

Transcript – Beatrice McGeoch, class of 1997

Narrator: Beatrice McGeoch

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 at Brown University. It is Thursday, June 25, 2020, and it is just after 11 am this morning, and I am here with another Brown alumna to talk about the COVID-19 global pandemic and other topics that are really gripping our nation and the world right now. So if you could introduce yourself to our listeners that would be great.

Beatrice McGeoch: Hi, good morning. Thank you. My name is Beatrice McGeoch. I am a graduate of Brown University in 1997. It took me five years to finish so I started, I think, in '92. My concentration area was translation. So I was a, initially a creative writing major, I'd taken a lot of creative writing classes and I also have a strong language ability so I'd [1:00] taken a lot of French classes. By the time I finished that ended up being a translation major. And with those skills I went on to explore in journalism, but I didn't do what maybe could have been done in terms of like moving to a different city and making a career of it.

I did end up staying in the town of Providence, city of Providence, Rhode Island, where I did a variety of different things. But the thing that I'm currently doing, I started back then was teaching. So, but not teaching in like the public school like K through 12 or private, but teaching adults, adult high school dropouts. So I have now about 20 years working in that field, and it's a little bit of an accidental profession. There's not a whole bunch of people that say like, "I'm going to, I'm going to become a teacher of high school dropouts," and also English language learners, [2:00] immigrants, you know, there's a whole lot of factors. But at this point, as of the past two years, I'm the Director of Adult Education and Literacy Services at the Community College of Rhode Island. So I'm a public employee, I'm working, really trying to make sure that what I do and the programs I manage, do the best they can to serve the state. So that's me.

AK: Fabulous. Well, thank you so much for joining me today. I think there's going to be a lot of

avenues here for the way COVID-19 is impacting Rhode Island in particular. But could we kind of start from the beginning and would you mind talking a little bit about kind of the moments that you were first starting to hear about COVID-19 and what you were kind of thinking as this news was breaking?

BM: Well, it was the Leap Year Weekend, so there's a leap year this year, February 29, thereabouts and I had planned a trip to New York City to visit a friend, [3:00] an old friend. So I went on my trip to New York City because we weren't at a point then where things were shutting down. But, you know, in all of the news reports, there was this like, little moment of like, there's this thing happening. There's this thing happening. So yeah, it didn't seem particularly relevant. Like in retrospect, that is the time period in which I was first hearing about it. There was a couple of surreal things about that trip also. My friend works in a Bloomberg News office. So I, because I was getting picked up from her to go home, I got like, into the Bloomberg office tower to go and like, meet her so she could take me home. And that was surreal, especially since also at the same time he was running for office. So there was a lot about that weekend that was strange. [4:00] Anyway, so I came back to Providence and then two weeks later everything was shutting down. And I am responsible for somewhere between, like maybe 800 students a year at least, like a good amount of classes, we have an entire English language, English Language Learning Program that's community supported and run. You know, we had about 200 or so students there, currently active, and then another like 50 or so in other classes. And we had to move everything online, you know, shut everything down for a week, move everything online. So the moment, the moment that that, the moment that that became real, like I was, because of my responsibilities, I was pretty tuned in immediately to like, okay, what do we have to do? I think we did okay. It was, I fortunately, [5:00] and I don't know, your original question was sort of like how did you begin to hear, but fortunately, we had invested, a couple of years previous, in the, to computer carts of laptops. So for our most vulnerable like adult students we were able to send them home with laptops and continue online for the spring. A majority of students continued. Yeah, so it was, it was, it wasn't, like once, once pandemic condition was kind of turned on, I was immediately like, taking it very seriously. Not fortunately for myself personally, because I'm not in like a high impacted demographic. And I also don't have like close relatives or anything that I would be concerned, really concerned about. People that I visit regularly, I'd be concerned about

