

Transcript – Premal Dharia, class of 2000

Narrator: Premal Dharia

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist

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Amanda Knox: Good morning. My name is Amanda Knox. I am the assistant archivist at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women here at Brown University today is May 14th it is 11:30 AM. And I am here with an interviewee in honor of her 25th reunion this year, and I will ask you to introduce yourself.

Premal Dharia: Great. Thank you. I'm Premal Dharia and I graduated from Brown in 2000, I'm looking forward to my 25th reunion this year. I graduated with concentrations in history and what was then called African American studies. And I'm looking forward to reliving my time at Brown and speaking with you about my memories of it and experiences since.

AK: Thank you so much for being here. I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind taking us back to sharing a little bit about your childhood, where you grew up, what your education was, [1:00] some of those foundational things that kind of set you up for your trajectory.

PD: Sure. Of course my parents immigrated from India to the United States in the mid 70's. And we bounced around a little bit in the first couple of years of my life, and then settled in rural Appalachia, and I grew up largely on the Kentucky West Virginia border. So it's coal mining country. Mingo County, West Virginia, and Pike County, Kentucky, which straddle that border essentially the same town exists on both sides of it with North and South in their names and that's where I grew up. That's where I spent my formative years where I went to elementary school and and part of junior high and, that's where I that's where I started my education, of course, [2:00] that you know daycare, preschool, kindergarten, through 5th and 6th, and I went to public school for the most part, although I also went for a couple of years to private Catholic school. There I think my parents were trying to figure out what education in the United States looked like, and how to get us the best quality education, me and my sister, that they could.

They were unfamiliar with the systems and structures in many ways of parenting in the United States, and of education in the United States, and so a lot of it was sort of trial and error. But we grew up there for the most part, and then around the time I was in 7th grade we moved I think, largely for educational reasons, and moved to Charleston, West Virginia, for a couple of years as a sort of stopping point to figure out what was going to come next. [3:00] In Charleston I went to private Catholic school and had a great experience there. But like I said, it was a sort of holding place until we could figure out what the next step was going to be, and I remember that my parents researched a lot. I remember that time period was one in which they were sort of trying to map the country and figure out where? Where would their kids benefit the most from educational experiences? And we ended up moving to Northern Virginia, which is a suburb of Washington, DC. And that was in 10th grade. And so I spent 10th, 11th, and 12th in Northern Virginia, and went to a private girls school called Madeira there, and that was my introduction in many ways to college. Coming in the future and preparing for college, thinking about college and sort of starting to take AP classes [4:00] and getting into the mindset of you know, when I leave home in a few years I'm going to be going to a university. And what does that look like, and what do I want it to look like? So those were important developmental years along the path to getting to Brown.

AK: So was it. Were you operating under the assumption that you would be going to university at some point, that was always kind of part of the plan?

PD: It was. Yeah, it was. I think it was largely my parents' plan. I didn't have a lot of thoughts about that. I certainly didn't intend otherwise I didn't have a clear plan in mind. I just hadn't been exposed to that much in my childhood, and so it wasn't. You know, I wasn't surrounded by lots of talk of college preparation prior to moving to Northern Virginia. And so but my parents had gone to college in their lives, and you know my dad's a doctor, [5:00] that you know, they'd received educations in college and beyond, and I think fully expected that of their children. And so, yeah, so once I got to high school, was excited to sort of think about that, and to sort of imagine what I might want out of that. And my parents, while they did have a clear vision that I would go to college, were not particularly demanding about what paths I might pursue, or what interests I might, you know, want to jump into, or where I would go to college.

AK: Do you remember how you heard about Brown? And what appealed to you about Brown.

