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Oral History Interview with Chelsea Mawugbe

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STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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

Oral History Interview with
Chelsea Mawugbe

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 Chelsea Mawugbe conducted by Jennasia Otway on April 18, 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: Chelsea Mawugbe
Interviewer: Jennasia Otway
Session Number: One session
Locations: Stony Brook, NY
Date: April 18, 2022
Pages: 6

[00:00:00] Jennasia Otway: So it is April 18th, um, 2022. And this is Jennasia Otway interviewing Chelsea for the Racial Unrest of 2020: Experiences from the Stony Brook University Community Digital Project. First, I want to thank you for spending time with us and telling us about your experience. (Chelsea: Um-hm) So can you tell us about how you're affiliated with Stony Brook University?

[00:00:39] Chelsea Mawugbe: So my name is Chelsea and I'm a Stony Brook student, um, majoring in respiratory care, and I'm a senior and, um, right now, I work at the Library Dean's office. And I also am part of Cadence Step Team. I'm the Vice President. And yeah. That's about what I do on campus.

[00:00:59] Jennasia Otway: Okay good, um, what do you first remember hearing about the George Floyd murder?

[00:01:08] Chelsea Mawugbe: Okay. So I remember like it was during, um, like quarantine. We were home or whatever, and my parents, like, they like watching the news so, um, at first I saw it on CNN and then I don't watch the news like that, but I saw it on my Instagram as well. Like how, um, I believe he, like, they called the cops on him cause he had like fake money.

[00:01:33] So yeah, that's what I saw in the, I saw that the cop was like kneeling on him for like a good nine minutes. And like the saying, I can't breathe went, like went viral and during that time, so that's when I first encountered that. And then, um, I remember when that happened, like there was like a march, a parade, it was a march not a parade, it was like a silent protest cause I'm from the city, so there was like a silent (knocking sound) protest that was going on around the city, and, um, I wanted to participate, but my mom she was like its dangerous so she didn't let me go. So, um, yeah, that's when I heard about it.

[00:02:13] Jennasia Otway: Um, now I'm just gonna piggyback off of what you said. So why, why w-why does your mom think it was dangerous?

[00:02:23] Chelsea Mawugbe: Um, I don't know. I guess, like she thought, like it was a large gathering, so like, the situation was like very, um, it's sensitive so like she thinks that since it was a large, large gathering. Like people might have weapons on them and, you know, things might, you know, get chaotic. So I guess she didn't want me to like get hurt.

[00:02:45] She wanted me to be safe. So that happened also, like, I think there was a protest going on in Brooklyn by like the Barclays center. And there were like, um, There were a lot of people, there were like cop cars and everything, there was like, I saw, one of my friends, she went live on Instagram and then I would see like, the cops are like really shoving people out the way.

[00:03:05] So I guess like there were times where like the, the cops again were fighting , fighting with the protestors. So probably she sees something and she knew that, you know, there might be bad things happening during the protest and she wanted me to be safe. So yeah, I understand where she was coming from too.

[00:03:23] Jennasia Otway: And what was your initial reaction hearing about or viewing, the Ge- George Floyd death on te-television? On (clears throat) the internet, social media?

[00:03:37] Chelsea Mawugbe: Yeah. I just, I don't know cause. Um, I want to say I was numb to it, but like I said, I heard like a lot of cases about like, you know, Black people getting murdered by cops. So it was just like another, like repeated occurrence happening, but it was just like, it was, it's the same thing happening, but like with different, like they're dying for different reasons.

[00:04:01] So, um, like this one was different because he was kneeling on his neck and he couldn't breathe, but it was just like, It was just, it's just crazy, like how it's still happening. And like, I remember like when I was younger, like I never, like I knew about racist stuff, but like I never thought, like it was, I thought it was like it past and like, it was this still going on, but as I got older, like I realized that it's still going on.

[00:04:25] It's still an issue that's happening in America. So my reaction is just, I guess it's crazy that it's still happening, like at this day and age. But it's, you know, there's [not] a lot to, you know, to, to help protect us from that happening to us.

[00:04:42] Jennasia Otway: Do you think it impacts you more now than you were younger?

[00:04:46] Chelsea Mawugbe: Yeah, I think it does because, um, I know when I was younger, I like, I lived around like people who are like me, like, you know, Black, but like coming to Stony Brook, I see more people that are like, you know, white.

[00:05:00] And like, you never know, like there, um, you never know how they feel towards like people of color. So it's like, sometimes you have to be like very cautious. Like, when you are around those type of people? Cause you never know, like what's going to happen when you're around that certain type of people. So—

[00:05:14] Yeah sometimes I like, I I'm always like alert of my surroundings when I'm around that type of group, group of people. But I think as I've gotten older yeah. Like being around those people I've it has changed me because I wasn't around those type of people when I was younger. So now that I am, I know, like how to you know interact.

[00:05:35] Jennasia Otway: Did you seek out any type of communication with anyone during the, um, from Stony Brook University during that time.