transmitting. So it's much more sort of an abstract problem for me about like, okay, all of our educational activities which I've realized in the past couple of months, [6:00] you know, we have healthcare, which is like a very high personal contact work, and then you have like, commuting from home in an office because I'm like, I don't know, working on the stock market or something, right. And then in the middle is education, it does involve like, some contact, some exposure, like, well, I can go on about that at some point, I'm sure another question will get to that. But the, just immediately trying to kind of just, so the beginning of the pandemic was practically, and I'm fortunate that I have friends like my sister's a doctor and I have other, other people that I was getting good information from. So I felt like I understood immediately why we needed to shut down. The governor in the state of Rhode Island has been fantastic in terms of giving a very clear, evidence based message so that was good. And we managed to do what we needed to do. And then subsequent to that, you know, once we did the like, practical, immediate [7:00] like first like triage stuff, there's a whole sequence of thoughts around what it means to be practicing education in these conditions to get back to that idea of like, okay, healthcare worker, totally remote, and where we sit in the middle.

AK: So can you tell me a little bit about first that transition process? Did that happen very quickly for you? And maybe a little bit about, were you getting any immediate feedback from the students in that transition, or maybe some of their concerns in making that transition?

BM: You know, I don't, I'm, unfortunately, I don't work directly with students because I'm sort of one step removed at this point. One of the drawbacks of getting into administration. So, you know, I didn't, I didn't really, we didn't really have a bunch of concerns. I mean, people, people were worried about how they were going to get online. [8:00] But we also were very fortunate in that we were able to help everybody. You know, we had a, we have a relatively low, it's not like a – We have a staffing structure that enables us to have more consistent one on one attention. And that's sort of an explicit part of the work I've done at the college is to establish full time positions that are responsible to students. So those, those facilitators that are doing that work were able to stay in touch with students. And in the cases where we lost contact with students there was usually like a clear like, okay, in like, I'm taking care of a sick family member, I can't do this right now. Or I don't, I mean, some people did not, were not able to manage internet

access, but most were, and, and you know, not by waving a magic wand. By like Jane who works in facilitation, [9:00] spending three hours with somebody on how to use Zoom, or how to use their Chromebook. We did, even though we probably could have said, “That’s it. We’re done. We’re not meeting with anybody in person.” I think we had a week of planning and then we had a week where students came in to pick up the Chromebooks. And as we did that, you know, we did physical distancing, but I would, you know, somebody came in and they were like, I can’t even turn this on, we would spend some time with them to get them going. So in that way, in terms of maintaining a connection with students, we were really able to do it as well as you can with that switch.

AK: Yeah. And then, so you have children who have so generously been giving you snacks for this interview.

BM: Yes.

AK: Were, are they school age? Like at the same time were you also having to make decisions about whether or not [10:00] to send them to school or waiting to hear about whether school would continue for the year?

BM: School was on the same schedule we were. The whole state, and I think, I’m a state employee, so probably, that’s part of that reason, right? Everybody said, “Okay, we’re all moving our spring vacation to this week.” Everybody. So we all had a week off for planning and then everybody started back up the next week online. And I, you know, I, just recently, just recently, like, a year ago, moved from living in Providence to living in North Kingstown. So, you know, I previously had had the kids in the Providence Public Schools, and now they’re in North Kingstown Public Schools. That’s been quite, that’s just been a, I wonder a lot how things would have gone for Providence and with Providence schools. But we’re very fortunate that [11:00] the North Kingstown school is well resourced. The kids already had Chromebooks at school so they just issued them. Everybody came home with a book and off they went, you know, the, the teachers at the school, sort of a little bit of a mixed bag in terms of what ended up coming out, I think. But like, you know, some of the instruction that my kids got was just like, great, is great.

And it was just, I mean, it wasn't as good. It was not the same. But it didn't, I didn't have a lot of concern about that. I'm also, as a person who specializes in difficulties in education, right, like my children are, they're like, the product of me being like, we got to make sure we get this right. So they're both really quite good academically. You know, talented, competent, and in fact, if somebody had said to me, there's no school through the end of the year, I would have been like, fine, you know, I'll give them some math here and there, and [12:00] they'll be fine. You know?

