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### Oral History Interview with Tiffany Friedman

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

Oral History Interview with  
Tiffany Friedman

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 Tiffany Friedman conducted by Mona Ramonetti on April 14, 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: Tiffany Friedman  
Interviewer: Mona Ramonetti  
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[00:00:00] Mona Ramonetti: Awesome. Uh, welcome it is April 14th, 2022. This is Mona Ramonetti interviewing Tiffany Friedman for the Racial Unrest of 2020: Experiences from the Stony Brook University Community Digital Project. Thank you. Uh, thank you so much, Tiffany, for taking the time to tell us about your experiences.

[00:00:22] Tiffany Friedman: You're welcome. Great.

[00:00:24] Mona Ramonetti: And I'll get started. Can you tell us how you are affiliated with Stony Brook University?

[00:00:30] Tiffany Friedman: Uh, so my role here, I'm an Academic Advisor, Senior Academic Advisor, Counselor in the Educational Opportunity Program. Um, and I usually advise, uh, anywhere between a hundred to 150 students, uh, during the academic year.

[00:00:52] Mona Ramonetti: Okay, we're going to dive right in. When do you first remember hearing about the murder of George Floyd?

[00:01:00] Tiffany Friedman: Um, so sometime in 2020, sort of at the beginning of the year, it became very big news. Um, I normally receive my news from Democracy Now, which is sort of like not the mainstream CNN, MSNBC, but sort of like an alternative news network, but fairly, uh, fairly reachable to the mass public.

And, um, they did have the story on there. Because there have been so many previous murders that have been videotaped, I personally did not want to watch that tape of another, yet another Black person being murdered by the police on TV. And I just heard about it through that way. Also, you know, my family and friends were already talking about it and asked me if I've seen it.

And, um, you know, even my students have brought it to my attention and, and seen it. And it just was just big news at that time. Uh, I forget the specific month, but it just was very depressing. It just, it happens so often and this was just something that I felt like I couldn't deal with before. Uh, at that time. Um, I had

already watched something very similar, uh, with Eric Garner being killed and I literally watched the whole thing.

And at that time, when I was younger, I went to one of the big Black Lives Matter protests and marched in the street. And it felt like nothing really came of it because the police officer continued to work on the job. And I just felt like I couldn't watch and do this all over again.

[00:02:43] Mona Ramonetti: Yup. Yup.

So you actually touched upon this, but maybe you can elaborate some more if you choose. What was your initial reaction to hearing about and, or viewing George Floyd's death on TV, internet, or social media?

[00:03:02] Tiffany Friedman: Yeah. So, um, yeah. Well, I already touched on that. I didn't view it because I just felt it would be emotionally triggering, but, uh, just absolutely disgusted.

I mean, this is just unfortunate that this continues to go on. You know, I, I just can't, uh, understand even from my own profession that if I personally was responsible for murdering one of my students, best believe I would not be a counselor anymore. (both laugh) It's not a negotiation. Uh, I get in trouble if I even yell at them, you know, just talking to them in any sort of disrespectful way would probably get my license revoked.

[00:03:44] Mona Ramonetti: Right.

[00:03:44] Tiffany Friedman: So it just, it's unreasonable to even think how this is allowable and, um, and I just, I think there's literally no justification for it, honestly, you know, you see it there and it's right in your face. And I just wanted to know, personally, at that time I was immediately thinking, how are they going to spin this?

How are they going to change this around and make it seem like the guy died and it's his own fault? Because that has been the history of these particular events and I have to say, you know, skipping ahead. I was very surprised that that guy definitely went down because I just was thinking it would be all like the rest of the people in the past.

[00:04:26] Mona Ramonetti: Yup. Yup. I think a lot of the nation actually, we were waiting for that verdict and it, I remember seeing it on TV and no one was cheering and I thought this, this is, this is new. Because I, and I understood why they were not cheering because a man lost his life at the end of the day, a man lost his life. Um, there's, there's nothing that we should be cheering about here.

And I'm talking about George Floyd, I'm not talking about the perpetrator.

Or the murderer I should say. So. Yes. I think most of the nation, we breathe a sigh of relief. Um, but it's not over, it's not over, but that's, that's another, another discussion for another time. Did you seek out communication with anyone from Stony Brook University during this time?

[00:05:30] Tiffany Friedman: Um, not really besides my colleagues who, you know, mentioned it occasionally. I didn't seek out anything. And I would, I would say the reason why is, unfortunately during that timeframe, uh, you know, it was also a year where we just got a new president, the country is completely divided with people who completely support the police, no matter what they do.

