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### Oral History Interview with Carol Hernandez

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STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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

Oral History Interview with  
Carol Hernandez

Stony Brook University Libraries Digital Projects

Stony Brook University

2022

## PREFACE

The following oral history interview transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Carol Hernandez conducted by Mona Ramonetti on April 22, 2022. 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: Carol Hernandez  
Interviewer: Mona Ramonetti  
Session Number: One session  
Locations: Stony Brook, NY  
Date: April 22, 2022  
Pages: 9

[00:00:00] Mona Ramonetti: Here we go. Okay. Good morning. It is morning April 20 (talking over each other) [Carol says: Oh, sorry.] It's okay. (Mona laughs) It's okay. It is April 22nd, 2022. This is Mona Ramonetti interviewing Carol Hernandez for the Racial Unrest of 2020: Experiences from the Stony Brook University Community Digital Project. Carol, thank you for spending or taking the time to tell us about your experiences.

[00:00:29] Carol Hernandez: Sure

[00:00:30] Mona Ramonetti: Welcome.

Okay. Can you tell us how you're affiliated with Stony Brook University?

[00:00:36] Carol Hernandez: Yes. I am a Senior Instructional Designer in the Center for Excellence and Learning and Teaching [ed. note: CELT] at Stony Brook.

[00:00:45] Mona Ramonetti: Very good. When do you first remember hearing about the murder of George Floyd?

[00:00:54] Carol Hernandez: I remember hearing about it that weekend. Watching the news. My husband is an editor, so our, the news is on all the time at home. And, and I remember seeing it, seeing it and listening and watching.

[00:01:10] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. What was your initial reaction to hearing about and, or viewing George Floyd's death on television, internet, or social media?

[00:01:23] Carol Hernandez: Yeah, I was horrified and I couldn't believe what I was seeing and I was seeing it over and over and I just felt, so it was so cruel and just so inhuman. And I thought to my, all I could think about with that, that is someone's son that's someone's brother someone's father. That's a human being and it could be my son. It could be my brother. That's all I could think about. And I, I couldn't understand how, the cruelty

[00:02:11] Mona Ramonetti: Did you seek out communication with anyone from Stony Brook University during this time?

[00:02:18] Carol Hernandez: No, I didn't.

[00:02:22] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. Many who witnessed the murder, described it as a pivotal moment in American history. Do you agree or disagree with that sentiment?

I think that it's pivotal. It's a pivotal contemporary moment. Um, I think that it exposes something that's probably going on all the time that we just don't see, and I know in our history, there have been horrific, horrific crimes against people of color, um, Black people, Asian people, Hispanic people. Um, I would say we have a lot of pivotal moments.

This one, I think was incredibly shocking, incredibly disheartening. I felt like my heart was broken open and we had, um, the pandemic had shut us down just about a month before that. So, so we started, we all went into lockdown mid-March um, so we're all trying to work from home and trying to help our children do homeschooling and,

um, you know, in, in my job, we're helping faculty, um, working with students and working with technology and it was really stressful. And I felt like, um, that sort of added to the trauma, it was traumatic on its own, but then knowing that people of color and essential workers and frontline workers and people who had, um, low income or no health insurance were getting the most.

They were, they were being affected the most by the pandemic. It just felt like, um, just everything. It just felt like everything was happening at once.

Yeah. Um, in terms of the events that followed his murder. Do you think that was pivotal or those, those events were pivotal in American history?

[00:05:02] Carol Hernandez: Yes. I would say. It was pivotal because it was also, it uncovered how, how it wasn't a story of interest for some people. Um, for some people, it was just, uh, you know, a holiday weekend, they were not paying attention. And that was shocking to me. Um, you know, being in a meeting and ha and having no conversation about it.

I was, I was shocked and, um, I was still in my doctoral program and immediately the president of that university sent out, uh, a statement and I could see other universities were sending out statements and I thought it was important right away to make a statement. And, um, I was waiting for the leadership. I was waiting for this to be addressed and it was, but it wasn't immediate.

[00:06:06] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. So it took a few days. Yes? If I recall.

[00:06:16] Carol Hernandez: Yeah.

[00:06:16] Mona Ramonetti: For Stony Brook, I mean, what did you think about that? Um, in terms of Stony Brook's response?

[00:06:27] Carol Hernandez: I think it should have been immediate. I think that every leader on campus should have addressed it immediately. There shouldn't have been any meetings where this was not discussed.