[00:05:46] Chelsea Mawugbe: Um, I think during that time, cause I was a part of NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. So, um, they had, I wasn't on campus, but they had a march on campus, and they collabed with other organizations, and they had a march around campus, and it was also with the, um, athletic program team. So they did a march on campus. And even though I wasn't able to participate, I was, you know, I was watching their lives and I was like, seeing everything that was going on. So, I guess that was my form of reaching out.

[00:06:17] Yeah.

[00:06:20] Jennasia Otway: Okay. And. Many who witnessed the murder, the murder described that as a pivotal moment in American history. Do you agree or disagree with that sentiment?

[00:06:36] Chelsea Mawugbe: Um, I would say it is because, um, like previous cases that happened where Black people got murdered, like most of the time the officers weren't held responsible, but, um, for George Floyd's case, even though it took a while for things to like, you know, settle, the officers got held accountable for their actions. So I will say it is, but I just feel like there's more to be done.

[00:07:07] Like, you know, like more, what's it called? Yeah. More needs to be done and more cops need to realize that like, you know, it's not okay to like, do stuff like that. Like their role is to protect and serve not to, you know, go flip the script. Um, and also, yeah, I just feel like they need to be held more accountable for their actions.

[00:07:28] Like some of them, I know some cases where like, some people, like they would like harm, you know, Black people, but they would get like a paid leave or like nothing would happen to them. Like they'll, they'll still be able to go back to a job the next day. So, I think it was a pivotal change, but it wasn't enough.

[00:07:52] Jennasia Otway: So, do you think the sentence that the, um, the cops were given, do you think that was enough, or do you think it could have been more?

[00:08:05] Chelsea Mawugbe: I don't. Okay. So I have to say that I don't I remember like the, the length of their sentence, but, um, yeah. So if you, do you happen to know the length of their sentence?

[00:08:20] Um, it was about 20 to 40 years.

[00:08:25] Wow. Um, I will say, okay. I, my opinion, I would think that they should get like, life in jail cause you're, you literally harm someone's life. Like you took their life. So I would say like for murder, you know, that was, I think that's first degree murder. So for that I would think they should get life, but, you know, yeah. I don't agree with this sentence.

[00:08:58] Jennasia Otway: Okay.

[00:09:00] What good do you hope will come out the events surrounding George Floyd's murder?

[00:09:06] Chelsea Mawugbe: Um, I hope that there's less killings of Black people due to cops. Um, also like, um, I hope people realize that like, um, there's consequences to cop's actions. So you can't just do something and expect not to, you know, have anything happen to you because of it. Um, yeah. I just hope there's like, you know, less of that happening and more protection of, you know, people of color, and yeah, like, that's what I hope that would come out of it.

[00:09:48] Jennasia Otway: Do you think that would change in the near future?

[00:09:52] Chelsea Mawugbe: That there'll be change?

[00:09:55] Jennasia Otway: Yeah, like say like five years from now. Do you see that change happening?

[00:10:00] Chelsea Mawugbe: (laughs) I don't think so. No. I think it will take like a long, very long time for that to happen. Not in five years. Cause this has been going on for like, since the beginning of time. So I don't think in five years, like things are going to change drastically. So yeah, it's a, it's a very long process for that to happen.

[00:10:21] Jennasia Otway: And what would you like people to know about this time in your life and what you experienced from the George Floyd murder?

[00:10:30] Chelsea Mawugbe: Um, I want them to know that like, you know, um. (long pause) Hm, that like sometimes like watching stuff like that in the news, it kind of. It kind of like, it does something to you sometimes. Like it's like hard to see people like you like publicized on the news like that. And knowing that like, things like this has happened to like your people, so I want them to know that, you know, sometimes, um, stuff like that hurts us.

[00:11:06] And also to, you know, not to add on to the hurt, like, you know, be, be a ally to those who are hurting and also, um, not to be a part of the problem. Like not to, like some people like they they're blue lives matter or whatever. Like, I, I kind I don't, I don't want to say I understand like why they stand for them, but like still, you have to understand that, you know, That movement is like also going against the Black Lives Matter movement.

[00:11:35] So to also understand like both sides, I'm like, you know, know that, um, like where you stand also hurt, like those who are hurting so.

[00:11:47] Jennasia Otway: And when you say hurting, what do you mean?

[00:11:49] Chelsea Mawugbe: Like those who are seeing the news of Black people. All over those who are seeing Black people all over the news. Like it affects like our mental as well, cause it's like, oh, like that's all you really see like Black people getting killed or like people of color getting killed in the news, so it was like, it's a repetitive thing.

[00:12:08] So like when, if it keeps seeing something repeatedly like it does something to you. So yeah. So that's hurting those of color. So that's what I mean by, you know, it hurts.

[00:12:21] Jennasia Otway: Okay. That was the last question. Thank you for your time today. I'm going to stop the recording now.

[Recording stops]