So, yeah, so the transition to school, it did also, though, then, you know the, one of the, one of the challenges we have with education is that it's sort of it's, it's like cultural reproduction, right? You go into a school and you're being taught, this is how we should behave. The public school curriculum is very limited in terms of what they actually address, you know, especially with a series of sort of reforms that are very focused narrowly into like mathematics and literacy without so much contextualized or applied content. And there's definitely a couple of points especially early on, I mean, now I sort of ingested it and I kind of feel like now I'm [13:00] coming back out with my response, but early on where it was like oh God, let me take the entire process of going to a school and interacting with people out and then we have just computers. And then on top of that the, the activities are, you know, going online to Khan Academy or going online to Lexia. The, the entire purpose of education which is to help humans culturally reproduce and not just reproduce the existing culture, but make it better, is reduced to just like, can I communicate with a computer? Can I like accurately input what is expected? And that is, you know, soul crushing. And also just like, it leaves a lot to be desired, right. So like, so like, seeing immediately the way in which our, and I've been working in education, like I said, 20 years, and I'm part of a generation of people for whom [14:00] like, the first Macintosh computers existed when, when I was in middle school, you know. I took a class in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator at Brown when it was like an obscure art class that was like, whoa, you know? Like it was the first class. And, like you could, you had a tower like this, a computer tower and like you were trying to edit one picture, and you crashed it, like three times out of four. So I grew up with the evolution of the Internet, and I've, because I've always been working in the high school dropout realm, which is underfunded and totally ignored. You know, it's like, well, if somebody's got a college degree and they're willing to do this work, we'll pay them, you know, \$18 an hour to be in this room with these vulnerable, abused students and, you know, make the best of it. Here's a workbook, you know. So I'm really used to working with like very,

very limited supplies, and that included like, not really [15:00] incorporating the internet and incorporating the digital components because if you're going to be part time and you're going to be in a classroom that shifts from place to place, you have to have this and like a whiteboard marker. And that's it. And like if you, you need to be able to start from total scratch with students and, students at multiple levels. Like I can, you give me a classroom of 10 people, and they all are trying to learn fractions, they're adults, but like, the, the abilities and the range, and what they're bringing in is really diverse. There's like no – in any case I got really used to doing that in person, right. And I had not incorporated the internet for the things it would be really good at. And so one of the things we're seeing now is like, oh, we actually had some better attendance for some students who, like they're, they're a mom, they've got three kids, they [16:00] were killing themselves to get to a campus four mornings a week to get this education they need. And now, that attendance problem, like maybe they were only coming two out of four days or three out of four days, the attendance problem is a non-issue. Them having a space that's quiet is an issue, but like the attendance problem is not the issue. So that, that whole aspect like having that, having the internet which sort of snuck up from behind and been like, oh, we're a factor and like a really important one. I think having to shift online is, that's been, it's been good. I don't remember what your original question was. Sorry.

AK: You're answering several of my questions as you go. So this is absolutely perfect. Do you think, it's probably too early to tell, but kind of projecting forward, do you think that this is a model that you would want to use for teaching these students going forward [17:00] as more of an internet, like take your computer home and do it from there? Or, or do you think that it still is something that very much needs to be like an in person process?