I, I, I think the news is something that affects all of us and injustice affects all of us. Um, And to, to just overlook it is incredibly disrespectful. Um, I just felt that so many people were hurting and it was just ignored.

[00:07:09] Mona Ramonetti: Do you think it was ignored or is it that this event was, uh, I guess so stark in nature that, that folks, were not sure how to respond or is it, uh, can you, can you, uh?

[00:07:32] Carol Hernandez: I guess, yeah, so I guess you could say, um, you could say. Perhaps that people needed time to come up with a response. But my feeling, my personal feeling is there should have been an immediate response. This is wrong immediately. There's no need to think about it. To me there's no need to pause. And it was on the news, literally playing constantly the whole weekend.

So. If you turned on the TV, it was on there. If you picked up your cell phone, it was on there. There was no way to get away from it. And, um, unfortunately TV as a medium relies on video on visuals. So if you have video, that story is going to be leading because it's a visual medium. And that is why sometimes you turn on the news and, you know, you see whatever, whatever they have video of, you know, that's why policy stories don't get as much coverage is because there's usually no compelling video that goes with it.

Um, but, but the point is, this was something that should have been addressed should have been discussed immediately. And because it was on the news and it was so easy to access, I feel like there's no excuse, just pick up, you know, your phone and read about it. Um, there was just no excuse. So that was shocking to me.

Um, it was shocking to me. So my background is in journalism and I know that it's sometimes hard to follow the news because it can be very traumatic. But I think you, you know when you need to read something, you know, because everyone's talking about it, so then you need to educate yourself. And we are an institution of higher learning, and that is what we should practice every day.

We should practice learning and being open to new information and challenging our status quo. So I, I feel like if you came into work after that holiday weekend and ask people how their weekend was, like without any acknowledgement of the tragedy that happened, I think then you need to examine your, your leadership.

[00:10:16] Mona Ramonetti: So Carol, is that what you experienced? I'm trying to get a sense of, of, um—

[00:10:24] Carol Hernandez: I remember, yeah. I remember being in, in some meetings and, um, and, and being in, waiting for the acknowledgement and not getting it, not hearing it. And then, you know, saying, saying something and then people would start talking. I don't know if it's something, I don't know. I think that facts are facts and you have to, you have to discuss, especially something that's difficult. It's not going to help anyone to pretend that something didn't happen.

[00:11:03] Mona Ramonetti: When you brought this up in meetings, when you initiated the conversation, I'm just trying to get a sense again, of, of how things played out. Uh, were you the only person of color in the room?

[00:11:18] Carol Hernandez: Um, no, not always. Um, but, but often I think as a person of color, um, you sort of become responsible for having these conversations or, or broaching the subject. Um, and that's an extra burden. Um, and sometimes it's painful. So you might not bring it up because it's painful and sometimes it's better to just go along.

And then once you're offline, have a conversation with someone in your workplace who will understand. And I think that's, it's, it's like we were not able to, to be, um, to acknowledge it in a public setting. We have to go offline to acknowledge it privately.

[00:12:19] Mona Ramonetti: So were you nervous to, to broach the subject in these meetings?

[00:12:25] Carol Hernandez: No, I wasn't nervous. I was a, I was disappointed, but I felt like it had to be, it had to be brought to our attention for our own good.

[00:12:41] Mona Ramonetti: Alright. And when you did that, did conversations ensue or was it just, uh, a perfunctory acknowledgement and then, uh, shifting to discussion of regular business?

[00:12:55] Carol Hernandez: Um, I think, yeah, it opened up the door to talk more about it. So people could say something. Um, and I think that's, you know, that's important, um, because not everyone, obviously not everyone is living the same lived experience. And I understand that. Um, but we, as a university, one of our

goals is to encourage diversity and equity and social justice and all of those things that address inequality in the systems of inequality and that, that news event, that murder highlighted so many systems of inequality.

So again, it's like, there's a lesson there, not just for. Not just for a journalism course, but for, uh, a discussion of leadership, a discussion of, uh, white privilege, white supremacy, power, um, you know, policing, um, just that there was an opportunity to discuss so, so many, many things. So I, you know, I'm glad that we did have those discussions. Um, I would've liked more and I would have liked to see more at, at a higher level.

[00:14:28] Mona Ramonetti: Okay. So when Stony Brook finally did respond, um, what were your thoughts on how the responses were delivered? And, um, the, the followups we had town halls, et cetera, et cetera. What, uh, Can you give me a sense of, was it adequate? Was, what are your thoughts on the follow-up?