And, um, I mean, it's unfortunate, but I was really thinking pessimistically, like this is going to be the same as the last time the police literally went out last time and got shirts that says "I can breathe" and was standing arm in arm, in New York City after they just killed a person by suffocating them to death.

I really just couldn't see any way that it would be different than that moment. So I didn't see the point in trying to engage in conversations with people about something that they were just going to very much make me angry over, you know, I, I can't, uh, deal with it that people are always defending the police when they have a monopoly on violence.

[00:06:38] Mona Ramonetti: Yes.

[00:06:39] Tiffany Friedman: And so I just was trying to avoid talking about it with people unless they personally brought it up. And then I was trying to keep my words to a minimum saying, yes, that's a shame.

[00:06:51] Mona Ramonetti: Yeah.

Many who witnessed a murder described it as a pivotal moment in American History. Do you agree or disagree with that sentiment?

[00:07:05] Tiffany Friedman: Um, you know, yes and no. Yes, it was a pivotal moment because I feel like the reaction for the first time that I noticed was actually heartfelt and of shock and everybody, you know, that I knew were completely disgusted and not taking the officer's side.

Um, that was unique because a lot of people in the past have been like trying to rationalize and justify something like this happening. So for me, for the first time, I felt pretty heartfelt like the whole world actually got behind George Floyd. This is a

unique thing. You know, they actually, for the first time didn't care that he had a counterfeit bill didn't care about the reactions that led up to that moment.

Didn't care that he did anything wrong. They just felt like this officer was outrageously terrible. And, um, the whole world got involved in supporting this victim and that to me was unique and new. The other side of, it was like, I already said, this happens so often. Uprisings happen so often even to the past where you look at history, Black history, where uprisings happened on the plantation and these things happen mostly because of the violence perpetrated towards Black people.

And there's just a tipping point where they say I'm done with this, I'm fed up and they get out there and they protest and they uprise. And then their allies join them because there's also people who were not Black that was joining them. And this happens and it happens so often. I feel like it happens maybe every five to 10 years. The media tried to portray themselves as supporting the victim.

And then they go back to the backlash where they immediately try to blame the victim and try to make it seem like the victim is, is the problem. You know, they are the reason they died. They should just follow the rules. They should have just did the right thing.

And, um, I just felt like this a little bit of this time was different because I really felt like the police this time did not want to defend themselves. They didn't want to, they wanted one person to be held accountable so their whole system wouldn't fall. Because they were looking at a legitimacy problem for the first time in history. (both laugh) And they wanted this person to get out of the picture as quickly as possible.

I really saw for the first time the police commissioner in New York, making a speech saying he interact with a million people per day and never ever, you know, even though that was a total lie, never, ever in the history of their interaction, have they ever had this happening and I'm like, hello history, you had some, I literally choked somebody on the job.

And when you do the pile on every week, you know, and suffocate somebody. So this was quite a unique situation, but at the same time, in its uniqueness, um, it is something that happens all the time because the police are unaccountable. This is the reason why they keep doing this. They don't have any accountability for the stuff that they do.

And the people who are whistleblowers in the police department, actually face the accountability and they end up being chased out of the career.

[00:10:31] Mona Ramonetti: Right.

[00:10:32] Tiffany Friedman: So, um, you know, there's the long answer, but yes, it was unique in history, but at the same time, it wasn't.

[00:10:39] Mona Ramonetti: I, I liked that you, um, You made that observation that the world didn't care that he had a counterfeit bill uh, essentially this was a murder. That's what the world saw. And, um, he was a flawed man, but that was no reason for him to have been murdered. And I like that. I liked that you made that distinction because I think more often than not, there's that drive to vilify and villainize the victim shortly thereafter. This time, I mean, what do you think happened there? Is it, was it because it was me, or Eric Garner's murder was, was recorded as well. So, what is the difference here? Do you think between Eric's murder and George's murder? Because they were both—

[00:11:47] Tiffany Friedman: They're both murdered by police officers and, um, they both were flawed men and, you know, in some respect, they both were very good men.

You know, people spoke to their character, but something changed this time. And I think it was just the brutality of how this poor man was killed begging for his life begging for his mom. Um, he was the aggression of the, the perpetrator police who actually just completely went out of his way to torture him, you know, making him get out of his car.

