air, I'm going crazy," like I went through [4:00] that last year, so this year, I felt like I could just kind of like dive into a better rhythm. So, in that sense, I had kind of an advantage. But, yeah, it was an interesting, like these last few months have been very different, for sure.

AK: Yeah. Would you like to? I don't want to kind of can your interview too much. Would you like to speak a little bit more on COVID-19 and how it's been impacting maybe your day to day? Or, or, the community around you?

JC: I can, yeah, I can, I can go there. I am, I am someone who I've, I've lived alone for a large majority of my life, and I'm also an only child. So, I was telling people like, I was born ready for

COVID, in that sense and, like, I feel like the transition into kind of being alone and being quarantined, particularly when we were still able, at least I was able to like, go around in the neighborhood and go on walks and get that, like, fresh air. [5:00] That's super important to me, but as far as like seeing people in the physical, like, I'm much, I'm okay, for the most part, like having phone conversations and Zoom calls, and, like, I don't, it takes me a lot longer before I realize, like, "oh, I haven't had like interactions with people in a while." So, in that sense, I feel like the adjustment wasn't so bad, it just becomes more surreal, like, when you go into, like a supermarket, and, like, the everything has changed, like, people are wearing masks and, like, you feel like you have to kind of avoid people. And, like, that was where I was like, "wow, everything is changed," like, in that sort of, like, social setting. And, I'm also a food writer. I do, but I wear lots of hats. So, I'm like, "here, let me just throw in another job I do." So, I'm a food writer and a food tour guide. And, so the, the restaurant industry, I'm really close with, I'm close with a lot of owners and employees, and so to see like the, [6:00] the devastation that that had on their businesses particularly, that was hard, because I care a lot about them. And, so, I was trying to like, partner with different people like Rhode Island Food Fights had really great fundraisers where they were raising money for gift cards from restaurants that were then going to hospital workers. So, it was, like, the more bang for your buck. You know, you could support two people at once, and doing stuff like that. So, that was helpful. And, I was volunteering at, like, Rhode Island Pride, and delivering, or putting together, like, grocery boxes and stuff like that for people who were high risk and couldn't afford to go get food or were unsafe doing so. So, it was good to, like, have some avenues of being able to help in small ways.

AK: Definitely. And, so, while we are dealing with all of this, and, in some ways, for me anyway, almost kind of settling [7:00] into this new version of normal and, like, all right, we've got a hang of it we know to bring our masks and X, Y, and Z -

JC: Right, yeah.

AK: The news of George Floyd's death comes out. If you're comfortable, would you mind sharing with me when you first learned about that and what might have been going through your head in that moment?

JC: So well, prior to that, there was Breonna Taylor and there had been a few incidences leading up to that. And, so, each time I would hear about it, it would, it was like really devastating and I'm part of a small prayer group and one of my friends is in an interracial relationship, and she has always had a heart for just, like, the, the issues that Black people in America face. And, so, I've always gotten a, an in-depth, I guess, perspective [8:00] from her that I don't necessarily see in my everyday life. And, so, I knew that it was, like, weighing on her because we'd been praying about it. She was like, not sleeping well and stuff. And, I had eliminated news for a little bit because I needed some mental health. And, I'm like, I just, so I went like a day or something without checking Instagram, or anything. And, then every, like, I, when I logged in again, it was like, I was flooded with all this stuff. And, I was, like, "whoa, what happened?" And, then I looked it up. And, that was a really difficult, I think, time just to real, I don't know, I mean, yes, I remember going and we had, again, we have these, like, weekly prayer calls. And, like, I think all of us ended up, like, crying on the phone about it. And, just like in this place of, like, we can't just talk about stuff [9:00] anymore. Like, what are, what are we going to do? Like, we have to do something. And then as someone who affiliates like, with, with the church community, it's like, we really, like, the church needs to be the church, and we haven't done anything to stand up for human rights in this way. Like, you know, we should have been on the forefront a long time ago. And, so just trying to grapple with, like, those ideas.

AK: Had you seen news or heard stories of any of the protests that started happening around the country before the protest came to Rhode Island?

JC: Yes, so actually the same friend who's in the interracial couple, she has family in Minnesota. So, they were right there, and her sister-in-law's a frontline worker. So, she's working in a hospital having to go to work. And, then there's, like, city devastation. She was [10:00] saying that, like, her brother and sister-in-law, like, couldn't sleep all through the night just because there was so much noise there. Her neighbor, like, the neighbors were sleeping on the roof because they were afraid of, I don't know, like, broken glass or, yeah. So, that, it was, like, a very I heard about all of that. And then, of course, some of the other, the protests and the, you know, you hear about rioters and looters and things like that. But, I was getting, like, an in-depth

perspective of Minnesota from, like, the, my friend's family who is, who is there and it sounded really stressful.

AK: For sure.

JC: But, they also had a memorial for George Floyd. And, I heard that that ended up being really beautiful. And, just like people had brought, like, candles and like it was a very, like respectful [11:00] and honoring sort of event which is nice to hear.

