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### Oral History Interview with Dejeuné Davis

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STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

RACIAL UNREST 2020: EXPERIENCES FROM THE STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY  
COMMUNITY DIGITAL PROJECT

Oral History Interview with  
Dejeuné Davis

Stony Brook University Libraries Digital Projects

Stony Brook University

2021

## PREFACE

The following oral history interview transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Dejeuné Davis conducted by Mona Ramonetti on May 21, 2021. This is a transcription of the spoken word.

This interview is part of the Racial Unrest of 2020: Experiences from the Stony Brook University Community Digital Project, created by the Anti-Racism Task Force of Stony Brook University Libraries.

Transcriptionist: Software and humans working in the Stony Brook University Libraries Digital Lab

Narrator: Dejeuné Davis

Interviewer: Mona Ramonetti

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Pages: 11

[00:00:00] Mona Ramonetti: Okay, here we are. Uh, it is May 21st, 2021. This is Mona Ramonetti interviewing Dejeuné Davis for the Racial Unrest of 2020: Experiences from the Stony Brook University Community Digital Project. First, thank you for spending the time to tell us about your experiences, Dejeuné. Can you tell us how you're affiliated with Stony Brook University?

[00:00:30] Dejeuné Davis: I went to Stony Brook University for three years and I just graduated last Wednesday.

[00:00:36] Mona Ramonetti: And congratulations again.

[00:00:38] Dejeuné Davis: Thank you.

[00:00:40] Mona Ramonetti: When do you first remember hearing about the murder of George Floyd?

[00:00:47] Dejeuné Davis: The first time I heard about the murder of George Floyd was I wanna say last year. May? I believe it was in May. Um, yes.

[00:01:05] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. What was your initial reaction to hearing about and/or viewing George Floyd's death on television, internet, or social media?

[00:01:17] Dejeuné Davis: Well, I think for the first time I saw it on social media, specifically on Twitter, and it really felt like another one, and it was hard to feel like there would be any justice to come out of it because we've seen such cases so many times over and over again. So I would definitely say I felt hurt. Um, it just felt like a slap in the face that this happened again.

[00:01:47] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. Uh, did you seek out any communication with anyone from Stony Brook University during this time?

[00:01:56] Dejeuné Davis: I spoke to a lot of my classmates and my peers and friends that graduated from Stony Brook.

[00:02:04] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. And were these, um, folks that you were friendly with, or you had classes with? Um, were they instructors, graduate students, um, students from different clubs. Uh, were they all of African descent or, uh, give me a, give me a snapshot of, uh, of the folks you spoke with.

[00:02:27] Dejeuné Davis: Okay. Um, all of, all of the people I've spoke to, they were African-American or of African descent. Um, a lot of them they, they were students that I were in class with, or either in clubs - I'm currently in the club Heritage - so I've spoke to some of them. Um, also, like I said, that my classmates, my peers, which a lot of them, if I didn't have class with them, they either, I had class with them previously. Yes.

[00:03:00] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. So what was it about the George Floyd murder? That - I mean, actually, you don't need to say this. In the past, did you speak to your, your, um, these folks that you just, that you mentioned, um, when other murders had taken place or was there something specific about the George Floyd murder that sort of pushed you into communicating with folks regarding this particular thing?

[00:03:30] Dejeuné Davis: So prior to George Floyd, whenever there were other situations that were similar, I would either speak to my parents or, um, different people outside of school. I would usually speak to different people outside of the school, like family about these kinds of situations. Um, and they, like I said before, most of the people they were of African descent or African-American themselves. So, yes.

[00:03:55] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. Many who witnessed this murder described it as a pivotal moment in American history. Do you agree or disagree with that sentiment?

[00:04:08] Dejeuné Davis: Hmm, I don't know if I would say it was a pivotal moment because I would say, um, Trayvon Martin was a pivotal moment for America. And I say that because at the time we had president Obama and it was like, we have a Black president and we are still witnessing Black people being murdered.

[00:04:36] And, um, so when I saw George Floyd, I knew that - well over the years, I would say, I knew that not much has changed, but it was just like another way to say it. Not much has changed.

[00:04:50] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. Do you still believe that today? Um, in terms of George Floyd, George Floyd's murder, that it was just another one. Or was there, uh, I mean, what I'm trying to get to is, with Trayvon Martin and the others that were killed, that were murdered the outcry was not at the level of what we saw last, last summer—

[00:05:25] Dejeuné Davis: Right.