[00:14:56] Carol Hernandez: I want to say the follow-up happened over a weekend. Do you remember that? I want to say it came on a Saturday or something. It was something that I, I didn't, I kinda missed it because I don't really check my email over the weekend and, um, I know there were some town halls and I did attend some of them, which I, you know, I think was useful.

Um, but long term, I would say, you know, like, have we made, have we made some changes? Right? Like I that's, what I that's, what I would want to know is like, have we made some measurable changes? Um, Did we see it as an opportunity to grow, uh, to address injustice? Um, you know, I think, I think, yes, I think there were some, some, um, discussions that happened that were useful.

Um, I was also getting a lot of emails from my university where I was doing my doctorate, so I had that ability to compare. Like I was comparing what they were doing and what our institution was doing. And I was, I was seeing like a difference.

[00:16:22] Mona Ramonetti: What was that difference?

[00:16:24] Carol Hernandez: Well, like first, um, that the university where I, where I was in the doctorate, um, they addressed it immediately and they immediately provided services and they immediately said, you know, this is our position. And you know our history is this. And, you know, here are resources and there were immediate, um, workshops and town halls. And, um, but it's a different kind of university which focuses more on, it it does focus more on social justice and the program that I'm in, focuses on social justice. So, so again, it was like a different kind of institution. Um, so, yeah, it's just different.



[00:17:14] Mona Ramonetti: Aside from the social, I'm trying to get a sense of, cause I think we're on something in terms of the comparison and aside from the social justice focus, uh, what were the differences between Stony Brook and, and the university that you were, you were getting your doctorate?

[00:17:31] Carol Hernandez: Right, um, so the university that, where I got my doctorate, they have a center for African-American studies. Um, so they are always putting out workshops and they're always putting out town hall to, so they're always discussing this. And so when it happened, they were able to move very quickly because they already had a lot of programming.

[00:17:55] Mona Ramonetti: What did the leadership demographic look like at that Institute?

[00:18:01] Carol Hernandez: Well, the president is an immigrant. Um, we, you know, the leadership is, at least in the program that I'm in, there are many leader, women leaders, women of color leaders. Um, so that could be a reason.

[00:18:26] Mona Ramonetti: Yeah. Okay. What good do you hope will come from the events surrounding George Floyd's murder?

[00:18:40] Carol Hernandez: Well, I think that as a country, we could just be more open about our history, about power dynamics, about white supremacy. Um, about how, you know, higher education as an institution, benefits from the power dynamics. Um, you know, like full-time tenured faculty are majority white men and you know, when you look at leadership, they tend to be white men and, and we already know this.

Um, I think. We need to take a systemic, look at our institutions and find ways to, to disrupt that. Um, so that is my hope. My hope is that we are, that we just are more critical about what we're doing. Like self-critical, um, and make sure that leadership is measured. Um, by, you know how they are addressing issues of social justice and not just, not just hiring, but addressing it with the current staff.

Right? So for example, I just got an email from my, um, my other university where I was in the doctoral program. And it said, um, that I'm required as a student to take diversity training. And if I'm registered for classes, I'm required to take it. And it's basically saying you have to take it or else you cannot attend class.

And I thought, well, that's interesting. Right? Everybody has to take it. All students have to take it. Um, I know that's an investment and it sends a message and it's, they're saying it's important. Um, so I think you know, that that's something that impressed me, that they're making that a priority.

[00:20:59] Mona Ramonetti: Now you, I'm going to circle back to something you just said about disrupting. (clears throat) Uh, what has been in place for, for so long. Um, can you offer some examples of how some of the disruption can be executed?

[00:21:24] Carol Hernandez: Right. So, so definitely you want to have diverse hiring committees and you want to place your job postings, uh, in places where you will attract diverse candidates. And you want to make sure that you're thinking about the qualification so that you are not narrowing your pool.

So for example, There is a bit of a debate in between the EdD, the Doctor of Education, and the PhD [Doctor of Philosophy]. Um, and so, you know, there is, if you said, you know, um, you know, "must have a PhD," so you're more likely to have, you know, a pool that is mostly white. Um, and maybe you can broaden it. Maybe you can make it you know, masters required doctorate, you know, preferred, like looking at our, our hiring our job postings and then our hiring committees. And then, um, you know, making sure that the language is not, um, perhaps unintentionally biased and then, um, uh, I would say once people are hired having resources for them so that they don't feel isolated or that they don't feel, um, you know, forgotten.