PD: Yeah. Where I went to high school, you know, was those last few years was a place where all of the country's top universities were talked about regularly, [6:00] and the classes ahead of me that I watched sort of go off to college, you know there were people who would go to Ivy League Universities, and so I learned about a number of them. And then, you know, sort of taking tours and doing all of that was part of the normal practice there and again I was sort of you know. It was all new to me, it was all something I was sort of like, "Oh, this is a thing people do." And, but through that I you know, I learned a lot about all the different sort of universities, and also did take the tours, and you know we went. We did the sort of East Coast tour, circuit, and I and I looked at lots of different places. And I was just sort of magnetically drawn to Brown from the minute I heard about it. For a lot of reasons which I'm happy to talk about. But I just had this feeling that it was going to be a place where I could find my people [7:00] and feel comfortable. And you know again. I'll talk more about this, but I couldn't have been more right. I don't know what instinct had taken hold, but it was a really good one. And so I was just really, really drawn to it, and I and I intended to apply early. I did apply early. I got in early, and I was just sort of this is what I'm doing. I'm going to this university. I'm sort of obsessed with it, and that all worked out really beautifully.

AK: I love that. Can you— what are some of your first memories of your time on campus?

PD: Yeah. So, I loved Brown so much. And I was really, you know, as I mentioned, so kind of eager to be there for the reasons that one might see on paper, right, the way the curriculum structured the sort of diversity of the student body, the kind of cutting edge, thinking of many of the faculty [8:00] and sort of programs. And all of that was true. And also I just had this innate sense that I would, I would find people that understood me, or that I could be myself around, or that I would learn from in a way that felt important to me. And so when I got to campus, I remember being really overwhelmed, you know, despite having at that point spent a few years in— close to a big city— and in a place where lots of people were going off to college and it was sort of that environment. I had spent the bulk of my life in a very different kind of place than that. And I didn't have a lot of the sort of social fluidity around culture and norms that a lot of

people did. And so I remember getting there. And you know, everyone was talking about like the city, and I had no idea, like I just didn't know what they were talking about. Like in my experience the city was like Pittsburgh, and so, [9:00] you know, they were all I learned later, all talking about New York City. But I remember being like, "Oh, that's weird. Why are they assuming that's like the only city?" And then there's sort of the tri-state region, which is another thing, and there was just like one that many people were talking about, and it was like the Connecticut, New York, New Jersey. And again, that was just not my tri-state region. It was like Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, and so you know, those sorts of differences were like things I didn't even know about. There were things that it sort of revealed about myself that I didn't even know about norms that I understood to be true, and ways in which I could be challenged, that I hadn't expected, and that was really interesting and great, because it wasn't exclusive. It wasn't a feeling of like, "Oh, I can never be part of this. I don't even know what they're talking about." It was more like, "Oh, there's all this cultural learning I can do about things people are talking about that I don't know anything about." And I ended up becoming really good friends with everyone in my unit, [10:00] early and in fact, you know, we've all been on an email thread planning for our 25th reunion. Now, still, so yeah, getting to campus was sort of like this, a little bit of culture shock in that way. And also this incredible experience of meeting people that I'm, you know, at age 47, still friends with, and that, I think, reflects something about the sort of innate, immediate camaraderie that we all felt and experienced in our time together there.

AK: Do you have any high point and low point memories? Like, if someone were to just kind of stop you and start talking about Brown? What are some of those highlight memories, polaroid pictures that come up in your mind of your time on campus?

PD: Yeah, my freshman dorm was Perkins, which is sort of you know, if you're familiar with the landscape of dorms at Brown, it's farther out from campus than some of the other ones, and so it's a little more [11:00] secluded, which in many ways made us all a little closer. I think. Like we were just kind of like off on our own in the on the edge of campus and so I have this snapshot of like a Perkins being, you know, kind of over there, and we were all together in it, and like would get together for like the long walk to campus. And so that's a definite snapshot,

is of my freshman dorm. Other snapshots are, let's see. Oh, my gosh. I have so many. They're all coming to me so fast. We did a lot of late nights at the snack bar. I think it's called Joe's. Josiah's the snack bar where you could get gummy bears at night. And so I have a snapshot of that, [12:00] that was right under New Dorm. I have a snapshot of that, and of lots of late night candy, spring weekend with incredible performers, and like laying on the grass with my friends in the sun. I have lots of snapshots of like my brain being totally broken open in the best ways in classrooms. Where I just my— the entire frameworks of how I thought about the universe, and everything I knew about it were just broken, wide open and reshaped. And so that's for me that is like the central defining thing of my academic experience and sort of intellectual experience at Brown.

AK: How did you decide on your concentration? Did you know going in, what you were interested in, or how did you land there?