[00:05:25] Mona Ramonetti: —and the months that followed. And I think that's what folks are getting at that there was something about this particular murder that was, uh, that was pivotal in, in the race relations in the country. Do, do you, are you of that opinion or do you think this was just another one on the list.

[00:05:46] Dejeuné Davis: Um, I'm in between. And I say that because I grew up in Harlem. And for most of my life, the discussion of race has always been a thing. And when situations like this come up, it's always been a discussion because being a young Black kid that lives in Harlem, it's kind of hard to just ignore conversations like this. Because oftentimes you do see, um, people that look like you being killed. Whether it's amongst their own community or, um, outside. So I would say that in some aspects, yes, there was a bigger pour of support and, um, fighting to get this seen. And I will also say that social media, the way that it has grown, it made it easier for people to know about what happened.

So where as for George Floyd, it was hard for people to say, I don't know, because the information is readily available and it's in our face. Where as with, um, Trayvon Martin, it wasn't as available. Where it was easier to say you don't know because either you didn't watch the television or you saw something on a newspaper that - it pretty much tried to make him seem like he was a thug or he was this monster. Whereas the day and age that we have now with social media, people are allowed to tell their own story and make a better story for people that can't speak up for themselves any longer.

[00:07:21] Mona Ramonetti: Right. I want to circle back to my question regarding, uh, your reaching out to folks from, folks affiliated with Stony Brook University. Outside of the folks that you spoke with and you said they were mostly, or if not, all of African descent or African-American—

[00:07:43] Dejeuné Davis: Yes.

[00:07:44] Mona Ramonetti: —have you had conversations with individuals that were not part of the groups that you indicated? Meaning, um, Caucasian, Asian, um, you know, just to hear what, uh, their, their perceptions were as well. Have you, did you have an opportunity to do so?

[00:08:04] Dejeuné Davis: No, I actually did not because during this time a lot of things that was happening was virtual and I was home. So it was really hard to connect with people outside of the group that I was already in.

[00:08:16] Mona Ramonetti: I see. Okay. And do you think if you were on campus that maybe it would have allowed you that opportunity to speak, uh, with folks from

other groups as well, or is this something that is a conversation that you usually just have with people of African or African-American descent?

[00:08:38] Dejeuné Davis: I definitely think that if I was on campus, I would have had this discussion with people outside of just African-American or African descent. Um—

[00:08:50] Mona Ramonetti: Do you typically have—I actually, I shouldn't say typically, do you have such conversations on campus with folks outside of, of, of the groups that you indicated?

[00:09:01] Dejeuné Davis: Usually no, because if it's not outside of the classroom, it's usually like, well, this is not discussed. And I feel like a lot of the times as well, that other groups may not understand in the same depth that African-Americans or Caribbean people or African people would understand.

[00:09:23] Mona Ramonetti: I see. What good do you hope will come from the, from the events surrounding George Floyd's murder?

[00:09:33] Dejeuné Davis: I really hope that people will be more aware. I also hope that there will be more reforms. Um, I truly hope that the people that are put out to protect and serve, they will protect and serve. And that there will be equal treatment amongst all groups of people. Yeah.

[00:09:56] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. Have you been actively involved with any anti-racism activism like Black Lives Matter, civil rights movements, and, and/or protests?

[00:10:10] Dejeuné Davis: No, I haven't.

[00:10:12] Mona Ramonetti: What does Black Lives Matter mean to you?

[00:10:18] Dejeuné Davis: Black Lives Matters means to me that, Black people should have this same opportunity as anyone else. Black Lives Matter does not mean that it's only Black people's lives that matter, it means that Black people should be heard. They should be seen. They shouldn't be silenced. And we should have the same laws, rights, um, anything that any other group of people should have, um, yes.

[00:11:05] Mona Ramonetti: I'm going to circle back to my question regarding when you first, uh, heard or viewed George Floyd's death, um, on, um, uh, May 25th. Did you, I mean, a lot of folks felt this pit of fear. Um, they felt anger. Some, some felt indifference, like, you know, because this is just another one on the list. Um, but a lot of people felt this fear. Uh, was this something that you experienced yourself?