AK: So, um, then the, the protest kind of come to Providence, and that was Friday, this past Friday, was it? A couple of Fridays ago?

JC: Yeah.

AK: Friday. I'm just looking at my planner here, Friday, June 5, that, that sounds about right? And, you attended that, that protest? Correct?

JC: Yes. So, I think that was the same week, where that was the longest week I think of, I mean, the first week of COVID, I think. And, then that week, were like the two longest weeks of the year. Because earlier, on Monday night, was it that I feel like I woke up Tuesday, and that's when downtown Providence had, like, the eruptions of violence and broken storefronts [12:00] and, and all of that. And, that was I think the first time where it really hit home for me of just like, "oh, this, this has arrived." And, I have friends with businesses, of course, like, on Westminster, so I first wanted to check in on them, but then went down there to see if, like, I could help clean up, and, by the time I got there, I mean, we live in an awesome city. I am really thankful for Providence, like, it was mostly cleaned up already by noon, which is really cool. But, so yeah, there was a prayer gathering on Thursday at the statehouse. And, it was like an interfaith sort of thing. So they had different churches and like someone, an imam from the mosque and a rabbi and even Gina Raimondo, the governor, was there and so like, they all kind of gave some talks and there's some prayer and then on Friday was the actual protest, and I met [13:00] actually

with a group from my church, and we, we gathered together to pray beforehand, and then we, we joined the protest.

AK: So, what compelled you to want to participate in the protests?

JC: Um, I felt like, so, when I was growing up, reading about civil rights, I had always, like, had such a hard time understanding why people didn't join in, you know, like, with Martin Luther King Jr., and, you know, I always thought like, "if I lived in that day, I would be there on the frontlines." And, as I've become an adult, I actually don't participate in protests very often, even if I believe in the cause. Just because the atmosphere can be a little bit tense, and, not that I'm necessarily, [14:00] like, afraid of danger, although this one had, like, an elevated sense of "something could go wrong." But, I, I don't like when people get angry at each other and to feel like that, that's why I'm there because, like, I'm more, I want to be supportive without, like, so this is, like, probably the first real protest that I'd attended. But, yeah, I, I felt compelled because, like, change needs to happen. And, I also felt like going into it I had, I knew that I wanted to do the prayer part beforehand. And then I was just going to kind of, like, see how I felt. But, once I was there and seeing kind of like the solidarity of people coming together and just like uplifting, you know, our Black and brown friends around us, [15:00] like, that felt like the right thing to do. So, I wanted to be a part of it.

AK: Can you describe the atmosphere? What, what were you feeling while you were there?

JCL Um, at first I was, like, a bit nervous. And then when we gathered as the people, like, in, in my community, and they had, like, their infants and their, like four year old children and stuff, you know, I was like, "okay, like, if they're bringing their kids, like, I think I'm going to be okay." Um, and, like, it, it just felt, there was definitely like an energy happening. But, I feel like everyone who was there was kind of coming into it with, with that sort of, like, solidarity mindset. And, so, in that sense, it was, it was pretty energizing and there were, you know, people going around like [16:00] offering water bottles, and, you know, like, someone had a sign over her backpack that was like, "I've got snacks, like, just ask me if you need one." And, someone had, like, made extra signs, and they were like, "you know, does anybody need a sign?" kind of

thing. And, if you didn't want one, they were like, "cool, no big deal, you know." And, actually, my friend and I like procured a sign, which was good. And, so, it just, it was a much, like, more positive sort of atmosphere than I had expected. And then, as we were marching, so we started at Kennedy Plaza, but I know that it, the march had also started at one of the high schools and then came down and then we went on to the statehouse. So, I remember like letting a lot of kids go because we were, we wanted the students to kind of proceed since it was their initiative, the high school students. And, so, like, we let a lot of people go by and then we were like, "okay, let's like pick up the end," and so [17:00] we just kind of jumped in. And, like, by the time we got to the statehouse, it was just like floods of people just kept coming. And, it was really cool to be like, like, "there's this many people all here together for the same cause." And, that was really, I don't know, just very exciting and uplifting, I think.

AK: What were you seeing around you in addition to the mass of people, were there any particular signs or groups of people or any, anything that just visually stuck out to you?

JC: Um, there was a wide variety of, of signs, there was a lot of "No Justice, No Peace." And, and that was like also a chant that people were saying, along with like, "Black Lives Matter." I saw there was a [18:00] group of, like, doctors, I think maybe Brown with like, it was like "White Coats for Black Lives" or something like that and they were all wearing like their white coats. There were, um, I think that there was a lot of, there was some signs like a lot of white people were like "I, you know, I don't understand but I'm an ally and like, I will stand by you, like, there was recognition of, you know, like, 'I don't get it but like I'm gonna stand here with you.'" There were a few signs that were cop related about defunding the police or like "all cops are bad words." There was, there were a few political posters also. But, for the most part, I feel like there was more, more positive, like, [19:00] "All Lives Can't Matter until Black Lives Matter." And, stuff like that. We had one of my friends had one that was like "In Providence as It is in Heaven." Yeah, we carried one about, or, like, Silence Is Violence, that kind of stuff. Yeah.