He was already on the way out, making him, um, you know, kneel down and. And pressing on his neck for so long, just calmly, you know, and then all the other officers just standing by letting it happen. Even though, the whole entire witnesses of all the people around were were trying to help. They were trying to do what they could.

They actually call the police themselves multiple times trying to get intervention. And to that, it was the, I think in this respect, I felt like maybe there was a tipping point again, like the injustice of seeing this happening, literally again, and to somebody who was just sort of like anybody. He could have been anyone and it may be just shows that people actually have a heart and they're tired of this garbage and it could have also been the pandemic.

I feel like the pandemic played a major role in it. People are, are um in a bad situation themselves. They're stuck at home or they lost their jobs. They all suffer from illnesses. They're trying their hardest to get their government to help them. And. Then you see this situation on TV and for, you know, you're not distracted at this point.

You're forced to stay at home. You're paying attention to the media. You're really involved in everyday day news about what is happening versus at that time where



Eric Garner, where, where the media could spin the story, they could make it seem like he was this big guy selling cigarettes. He was a nuisance.

He was hanging outside the store. They could vilify him a little bit more easily. This one was hard to spin that narrative. That man was actually on his way out. And it was a very minor infraction. I mean, it's just, uh, and people were paying way more attention this time around and had so many other problems going on.

They couldn't take one more dang thing. (laughs)

[00:14:35] Mona Ramonetti: Right. Yeah, yeah.

And I think also the. His his, uh, the other police officers standing guard.

[00:14:50] Tiffany Friedman: Yes. To prevent the intervention of regular citizens.

[00:14:54] Mona Ramonetti: Yes. That I thought it was incredibly powerful and many people comment on that because it's essentially, I mean, they're saying, go for it we you, you cannot do anything right now, these individuals are public servants and the people for which they should be serving are now basically they've been, uh, rendered powerless.

And I think that just though that vision, I think spoke volumes. Uh, I mean, I oftentimes, when I saw some of the footage, I would mute because I could hear the—

[00:15:40] Tiffany Friedman: All the citizens screaming at them (Mona: yes, yes) and shouting and trying to get them to do something, you know? (Mona: yup, yup) The officer that killed him at one point looks up and wonders if his colleagues are okay, you know, like, Hey, I'm doing this and are you okay with it? You know? And by their silence or by them not getting involved, they were okay with, they're complicit.

[00:16:07] Mona Ramonetti: Yes, absolutely.

What good do you hope will come from the events surrounding George Floyd's murder?

[00:16:19] Tiffany Friedman: Well, I have hopes for good, but, uh, so, so far, many of them really haven't been delivered. (laughs) Uh, you know, by exposing at minimum, exposing this type of behavior, I've, my hopes is that no one will question me anymore when I tell them stuff that they sound, it sounds radical when I tell them stuff about police. That actually has immediately changed.

I used to have, uh, discussions with people and tell them I do not support, like, or care for the police. I think they're occupying force in many Black neighborhoods and I do not support the organization. And boy, Mona, the pushback I would receive, like I'm some sort of crazy Black Panther. (both laugh) And I'm like, first place, the Black Panthers weren't even crazy.

They were fine. I mean, personally, in my opinion. Uh, and, second that is just the way I perceive them, because that's how they behave to my community. The fact that you can't see them that way means that you are on the community they're protecting, they're actually not protecting my community. And, and the fact that you really are making it seem like I'm insane for recognizing something that has happened in my lived experience, that they're not protecting my community, that they believe my community is the one they need to police.

Your community can stay over there. You have no negative interaction with them, then, you know, it's, I'm not really crazy. But now that I mentioned these things after this George Floyd incident, I don't have those problems anymore. (Mona: yup) That is the good that has come of this. No more do people say these things.

They say, I understand why you see it that way.

[00:18:13] Mona Ramonetti: Yeah.

[00:18:13] Tiffany Friedman: And then, and then the other, uh, things, you know, nationwide is that also now people can see the police for who they are and how they have a little bit of a legitimacy issue. So now you see the police trying hard to, to legitimize themselves and trying their damndest to put out public statements.

This is no different than the past though. In, in some ways they are constantly doing PR and I noticed you don't have to do as much PR with other careers, do you? (Mona laughs) You know, lots of helping careers are helping careers. You don't even need to advertise it. Teachers aren't on the news every day, talking about how they helped children learn and grow.

Um, you know, nurses and doctors, they do advertise them. But I think that just has to do with some propaganda that they're trying to push right now. (Both laugh) Mostly because they know that they're not really paying them well so they're trying to get out of the jail with that one. (Both laugh) But with the police, the propaganda is very thick and now people can see through it. Because they understand they have a legitimacy problem.