Um, so, so for example, having resource groups, having, um, affinity groups, um, and looking at leadership to see how they're developing the people that they have hired. Right. So, so are they developing people? Are they promoting them? Are they, what are they doing to, to increase their investment in, in hires? Because often, um, if you are at a majority white institution, right?

A primarily white institution and you are a person of color, um, you know, If you don't feel supported or heard or seen, um, you might not stay. So, so are we looking at the numbers as far as like who's leaving and why? Are we doing exit interviews? Um, you know, so all of those things might, might help, might give us some, some data to, to then put in, in some different approaches that could then make a change.

[00:24:08] Mona Ramonetti: Thank you. What would you like people to know about this time in your life and what you experienced?

[00:24:20] Carol Hernandez: Um, I mean, me personally, I was working from home and, uh, feeling the stress and the fear that I think all of us were feeling and, and realizing that people of color were become, were impacted more than others, um, because of income and, you know, access to transportation or healthcare, or, you know, access to paid time off.

Um, and our students were impacted. Um, and it was just a terrible, I don't know, it was just a terrible. Shocking sad time. Um. I just couldn't, I just couldn't believe I was just, I couldn't believe what was going on. It was very sad and traumatic. Um.

[00:25:30] Mona Ramonetti: Has this changed you? Has viewing George Floyd murder and, and, you know, the events that followed, um, how has it changed you if at all?

[00:25:46] Carol Hernandez: Well, I try not to have the news on all the time. Um, unfortunately, you know, there, there are other news stories and other videos that are, that are. Are traumatic to watch too.

Um, I think, you know, does it desensitize us? Does it, do we accept it? Do we, I don't know. I think it did. It did affect me, especially as a mother, because I just think, you know, that's someone's child. That's all I could think was like, that could be my son.

So, yeah, I, I mean, it's, I think I just, as a mom, I do think I look at things differently now. So yes, I'm much more affected by things that I see in the news. Um, and, and in my role, you know, it did spur me to. Think about how we can address, um, you know, diversity equity inclusion in our role as instructional designers.

And that led me to propose, um, these panel discussions that we do about once a month. And one of the first ones that we did, um, was looking at, um, Looking at issues of race and colonialism and anti-racist pedagogy. Um, you know, that those conversations are, are, should be, I think, front and center and in our, in our mission as an institution of higher education.

[00:27:53] Mona Ramonetti: So these panels that you've put together and some of them are very great. Uh, thank you so much, uh, to you and your department for providing the Stony Brook campus with these panels. The first one I remember, yes. You referenced was the diversity one. How well attended was it and how well received was it?

[00:28:14] Carol Hernandez: Yeah, we had, I want to say like a hundred people come to the first one and, and right away, I, I received emails from people saying thank you so much that, you know, I, I, I'm so proud of our university for having these discussions.

So we look at everything in terms of teaching and learning. We look at it as, um, you know, uh, a teacher. Uh, is a whole person, right? And they bring all their identities into their teaching practice and they are ideally learning causes transformation. Right? Learning should change you. So when you start a class, by the time you finished the class in 15 weeks, you should have changed.

Um, and. And when you look at it that way, or you look at it like, oh, teaching and learning is a transformational process, then you definitely want to look at the whole

person, not just a cognitive, not just the intellectual, but also the identities that, that they've lived. You know, it could be, it could have to do with race.

It could have to do with gender. It could have to do with sexuality. It could have to do with, uh, ability. It could have to do with language, accents, all of these things that come up in the context of a classroom that could make, we create a micro aggression, could create, um, you know, a sense of stereotypes threat.

It could, um, could, uh, create trauma. Um, and you know, how do we, one of the things that came up too was, uh, trauma informed teaching because when people are feeling traumatized or just not safe, it's really hard for them to learn because they're trying to survive. And learning wouldn't be at the top of the list.

So all of those things we felt like, um, that we wanted to discuss and discuss at the university level across departments. Um, and that was the goal of the, um, the panel discussions.

[00:30:52] Mona Ramonetti: So that is the end of my list of questions. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us before I stop the recorder?

[00:31:02] Carol Hernandez: No

[00:31:03] Mona Ramonetti: Carol, thank you so much. Please stay on. Um, but I'm going to stop the recording right now.

[Recording stops]