[00:11:47] Dejeuné Davis: I would definitely say I did experience, um fear. But I would say I mainly experienced it during the time of the trial. Because it just felt like I know there was a lot of, um, media and a lot of attention. But I felt like there were other cases where there was media and attention and it just didn't go well, where there's been plenty of evidence to show that, um, there was wrongful doing and that never mattered. That the case always went against the victim. Um, I also felt fear for my father, for my brothers, because they look like George Floyd. And there's nothing I can do, but hope and pray that they will be okay.

[00:12:48] Mona Ramonetti: Is this a feeling that you—and and stop me if this is too personal a question—is this something that you feel on a regular basis or was this something that the incident of George Floyd's murder brought forth these feelings?

[00:13:06] Dejeuné Davis: I can say I felt that for a long time. I think the hardest I've ever felt that was during Sandra Bland's case because it hit home really. Because it's like, this is a Black woman, so it's not only affecting the men, it's affecting the women too.

[00:13:29] Mona Ramonetti: Do you think that, that this, this fear that you experience, and many of us experience, is this something that is, um, did you experience frequently or just at different points in your life?

[00:13:50] Dejeuné Davis: I would say at different points in my life. Um, mainly because I don't think every day is a bad day and I know that not every encounter I have with police per se is going to be a negative one. And I know that I can't um, put everyone in the same ball because everyone is not the same. So even though sometimes I do fear, I have to remind myself that not everyone is against Black people. Not everyone is against people in general. So yeah.

[00:14:32] Mona Ramonetti: Have you or someone, you know, been the victim of racial discrimination?

[00:14:38] Dejeuné Davis: Yes. I do know many people that have been victims of racial discrimination.

[00:14:46] Mona Ramonetti: And what was that like? For you?

[00:14:50] Dejeuné Davis: Um, it's hard to see. It's hard to hear, especially when it's a loved one, because it's really like, what do you do? Do you speak up? Do you stay silent? If you do speak up, what's going to happen? What's the consequences? If you're silent, how is that going to make them feel? How's it going to make you feel?

[00:15:15] Mona Ramonetti: Right. And yeah, the, the idea that it's almost like a catch-22.



[00:15:23] Dejeuné Davis: Yes.

[00:15:24] Mona Ramonetti: And, um, it's, uh, Can you expand on that actually? I just said the catch-22.

[00:15:33] Dejeuné Davis: Okay. Um, for the catch-22, it's like, if you say something you could possibly be putting that person in jeopardy, you could be putting yourself in jeopardy. It can also be seen as selfish, but if you don't say anything in that moment, you don't know how the person is feeling inside. You also don't know how you'll regret it later on. Um. There's just so much feelings that you can feel. The question, the catch-22, is just there's so many things behind it. Um, it's hard to like just put, you know, a specific, uh, I don't know, how do I say this? Just, you know, to identify specific things that is going to make you feel or other people feel. Yes.

[00:16:32] Mona Ramonetti: Right. Right. Uh, what do you think of some of Stony Brook University's response, um, and commitment to anti-racism and the Black Lives Matter?

[00:16:47] Dejeuné Davis: I would definitely say I was disappointed. Um, in the first delay of response. I feel like, um, when everything started to happen with George Floyd, and a lot of the protests, Stony Brook was very silent. But at the same time, I was getting emails about Shop West and it was like, this is very insensitive that I can get emails from Stony Brook to show me about the bookstore is having a sale, but I'm not hearing anything about what's going on in the world. There's nothing that makes me feel reassured. There's nothing that is showing me support. So I was definitely disappointed.

[00:17:29] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. Um, and when there was a response, so, uh, what was your reaction? Was it a "whew," or something completely different?

[00:17:43] Dejeuné Davis: I, I wasn't sure how to react. I didn't want to say it was like a thing to shut us up because I don't think that was the intentions. But I also felt like, because it took them so long, it was hard to just find it genuine.

[00:18:04] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. So when you say shut us up, what do you mean by that?

[00:18:10] Dejeuné Davis: Um, I noticed a lot of the times, either on Twitter, or on Instagram, a lot of people would comment and say like, "Why isn't Stony Brook talking about these issues?" And I noticed that a lot. I think this went on for three to four weeks and then eventually the response came and it was like, is this response coming because students are asking you questions or is this response coming because this is how you really feel?

[00:18:38] Mona Ramonetti: I see. And, and what's your indication of that, your, your own personal position on that?

[00:18:46] Dejeuné Davis: What do you mean?

[00:18:48] Mona Ramonetti: Uh, were they trying to shut you up or was this a genuine response, or a little bit of Column A, a little bit Column B, or something completely different?