PD: No, I didn't. And one of the things I was so drawn to about Brown was the fact [13:00] that I didn't have to know, and I didn't have to be confined or constrained, and could really experiment with different things. You know, as I said, my parents were not— despite being immigrants from India— and you know many of the ones in my family, my cousin's parents, for example, across the board, are much stricter than mine. They were really open to us, kind of finding our own paths, and you know, doing what we wanted to do. That would make us the happiest. And so I was really, you know, it was like a blank slate. I could sort of really dig in on whatever was appealing to me. I knew that I wanted to do something that would change people's lives for the better in some way, and I don't say that in a big grandiose way, I just wanted to do work that would actually materially help people. And I knew that. But I didn't know what that looked like at all. There's so many, there's a million ways [14:00] in which one could help people make their lives better in this world. I knew that I sort of vaguely wanted to work around issues or think about issues around social justice. But again, didn't have a really clear sense of what any of that meant, or what it could look like in practice. And so I took a lot of different classes across this sort of humanities spectrum, you know. I took history classes, anthropology classes. I sort of did a variety of things. And you know, as I was saying earlier, Brown is a place that gave me the tools to have— like to analyze the world. I had obviously had

a number of experiences that shaped me growing up. I had grown up in this place that was marginalized and rural and complicated. I grew up the child of immigrants. There were lots of experiences that I'd been grappling with in my own ways and thinking through and processing and [15:00] trying to understand and make sense of as I grew up. And Brown is the place where I 1st learned language and frameworks to understand all of those things, and that's, you know, frankly, in life for me that was revolutionary. That was a game changer. It helped me understand that for example, the town I grew up in, you know, wasn't the way it was by accident or by nature, right, but as a result of policy choices that were made to put roads in certain places or not to invest in the economy or not to, you know the list goes on, to support people who actually live there or not. And so, having that sort of like shield broken, being able to see behind that curtain is something I learned at Brown, learned early at Brown, right? It's the way that sort of critical thinking was embedded into sort of every different [16:00] discipline that I experienced there. And I mean, I just really, I'm getting chills thinking about like I really can't be more grateful for that experience, because it allowed me then to take my own experiences, my own background, and figure out how those could shape and develop my ability to engage in the world, as I grew up even more. And as I went out into it as an adult, and so, through the course of that sort of learning, learning of myself, learning my own experiences and being able to translate that into words that other people could understand, I ended up focusing on history and African American studies. And the way that I did, that was sort of not to just kind of sign up for the most popular classes in both of those but rather really like, took the reins based on the tools I was being given in all of my classes at [17:00] Brown, and through the curriculum being open and sort of structured my own concentration. And so in history, I ended up really focusing on comparative post-colonial histories. As I was really digging into my parents experience, my family's experience, my experience as a 1st generation American. I— you know, another sort of shield that was broken, or framework that was given to me was that of post-colonial analysis and understanding. I remember I took a class called the Political Economy of Development, which I still have the textbook because it was so formative for me, you know, just upending entirely the idea of charitable aid. And which, of course, is good in many ways. But it's, you know, it's sort of grounded in this framework that's about colonialism. And I, you know it showed a light on all kinds of things for me. So I focused on African history, Caribbean history [18:00] and South Asian history, and tried to find patterns and

intersections and to understand the role primarily of the British, but also of other European countries in shaping the world as we know it now. And being able to connect those dots and to sort of spend that time really digging into those histories was not only like a beautiful ability to learn history, but also again gave me tools to understand so many other things, because, of course, all of these frameworks are intersecting. And then I also focused on African American studies which intersected in many ways with history, because I was doing African history and Caribbean history, but also really wanted to understand critical race theory and some of the other sort of policy and philosophy and literature frameworks through which we could understand better American history and the experience of race in it. And so that was a really beautiful complement to the sort of global histories that I was understanding [19:00] through the history department. So yeah, so that's how I ended up sort of focusing on those 2 concentrations and I just feel like the luckiest person in the world to have been able to do that. It was really cool.

AK: What are some of your memories of graduation day or graduation time?