BM: Well, so okay. I, so, getting, getting back to the idea of like, okay, so education is cultural reproduction – And this actually kind of ties into perhaps where you might end up going with some of the questions around Black Lives Matter, right. We have, we have, I've been working in classrooms of dropouts for so long you know, and like my, it's a little bit of a bad joke, but I do say sometimes that if you take out, if you take out all the people of color, if you take out all the queer, you take out all of the minorities [18:00] in any way out of my classroom, we have left one white guy with a learning disability. And that's, that's a, that's a bad joke. I know it's not

very sensitive, but it's true. It's like all of the things that fail in our, in our, in our system are what ends up in my classroom. And so I've spent 20 years working on curriculum that's responsive to those students. I've just because of who I am, I'm sort of academically trained, I have this urge to get things into like a book format. Like I'm really into books of knowledge, you know, when you have like, one book that's like, here's all you need to know in the world. Like, I have a collection. And textbooks. I love textbooks. And this work that I'm doing in the classroom, like I'm not personally in the classroom, but the work I'm doing at the college is around a two year-long curriculum. And that two year-long curriculum has [19:00] some really intentional components around recognizing culture and, and, you know, teaching real history. Not teaching the – the GED textbook is abysmal, you know. You can open any GED textbook and it's going to be like 1776 ,1865, it's going to spend a long time on the Vietnam War, and then like maybe one page or a half of a page on like September 11<sup>th</sup>, and then it's done. Like it's, it's, there is no narrative there that is like compelling. Okay, so I've been teaching using Howard Zinn materials forever and that's what we use in our bridge. The science textbooks, like when they came out with a new GED 2014 science textbook, the page on male anatomy had a full color, color, like wash drawing of the penis [20:00] and everything all very nice and detailed. And the female one was still like the weird line drawing of like the uterus with no clitoris, nothing. You know, it's like it's 2014.

AK: Wow.

BM: So –

AK: I had no idea.

BM: So this is, this is the, so this this work I've been doing on the books of knowledge and the content has been inspired by repeatedly being in the classroom with people who I felt like I had to give them the best information possible. And me being who I am academically, like I will go and read all the National Science Standards, I will go and read all the Social Studies Standards, and I'll bring that to my students because they're dropouts doesn't mean they don't get to get the good stuff.

So, to get back to the issue of like, is it better that we work online or not? So, we need like comprehensive cultural adjustment. Like the, [21:00] I went from my fourth through twelfth grade I attended the Windsor School for Girls in Boston. And at the time, we're talking about like the late 1980s, 1980s, '90s, early '90s. Very academically rigorous, very culturally disconnected, at least my experience of it was very, like it was, there was, it was just like, do really well and be the best. You're the best. You know, and like, I went to Brown and honestly, Brown for me was a very, I was very disconnected there. I was a queer youth, my parents had, they were, they were not happy with that. They sort of said, you know, you can be that way but stay away was kind of the vibe. So I, and I, something you might not guess from looking at me is I'm an immigrant. I'm actually British. So, so when I, when I, [22:00] and I'm still holding on to the thread of why, what this has to do with online education. Let's see. How did I get here? So my experience of those institutions, educational institutions, they were like top, top, top, top institutions. Even though I was there and I was participating, I didn't feel connected. I didn't feel connected because I mean, I literally was an immigrant. So I was like, I don't understand this culture. Like I don't get it.

AK: How old were you when you came here if you don't mind me asking?

BM: I was 17. I was also really young.

AK: Wow. Okay.

BM: Because my parents had, were very ambitious. They put me into school a year early. A whole soup of factors there. But so this, this, the – So between that experience of like elite private like northeast schools, and then also the dropout side [23:00] of it right? So then this is where it all ties together. As a queer youth who was not going to go home no matter what – I was like working in a deli on Thayer Street and I spent my summers just like finding an extra room in somebody's apartment. You know, I was like, I was kind of a street kid. And so I did both. So I'd be like, I'd work in the deli until like 11 o'clock at night. And then, or, and then like, do my homework or on the weekends I'd like, there were certain times when I'd like do all my homework until 11 o'clock and then I'd just go out and party. Like, I was like, doing wild stuff. I