[00:18:56] Dejeuné Davis: Um, I really felt like a mixture of both. Like maybe the intentions was to show support. But at the same time, because it took so long, it was hard to not look at it like, well, maybe they want us to be quiet so that they can say they did make a response now. But I really tried to tell myself, like, you know, that's not what Stony's about. After the initial reaction, like this was something that they really wanted to do, even though they took awhile, if they didn't want to post anything at all, they would not have.

[00:19:37] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. Did you attend any of the town halls that were organized around these events? Uh, well, this particular event, I should say.

[00:19:48] Dejeuné Davis: No, I wasn't able to cause I had Corona myself, so I wasn't able to leave the house.

[00:19:53] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. So is it something that is still, uh, talked about a lot amongst you and your, your, uh, colleagues, friends, associates, or is this, uh, or have we moved on from this? Or have you moved on from this I should I say, I should say?

[00:20:17] Dejeuné Davis: I wouldn't say myself or any of my peers have moved on completely, but I would say because this has happened so often, and because a lot of this has made us so disens-, uh, desensitized, it's not something we talk about as often as we did talk about it in the beginning.

[00:20:44] Mona Ramonetti: So you think a number of folks are desensitized to something like this?

[00:20:49] Dejeuné Davis: Yes. I definitely feel that.

[00:20:54] Mona Ramonetti: Uh what folks? Can you identify some folks? I mean, are we talking just the American population? Or are we talking a specific, uh, set of the population?

[00:21:05] Dejeuné Davis: I would say Black people specifically. I definitely think that we are desensitized, especially Black Americans. Um, I know that there's a lot of

these injustices going on in other countries as well, but because there's such a distance, there's hard to find out specifically, specifically what's going on in other countries.

[00:21:29] Mona Ramonetti: Do you see yourself? Do you think of yourself as being desensitized on some level?

[00:21:34] Dejeuné Davis: Yes. I think a lot of things that I should be enraged about, I'm not.

[00:21:41] Mona Ramonetti: Such as?

[00:21:43] Dejeuné Davis: Um, such as the many times where, um, the verdict was not guilty for cases. Where I should have been upset, I should have been sad, I should have been disappointed, it was like I saw this coming. Or another example would be after the George Floyd's case when they had the police officer, um, indicted, I remember that morning my mom was like, "There's going to be justice." And I was like, "Well, I don't know about that." And, um, my father agreed with me as well. And when the case came back that the police officer was charged, I still said like, "Well that happened, but I don't know what's going to happen next. What if they make an appeal or, um, he doesn't get a lot of time?"

[00:22:46] Mona Ramonetti: So, how do you feel about the verdict that was handed down?

[00:22:54] Dejeuné Davis: Honestly, I'm not sure. I feel like I should be happy, I guess, but I just don't know how to feel. Because what's going to happen next? Is this going to be just something that goes quiet later on? Um, like I said, is there going to be an appeal? And then the next time he's allowed to walk free? Is there how much accountability will there actually be? Um, I don't know. I just don't know.

[00:23:35] Mona Ramonetti: Right. I remember watching, uh, the guilty verdict being handed down and the response throughout the nation on TV, and it was subdued. And, um, I mean, I can just remember when, when Biden was inaugurated, and it was just, you know, you felt this joy.

[00:23:58] Dejeuné Davis: Yes.

[00:24:00] Mona Ramonetti: And I think when, um, the verdict came down for, uh, for Chauvin, I remember thinking, some- it wasn't, I can't say it was it wasn't, there was no elation because a man lost his life. And I, I remember looking at the images on TV and thinking that that's what people were, how they were reacting. It was so subdued, there was respect for human life that—

[00:24:28] Dejeuné Davis: Yes.

[00:24:29] Mona Ramonetti: —that was taken, uh, under just horrific circumstances. And there was, uh, there was humanity. I think that was, we don't see a lot of that. I think the humanity became evident just through, through the various reactions that we saw.

[00:24:50] Dejeuné Davis: Right.

[00:24:51] Mona Ramonetti: And, um, and yeah, I, I understand what you're saying in terms of that. Is it, I mean, actually let me just say this, is this something that resonates with you, what I just said, or is it, or you feel like there, this really is, there isn't, there isn't a lot of hope with this system?