PD: Yeah, very joyful, but also sad. I was really sad to leave Brown. I, at that point, I knew that I was going to be going to law school in the fall, and I understood that would be a really different experience in many ways than the sort of hungry learning I was able to do about all of these different things and also this sort of like intense kind of support around critical thinking that I was able to get at Brown, where I was being challenged all the time in ways that I was so grateful for. [20:00] And so I mourned that a little bit, but it was really wonderful and joyful, and I'd made so many good friends at Brown and and reunion graduation weekend is just such a uniquely celebratory and lovely experience on campus. And so, yeah, very joyful memories of that.

AK: So when did you decide that law school, when and how did you decide that law school was the next right step?

PD: Yeah, I still not sure it was the right next step. [Laughs] But I'm joking in part. I've had a great career. But I spent the summer between my junior and senior year of college in New

York, as an intern at a public defender's office as a sort of college level intern doing investigative support, so helping lawyers investigate cases which involved speaking with family members, and, you know, helping with interviews of witnesses and going to the supposed scenes [21:00] where things had happened, and taking pictures and that sort of that sort of thing. And I— it was, you know, it was a very cool internship to have. I was out in the world, and I was doing all these exciting things, but also it, you know, for me, was the 1st time that I was introduced to a concrete role through which one could actively be helping people who are suffering, and could also be simultaneously kind of pushing back against systems that felt racist and oppressive and harmful. And so it felt like this incredible combination of sort of big picture challenge and also like a micro level, actually making people's lives potentially better on a day to day basis while doing very cool, stimulating work. And so I really couldn't imagine anything better than that job. I was like, this is [22:00] like, I want to be a public defender. This is what I want to do. It kind of meets all of the things I have in mind for how to sort of engage with the world. The early kind of goals and criteria I had around, you know, doing social justice work that made things better for people which was like very broad and open. But really this work for me, focused in on racial justice, on economic justice, and on sort of the addressing what I found then, and still find just sort of mind blowing, in that you know the way we separate families in the United States. And the way we just sort of do that as a matter of practice. And it felt like taking that on, too. And yeah, so that's you know, that was a huge formative experience for me. And sealed the deal for me on wanting to go to law school. [23:00] And so yeah, I applied to law schools, and which I'd sort of, you know, had in my mind as a general thing that maybe I would do, but this was really a confirmatory experience. Yeah, that led me to law school after college.

AK: And you had a nearly 2 decade career as a public defender. If I am correct in that. I don't want to to jump ahead in your story, or timeline too quickly. But what are some takeaways you've had from that experience, high points, low points?

PD: Sure.

AK: Things you've learned?

PD: Yeah. So I was a public defender for almost 15 years in a— in a few different places. And I did that starting right after law school, you know, I spent my law school summers exploring kind of public defense offices and experiences. And then went straight from law school to being a public defender in Washington, DC, [24:00] where I represented people who were charged in local Washington, DC courts. Washington, DC is quasi Federal, so it's a sort of a different kind of system than it is in many other local places. But I started out representing children in Delinquency Court, some of whom were very young and that was incredibly jarring and challenging work. But I also can't really imagine anything more important. And yeah, I mean, I have memories of very young children being arrested and brought into court and held in cell blocks and in detention centers, you know, almost entirely black, sometimes brown. I think I could count on one hand, probably the number of white clients I had in my [25:00] time as a public defender in DC. And so it's, you know, it's— that's just a very real and pervasive part of what the criminal legal system does. But you know, child after child after child coming in with distraught mothers or family members crying in the hallway. I mean, it's just it's really— it leaves an indelible mark on anyone that sees it, much less on the people who are actually experiencing it. So that is a really vivid memory. I then continued on in that office and in my career there, representing adults charged with all kinds of things from, you know, weapons, offenses to drug offenses, to homicides and sex assault cases, and you know anything you might imagine in between. And I, you know, there are people [26:00] that I represented that I will remember forever. There are conversations I will remember forever. There are tears, I will remember forever. You know. There are lots of lots of sleepless nights. And I think it was really important work. I don't know that I've done anything more important in my career. And you know, yeah, so it was a wonderful place to work in many ways, too, lots of like-minded people, and a wonderful community of colleagues which is pretty critical when you're doing work that's so emotionally draining. But it was a constant reminder that, you know again, policy choices are being made every minute of every day. They are intentional. And we all have to decide what we're doing in response to that and not doing something in response to that is a choice, too. [27:00] And so, I kept at it, and I kept being a public defender. I went from there to the Federal public defender in Maryland, and represented people in Federal court charged with a variety of things. It's a different experience as a lawyer. So I was sort of eager to learn new