AK: Um, where, did, did COVID-19 pop into your mind at all, either in the decision to attend the protest or while you were at the protest? Did it seem like people were concerned about that

element of a large gathering in any way? And, I'm not, I don't mean to diminish the nature of what was happening.

JC: No, no, it's a great, it's a great question. Like, I think when we first gathered, like, we were very cognizant because we got together before the, the rally actually started. And, we were like, cognizant, and we kind of, like, kept our social distance, and, you know, and then of course, like once you get there, you're kind of in this mass of people. And, one of my friends [20:00] actually with the "In PVD as it is in Heaven" was like, you know, holding it up and chanting along with them and he was like, "six feet apart, six." You know, joking, like, he didn't actually continue, but it was just like in that, that was probably the moment where I realized like, "oh, yeah, like, we are not." It's just funny how, like, this thing that is, like, been drilled into our heads for two months did just kind of go away. And, I didn't feel super concerned because I think that the people that I was closest to, for the most part, were people that I'm, I'm semi-familiar with. And, when I walked around, and, like, got closer and stuff I tried to maintain, like, some distance, but it was not at the forefront of my mind whilst at the protest. Yeah.

AK: Definitely. Now, kind of, looking ahead, has there been any conversation about [21:00] changes within your department to address these issues? I, that's a very specific question that you might not want to answer. But, have there been just conversations generally, either personally or professionally, about taking this moment and moving it forward and not just letting it go?

JC: Um, I don't know that I can speak for the department, and I'm not really on the inside. So, as far as, like, disseminated materials, I haven't received them yet. I think we're seeing, kind of what Brown, as the bigger entity, like, what those statements are before we figure out how we're going to apply it specifically to our department. So, I don't, I'm not involved in that decision-making and I don't know exactly what has already been addressed, [22:00] as of this moment.

AK: I guess before I ask my final question, is there anything else you would like to touch upon on these topics? Before I move on?



JC: Um, I feel like I had a thought at one point, and it went away. So, if it, if it comes up in the middle of my final question, I will.

AK: Great. And, I actually lied because a second one just popped into my head. Because, you had mentioned that you were working with Pride. Yesterday, a major Supreme Court decision just came out. Would you like to talk about that a little bit?

JC: Um, I don't know that I am very equipped in say, in speaking out, except that I think it's a positive step, like, a very [23:00] encouraging moment in a sea of devastating moments. So, I was happy to see the news. But, again, I fluctuate in my, in my news intake. So, I saw the decision, but I haven't read up enough on it yet.

AK: Definitely. I completely understand the overload at this point. The Supreme Court just, some context for our listeners, has decided that the LGBTQ+ community cannot be discriminated against in their work because of their gender identity or, or sexual orientation.

JC: Which in some ways, to me is still crazy, that that's like, like, you could be fired. Like, I don't know, there's just like, racism still exists. And, we have to, like, overt racism. I mean, I think that there's a lot of microaggressions and privilege that we are starting to, like, understand on a bigger scale, but, like, just the fact that [24:00] overt racism still happens. And, that to me is mind blowing. And then we're realizing "nope, that's real." And then to see that, like such discrimination can be so open like, so, uh, yeah, it's a huge step in a right direction.

AK: Definitely. I had heard in my recap on the news yesterday that I think about, or almost half of the states in the United States until this decision came down, it was legal to fire somebody on that basis. And, now it's not, so today's a better day than it was yesterday. So now my, my final question: if somebody were to listen to this interview tomorrow, what is one thing you would want them to know? And, if they are listening to this interview fifty years from now, what is something you would want that person to know?

JC: [25:00] It's a great question. Listening to this tomorrow, I would say, I think we are in a very pivotal moment in history and I'm hoping that we can continue to, like, make positive changes, and to really examine our systems, and to come up with creative solutions, and to just, really if you're someone, like, someone like me, and a white person who has not really had first-person experience with this, like, to do reading, to watch movies, I just watched the movie *13th* on Netflix, which was, like, a very devastating, but it's, like, to kind of be to open our eyes to then I think that that's, like, kind of the first step, and [26:00] to encourage any, like, people of color who are listening, like, we see you and we want, we want to stand and we're learning how, and, so I think that's like for for tomorrow, like, let's let's make it happen like that's that's encouragement. And, fifty years from now, god bless, I hope that the country looks a lot different in a good way than it does right now. Because, I, if anything from that movie *13th* it's like racism just takes on a new exterior. And, and, we find new ways to enslave people, which is really upsetting. And, so, I really hope that there's prison reform and just, like, everything, like, I hope that people looking back on this fifty years from now will be like, "yes, that was the moment that history changed for something, [27:00] for more equal rights." So.

AK: Absolutely that, that was wonderful. Thank you so much. Is there, the, one last opportunity here to, to fill in any gaps of things that I did not ask you about today?

JC: No, I think that's it. I really appreciate you taking the time to work on this and, and have some interviews and I look forward to hearing what other people have to say to you.

AK: Well, thank you so much for your time today.

JC: Yeah. You're welcome.

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