[00:25:15] Dejeuné Davis: I think it's a mixture of both what you said. And the part of me that kind of feels like there's not a lot of hope for the system. Because also not only, yes, this part was guilty, but then we have Ahmaud Arbery. What is that, what's going to happen with that case? Or any other cases to follow that we don't even know about.

[00:25:41] Mona Ramonetti: Right. The list is long.

[00:25:43] Dejeuné Davis: Yes. Okay.

[00:25:47] Mona Ramonetti: What would you like people to know about this time in your life, and what you experienced?

[00:25:53] Dejeuné Davis: Um, Hm. I would want people to know that, it's okay to not be okay during this time. Um, I would also want people to know to not lose hope, even though it's really easy to. I would also want people to know that it's okay for you to find your own way to seek justice for yourself. Um, protest, if that's what makes you comfortable, um, spreading information, if that's what makes you comfortable, just find something for yourself to make yourself, I guess at peace.

[00:26:51] You don't have to settle. But- I would say don't just act out of anger because it's so easy to do that. Um, but also find what works for you.

[00:27:10] Mona Ramonetti: Do you mind my asking what has worked for you?

[00:27:14] Dejeuné Davis: Um, a lot of what works, what worked for me and what's been working for me is writing and I've also started painting. That's also been a huge outlet for me. So, yes.

[00:27:27] Mona Ramonetti: Have you written about George Floyd's death?

[00:27:32] Dejeuné Davis: I have not written anything on paper, but in terms of like messages that I've sent my friends, that's definitely been where I wrote, where I wrote a lot of impactful things.

[00:27:47] Mona Ramonetti: Well, part of this project also is, um, documenting that aspect.

[00:27:55] Dejeuné Davis: Okay.

[00:27:55] Mona Ramonetti: Uh, the written word, um, it could be a poem, could be a song. It could be an essay, an article. Uh, it could be, you know, just something that, that was inspirational to you or you just needed to, you know, to vent. So if you would like to contribute to that aspect of the project too, um, feel free to reach out to me as well.

[00:28:20] Um—

[00:28:21] Dejeuné Davis: Okay.

[00:28:22] Mona Ramonetti: —again, this project is going to be going into the fall, so, uh, you can reach out to me during the summer, or, you know, whenever the, the mood hits you.

[00:28:31] Dejeuné Davis: That's great, yes.

[00:28:33] Mona Ramonetti: Um, so do you feel like justice has been served now and we can move on? Or, and I know you said, well, you know, he could appeal, but in order for us to move on on some level, uh, is that something that we need to tell ourselves? Or we just, are we still in a waiting pattern? What do you think?

[00:28:59] Dejeuné Davis: Um, I really think it depends on how you look at it. For George Floyd's case specifically, I think we're on the road to justice, that it's not complete yet, but we can get there. It's definitely possible. And I think for many other cases to follow it's definitely possible. Um, I think the biggest thing is to just not let these voices die because they can no longer speak for themselves.

[00:29:30] Mona Ramonetti: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us, um, with regard to this particular topic?

[00:29:38] Dejeuné Davis: Um, I would definitely say during these cases, I've also seen a lot of divide amongst the Black diaspora. And the biggest thing I would say

is, don't forget during this time that we have to stick together, it is so easy to pick, during hard times, um, find reasons to go against each other, but during these times, it's best that we stay together. Later on we can discuss the differences that we see amongst each other, but for now it is very important that we stick together.

[00:30:19] Mona Ramonetti: What do you think is accounting for that?

[00:30:23] Dejeuné Davis: I think a lot of the division can come from divides. And when I say divides, I mean, amongst cultures. A lot of times some cultures are put against each other. They say this is better. Or you guys didn't work for this. You didn't work for that. Or one group has it easier than the other. I think a lot of comparisons is what makes it hard.

[00:30:52] Mona Ramonetti: I see, okay. All right. Well, that's it for my questions. Um, and you have the last few minutes to say whatever you'd like to say. And I think, I mean, if you'd like to add more to that, by all means.

[00:31:07] Dejeuné Davis: Um, I don't know what else.

[00:31:15] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. I think this is pretty good. Um, they were at 32 minutes right now, so what's going to happen now. Um, I am going to stop the recording.

[00:31:24] Dejeuné Davis: Okay.

[00:31:25] Mona Ramonetti: And thanks again, uh—

[00:31:28] Dejeuné Davis: Thank you!

[00:31:29] Mona Ramonetti: —for share, sharing your thoughts on this.

[Recording stops]