things at that stage in my career, and then also served as a defense counsel in the Military Commission for a bit of time. And after that was sort of eager to think about– I'd been representing individual people at that point my entire career, you know, sort of case by case, by case, experience, by experience. And through each one trying to understand that person, their family, their needs, their case, their legal issues, like, you know, and addressing those in that fashion. And, as I mentioned earlier, part of the reason and motivation for doing this work [28:00] was sort of a general sense that the criminal legal system was really unfair in a variety of ways, right, unfair in how it targets certain races, unfair in how it targets people without wealth, unfair in how it sort of is implemented on a day-to-day basis, and unfair, you know, in the bigger picture things of separating families and destabilizing people by incarcerating them, making our communities less safe by incarcerating people, who are going to come home. And so, for all of those reasons, I wanted to really think about how I could potentially use everything I've experienced until that point to do work that might tackle systems as a whole. And so I went from doing individual criminal defense representation to doing sort of broader systemic civil rights litigation.

AK: Can you talk a little bit more about that– [29:00] if you're able to?

PD: Yeah, of course. I– so, I went to a nonprofit and started doing– a civil rights legal nonprofit– and started sort of engaging in litigation work. That tackled largely kind of the the way that the criminal legal system criminalizes poverty. So there are, you know, in addition to probably what most people have likely heard about, which is the money bail system, where people have to often pay money to be able to get released before their trials happen, which is true in many states around the country and is, of course, dependent on having money. So you know, the organization I was with brought challenges to that, but also to a lot of the other sort of parts of the system that often people don't know about, which are the fines and fees that get imposed on people in a variety of parts of the criminal legal system. In many parts of the country people are paying money to be able to have public defenders, who are supposed to not cost money. People are paying [30:00] money to be incarcerated. People are paying money for things they, you know, are experiencing during their incarceration. People are paying money to courts for court fees, driver's licenses get suspended, because people haven't paid their debts,

and so then there's a whole cycle of poverty that gets renewed. So there's a sort of a variety of financial penalties, or sort of punishments that come from not having money, and that grow because your debts accrue as you're experiencing the system. And so we did a lot of work to challenge those kinds of systems around the country. And while I was doing that work, you know I had come from, as you as you now know, years of being kind of in courtrooms representing people, and seeing how criminal law manifested, right, seeing how things played out [31:00] every day in real life in real courtrooms, and I was sort of struck that like in all of this civil rights work that was happening, and we weren't the only ones doing it. There's a number of legal nonprofits that are challenging these systems that are really unfair. There were very few public defenders that were in conversation with people about what was happening, and I found that really strange, you know, public defenders in my experience were quite expert in how things actually happen and what's actually going on in courtrooms, and how the laws actually get interpreted and wielded. And so I tried to sort of, you know, address that while I was doing the work I was doing there. But then found that it was a much more sort of intractable problem, and that public defenders didn't have a lot of extra time beyond their casework. But also there was just sort of these silos, and people didn't even know each other necessarily or know how to reach each other. And so I left that role [32:00] and started a nonprofit project that was aimed at figuring out how to build more bridges between public defenders and people doing organizing, other litigation, advocacy, all kinds of work that was aimed at the criminal legal system and trying to change it for the better. But, you know, folks who weren't in conversation with public defenders, and I thought should be, and similarly, for public defenders who are doing the work they were doing it day in, day out, in courtrooms who could benefit from knowing of all of these sort of reforms that are getting pushed, or sort of big picture changes that are getting, you know, advanced or brainstorming that's happening around what should change. And there was a lot of sort of interchange that I thought should be happening that could be mutually beneficial to everyone. And so I spent the next couple of years really trying to build that out in the hopes of changing the ecosystem a bit, and of strengthening on all fronts the work people were doing [33:00] to have it be more informed by sharing and collaboration.

AK: And is that the Institute to End Mass Incarceration that's at Harvard? Or is this a new— a different project?