And they're trying their hardest now, after that very bad situation to, um, legitima, legitimize why they shouldn't be defunded, that was the rallying cry after awhile.

And you know, they're trying to keep their money because they're a occupying force, just like any sort of other army.

They're protecting wealthy interests and that's the reason why they keep getting money. Nobody else is getting as much money as them. And employment. They got a lot of things that they're, they're getting, but, uh, it's, you know, it's unacceptable and people are starting to question it. So I think the good things that are coming out of that is that they are on their heels right now, trying to figure out what to do.

[00:20:12] Mona Ramonetti: Alright.

Um, I want to go back to what you said in terms of folks believing you. When you, you know, you called something out as racism. Um, I mean, how does that, how does that make you feel? Just on a very basic level?

[00:20:41] Tiffany Friedman: Well, I mean, I'm personally tired of being gaslit that my experiences, my feelings, all these things are radical and crazy.

That's their go-to word. When I just described something that I feel like it's, you know, plain to see for everybody. And I um, I'm just tired of it at this point. You know, I'm just like, this is, this is real for me. If it's not real for you, then, you know, I totally support and understand that it's not real for you, but don't try to make it seem like I'm I'm insane.

You know, I'm not going insane. You just have to understand just basic United States history. And I am not crazy. There's a ton of literature about this. There's plenty of Ted talks. There's tons of podcasts. Everybody knows this. This organization is a problem, and, uh, you can dig your head in the sand as far as you want it to be and close your ears and cover your eyes.

But I'm not doing that. I'm, I'm recognizing their problem, you know? So it's, it's annoying to try to explain to people about racism. They always try to act like it's something else. That's what I noticed about that. And my feeling towards that is that they're really trying their hardest to ignore. Um, they ignore the truth of lived experience of people and, and that makes me upset, but you know—

[00:22:19] Mona Ramonetti: Why is that? Not that it makes you upset. Why is it that there's that, uh, need to not acknowledge what is being said to, to folks about racism?

[00:22:33] Tiffany Friedman: Yeah. I feel like part of that may be that then they, you know, they might feel that they might have some ownership in it. And then when you recognize that there is a problem and that is associated with a certain group of people, you know, historically white people, but other people too.

Uh, you know, and, and just to be fair, like my uncle is, I talked to him about this stuff all the time, my uncle was a Black man, but he also was a police officer. So his association with the police is stronger because that was his role in the past. And to call somebody out on their personal industry, then they feel like they take ownership of that and they prefer not to.

They don't want their industry to be seen as bad. They want to seem like they're good heroes. And like I said, it's part of legitimacy problem. Then he'll have to really face the fact that his industry isn't that legitimate and they have problems. And then once you recognize that you can't un-know it.

And then you have to start thinking about how it can change. They don't want change. They don't want repair or justice. They don't want to do that. So it becomes a big problem. (laughs)

[00:23:56] Mona Ramonetti: Can we circle back to your uncle? So yeah, I mean, I'm sure this has his, uh, I, my husband and I have talked about it in terms of why does it have to be one or the other?

I remember. Um, and I live out here on Long Island and we saw, I know the Black Lives Matter placards and all lives matter placards. Uh, we support, you know, a unified, whatever, all these different placards in support of, of diversity and equity, et cetera. And then we saw we support the police and, um, and my husband said, why does it have to be one or the other?

Uh, his brother's a cop in town and does not demonstrate, um, you know, what we're talking about in terms of perpetrating, um, a crime against, uh, folks that are not white. Yet how do the, the, the Black cops, where do they, it's a really difficult position for them to be in how are they dealing with this?

And can you offer some, uh, has your uncle shared any insight into that? Because it's, it's a, it's a balance. It's a fine balance that they have to strike being a Black police officer in this particular climate right now.

[00:25:27] Tiffany Friedman: Well, just to be fair for him. He's a retired military police officer and military has different rules and engagement than even the regular, everyday police.

He feels that they have a higher level of engagement as um military. And I, I have to just probably agree with him on that. I mean, it's just, you know, the police on the streets seem to be held less accountable than a soldier would be. So his solutions are just to me, just completely, in my opinion, not adequate, he's believing training and just the standard answers, training, more equity, inclusion information, the ability to get, um, more access to reporting, all these things.