PD: So that was the Defender Impact Initiative. And while I was doing that work I was, you know, as I mentioned, really in conversation with a lot of different people who are doing a lot of different sort of thinking and work around these issues. And in the course of that, reconnected with a former public defender colleague who was at that point a professor at Harvard Law School, and that's Andrew Crespo, and he and I just started having conversations about ideas we had about, you know how things could change and work that could be done, and realized that we had a lot of very similar ideas. And Andrew was in the process of trying to start a new institute at Harvard Law School, and through the course of those conversations, sort of drew me in to do that with him, basically, [34:00] and so the two of us launched the Institute on Mass Incarceration at the Law School. I think back in 2021, and have been kind of co-directing it since then, although he remains a professor at the law school as well.

AK: That's fantastic. I don't know if this seems kind of out of the blue, but I'm curious how, if at all, you had found major events impacting this work either legally or otherwise? I mean, you were still in law school, but like 911, like recently, the murder of George Floyd. How are these kind of notable events in United States history, impacting mass incarceration as a whole, and the people, or the work that is needed to kind of dismantle it?

PD: Yeah. Great question. I think that, [35:00] you know, the boom of prisons in our country, you know, isn't some sort of centuries old thing right? Like the vast number of prisons and jails that we have now really started getting built in the 80s, and you know, and that's just not that long ago, it's during my lifetime. And so it's I think many people assume that this is just how it's always been, right? And that's just, you know, just not true at all. And I think in the past several years there have been a lot more people who can see that more clearly. Can see, “Oh, these are actually just choices that we've been making in the last few decades, and they're not permanent,” you know. It doesn't have to be this way. And of course the murder of George Floyd and of many other people in the last several years [36:00] has I think sparked that kind of thinking and new learning and activation for a lot of people who are wondering why? “Why are

things this way,” and “Who decided that they should be, and we don't agree with this.” And so it's been. It's been incredible to see that, you know, in many ways like my experience at Brown, of sort of being introduced to these kind of game changing frameworks and a game changing analysis around critical thinking and around sort of not accepting everything that I'm being told as just like— that's just the way it is— I think, has been awakened in many, many people, and that has been incredible to watch happen. I think it's galvanized a lot of action and momentum and a lot of desire for change. I think there are, in the past several years, certainly, you know, whenever [37:00] I go speak to anyone anywhere, I'm generally faced with like, “yes, yes, it's bad and what do I do?” Right? Like people are kind of almost past the point in many ways of acknowledging that there's a problem and are eager to figure out how they can plug in, which is incredible, right? That's like a real shift and I think it's really worth sort of, you know, all of us remembering and noting that. So I'm glad you asked the question. I think it's— we often are just sort of looking forward and forget how far we've come. So this past year I edited an anthology with two of my friends, and now co-authors, James Foreman, Jr. And Maria Hawillo. For this reason, in part right. We are all people who are, you know, teaching in part and being out in the world and speaking to people about these issues, and consistently, are just getting questions about what to do or like, “How do I get involved? How can I do something meaningful about this?” [38:00] And so we put together this anthology with the hope of sort of giving people kind of a tour in many ways of the criminal legal system, and not just of the system itself, not just this is what the system is, but within each segment of the system and this is what people are doing and thinking about what can be done to make change and sort of the real goal there was to sort of give people ideas about where they might be able to plug in, or what they might feel attracted to as a sort of area that they really wanted to work on in an effort to address that what we see as like a real growing desire to do something.

AK: That's so interesting. What is some advice that you would give to somebody, a student at Brown who's thinking of going on to become a public defender or do work around mass incarceration, what's some advice you would give them?

PD: That is a really great question. So I would say that [39:00] the things that jump out at me as being the most sort of formative are, you know, some of them are about the specifics of kind, of

the criminal legal system and the experience of law, and all of that. But a lot of it is not, right? So a lot of it is just about like, “oh, you know, the media is not what I thought it was.” And so just even how you're understanding the world and then you take those tools and you, if you're really interested in public defense or racial justice, or using the law as a tool like then you apply that framework to the thing that you're interested in. But it's the framework and the sort of big picture thing that for me, Brown was so, you know, incredibly transformative in providing. And so I would say, take MCM classes, take modern culture and media classes like those were just like the intro to critical thinking, this sort of upending of the world, as you know, it is just foundational for being able to go out into the world and then plug in in a variety of ways. So for me, that department, [40:00] even though I didn't concentrate in it, I did take a number of classes and became friends with many people who were studying that, and it just changed my entire way of understanding the world around me. So I would say, I would say, take MCM classes, and I'd say, challenge sort of any norms that you might be bringing in about like what history is or should be, or what literature is or should be, and actually just learn what you think is important in the world. And you know, so I didn't take a lot of classes, for example, about European wars with each other like I don't— it just wasn't like— it's just wasn't— you know, a lot of people wanted to learn that. And I didn't. I wanted to learn about other ways in which power had been wielded in the world, and power had been created. And so I think there's like a real opening at Brown that is unique to be able to pursue the things that *you* want to learn [41:00] because you can trust your gut in many ways and know that you actually, you know, whatever kernels are developing in there actually can be pursued and can flourish at Brown, which is a unique experience and opportunity, and one that I would take advantage of. And then I would say, the practical experience of finding an internship or an experience, whether it's in Providence during time there, or over a summer like I had it like just is unparalleled, because you are sort of in it and seeing things and then able to take those experiences and try to process and understand them, and then help that, you know, have that drive your choices in the future. So that combination of things, I think, is— takes advantage of the unique space that Brown creates for learning and combines it with some practical experience in the world.

AK: So with the time we have left. Are there any other memories [42:00] or thoughts about your time at Brown, your life, personal or professional, that you want to share for the historical record before we close today.

PD: Oh, well, I want to thank you so much for this. What a great opportunity to reflect on my time there, especially at this moment when I'm about to come back up. You know. I started off by talking about some experiences of people who were talking were sort of had different cultural norms than I did, and I think I just wanted to sort of return to that for a moment and flush it out a little bit more, and to say that that was sort of a subset of people that I it's it stuck with me because it was new to me. But as I began to understand, like, "Oh, there are people who lived in New York City" which I hadn't actually fully realized. People lived in New York City like I thought it was like— I thought it was like a vacation place like I didn't know, anyway, so new to me. [Laughs] [43:00] But in the course of that I also— it helped open me up to meeting all kinds of people. Even, you know, people who might be different from me in many ways, and that was such a cool thing that I was able to do at Brown the way that Brown celebrated students of color and named that was another way in which, for example, I felt like this "Wow! Oh, this is like this is like a thing that can be named and celebrated and explored, and you can have community." And that just wasn't a thing that I'd had before and it gave a lot of language and again framework to sort of my place in the world, and that was incredible. And you know, I also, of course, met people who were interested in the same intellectual pursuits I was who wanted to watch post-colonial African films with me, who, you know, all sort of all of these different experiences. And I was really, you know, something about arriving at Brown was [44:00] a really encouraging in that I felt like I could have a place there that allowed me to be open to meeting all of these people and to learning from them. And not to say it was all rosy or perfect, right, like everyone's still 18 or 19, and struggling with a variety of things, including me. But I truly feel like I met the most incredible range of people from whom I learned so much. And there's something about the structure of entry into Brown and the ways in which there are names given to experiences and communities constructed, but not in a sort of confining way that really allow for that for someone like me who was unsure of how to name my own experiences, and also where I fit into the broader experiences of other people and that was really both liberating and affirming and empowering, [45:00] and has just been a formative

part of my ability to go into the world and then sort of decide what I wanted to do and pursue those things, you know, at every step. As I described my career, I was sort of taking in things and being like, “Oh, there's something missing or like, oh, this is why I'm doing this, or this is, I should do this instead,” and all of that comes from sort of having been empowered at a younger age to make those decisions and to know that it was okay to explore new things. And I just a lot of that really is something I got at Brown. So yeah, so I hope that people who are there and coming there, and years to come can take advantage in the same way that I did, of all the opportunities that there are to become a sort of person who can see the world for what it is and find a place in it.

AK: That's fantastic. Thank you so much for your time today. [46:00] Taking the time to reflect on your 25th reunion. I'm so excited you'll be able to physically come back to campus. Just thank you.

PD: Thank you so much. I really appreciate this opportunity.

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