They're not the problem. It's not the problem at all. The problem is that there is a system in the police force, in the regular civilian police force, not his with the military, of complete, inaccountability, they're unaccountable at all. They're unaccountable to a mayor who, who controls them by the way. The mayor needs them.

So they're not, they're not listening to the mayor or the governor. They are just completely unruly because they can be, there is sheltering laws in place for them. There's a lot of things in place for them to get away with what they do. There's a whole system to protect them. No one else has that system, including the military.

And if, uh, they were held accountable by public, by politicians, by anybody, by their bosses, then they probably would have a stop in place. This wouldn't even continuously be, it might be a problem, but it wouldn't be this big of a problem where they're killing as many people as a serial killer will kill people.

You know, (both laugh) it's really getting bad.

[00:27:31] Mona Ramonetti: What would you like people to know about this time in your life and what you experienced?

[00:27:39] Tiffany Friedman: Well, um, I guess I've gone through stages in my life. You know, in my thirties, I had at the stage where I thought this wouldn't happen again, as long as there is these, these uprisings and things.

But now that I'm in my forties, I am really not optimistic about this type of situation changing. And I really do hope it, it will. I, I, you know, I have the hope in the back of my mind, but based on my 40 years of living and watching every single decade of my life have this type of situation happen, I wouldn't be surprised if it happens within my next decade and the decade after that.

So I'm really, I don't know how to put that, depressed about it, I guess.

[00:28:30] Mona Ramonetti: Um-hmm, I mean, how do you, how do you reconcile that with yourself? I mean, and that's a very personal question I'm asking. Um, because the fact of the matter is we, we have to move, not move on. We have to live, you still have to go on and live with this knowledge that, or this feeling that there's no hope.

[00:29:02] Tiffany Friedman: I know. And that's what worries me, uh, because I feel like I could be a victim of police violence. My children could be a victim of police violence. My cousins, my friends, everybody I love because there is no hope in their behavior. You can't, uh, you know, as I would say, Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote a book

where he said, you can't be good at your way out of this situation, you can't be the goodest, best well-behaved person and still survive this.

Um, so, you know, part of it is by making sure that I don't betray myself and pretend that things are okay. Recognizing that there is a problem with the system. And also understanding that, um, even though there's a problem with the system, even though there's this situation, there's more of us being messed up out there, then, then the perpetrators, and maybe we can all organize together and get a change.

[00:30:09] Mona Ramonetti: Well, that, to me sounds like hope. (Tiffany laughs) And, you know, in, in so many, uh, publications, monographs, you know so many printed materials. I keep coming across. I, I'm not gonna, I'm not articulating it very well, but the idea that the African-American has the most hope out of all the groups—

[00:30:38] Tiffany Friedman: Yeah?

[00:30:38] Mona Ramonetti: —century after century. Given what the African-American has been subjected to in the Americas for a very long time. The hope, the conflict is still there, we're still fighting. We fight because we hope for something better. So, yes, it's hard to do that on a daily basis, but I think the hope is still there.

[00:31:16] Tiffany Friedman: Yeah. And I, you know, I also have to think about all our, our ancestors who struggled and had these problems and yet they somehow lived their lives and we're, you know, and made it, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them living, I still, they made it it's that they lived and were able to continue continue on.

[00:31:42] Mona Ramonetti: All right. The idea that, I mean, I, I, I like what you say and I, I actually do embrace it even though I'm not being interviewed here, but I, what you just said really resonates with me. Um, the idea that I, um, my ancestors fought, they survive through me. Their strength is through is exhibited through me. Uh, how, I mean, I I'm full of so much pride that their material, their strength still lives on.

[00:32:20] Tiffany Friedman: That's right.

[00:32:20] Mona Ramonetti: We are a Testament to that strength. So that oftentimes when I'm feeling, you know, this is, this is, I can't believe this is happening again. And all of these things. Um, I have to remember that. I have to remember. And again, that is the hope that's all we're always, uh, being associated with. (laughs) That's what's getting us through.

So. Um, we're uh, actually we were over 30 minutes. This was, this was terrific, Tiffany. (Tiffany: great) Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

[00:32:56] Tiffany Friedman: Uh, just that, um, I'm very happy that you were able to interview me as part of our archives. I said, I have to dedicate my myself to do this. It's important to get people's experiences out there, especially African-American women experiences.

I doubt there's a whole bunch of us on this campus to do it. (both laugh) So I have to get it in there.

Well, you know what? You hit the nail on the head. It was fantastic. Thank you so much, but don't sign off just yet. I'm going to hit stop the recording.

[Recording stops]