managed to pull the whole thing off. Like I finished Brown, a little bit longer than normal. I, I held, I retained life and limb, more or less. A little bit more dental problems than maybe you should have at my age. But like, but that that feeling of like okay, this is like, I'm supposed to be getting a good [24:00] education here, but it's not my place. It doesn't reflect me back accurately. And then experience from like being in Providence with working class people and teaching in places where it's working class people really highlights the differences the bubble, right? So for me, my parents tried really hard and they cared. They wanted me to have the bubble, right. So they put me in a private school where like everybody else was getting bused in from suburbs in Boston and like, doing ski things, camp things. And my life was going to school and home because there was no resources for anything else. And then Brown was kind of the same. It was very dissociative experience, because people come in for a semester and then they go somewhere else. They're going to be in like Guatemala for a semester or they're going to be somewhere else. Like there's so much entitlement and privilege around controlling the flow of your life and like what you do next. Like I was in there, very emotionally vulnerable. [25:00] Like I'm looking for home, and other people were like, no this is sort of part of my professional track, which was legitimate, like I was a mess. But I didn't find you know that, that bubble. It also then results in people going into policy work and education work and not understanding the like real actual struggles that people are going through who are on the other side of things. So and I really see that so much with this pandemic condition. And the way that the internet is, is a conduit. Yeah, we're still in touch. But it's also, it's, it's really highlighting the differences and who's in the bubble and who's not.

AK: Absolutely.

BM: Like, if I had been in Providence – The streets that I was living on in Providence until a year ago, you know, there was a shooting on my street, and it went through the living room windows in my house. And I was home, my children were home. We all woke up in the middle the night [26:00] and hid in the hallway, you know. So that's real. And for me, I'm privileged, I was able to also then, you know, I have my Brown degree, I'm working hard on my thing, I got my good job, I moved out, fine. But that visceral experience, you know, it's very hard for you to imagine if you're not having, like, if you're in the bubble. So part of my work in terms of

curriculum and where I'm headed right now with stuff at the college, I mean, what I've sort of realized in general is, on the one hand, we're trying to deliver the best quality stuff we can to the students who are vulnerable and make sure we maintain the connection. On the other hand, like a lot of the work I have to do is actually with people in my class and from my tier in terms of management, communicating with people. It's part of the reason why I do an interview like this. Like I need people to, to, like the change, [27:00] the change is not [skip in audio] and if we're looking at who should be making the change, it's not the high school dropouts. We definitely have a system that tells them over and over again, "It's you." But that's definitely not the people who have the power or the resources to actually adjust things so that, so that we have one more thing that supports everybody. And so, this move into internet based education completely. No, we can't do that. Because it, it's like, some serious dystopian terrible stuff. Like, yeah, I can live in my little North Kingstown suburb, and I can manage all of you remotely and not really like, it runs a risk of being really creepy and kind of totalitarian. Yeah, so I have concerns about that. So one of the things we're doing is I'm really thinking about, but, on the other hand, [28:00] right, nobody's driving anywhere. We could save the environment with this one. If we, if we pull it off, you know. So for what I'm providing for students and for facilitators for next year is I'm really trying to come up with a schedule that includes like a one week on, three weeks off kind of a format. Like a low residency program, right? Where we do do in person contact, I don't think it's reasonable to say that because we are the academic people who have the knowledge, we don't have an obligation to subject ourselves to similar risk that somebody who's like a CNA working in a nursing home right now does.

By the way, CNAs. I can't tell you how many GED classes I've had with a CNA in them and we need to give CNAs better work hours. Like way better. Like they should be working no more than 20 hours a week. Because that was like, like if a person comes into my classroom and they say, "I want to get my GED, finished high school, and become a nurse. I'm working right now [29:00] as a CNA." I wish I didn't have this knowledge, but I'm pretty much like, "Oh, it's not going to happen." Because there's no way your working conditions are going to give you the free time, the rest, the ability to replenish that you need for your brain to literally begin to master this stuff. So, sorry. Side note.

So there's, there's a lot there. There's a lot to unpack in how we address like, our cultural practices moving forward. I think for education, that low residency thing is a really good idea. I

think that culturally, and sort of outside of my role as a professional running this education department, I have a couple of other things I think are really important. I think and, and when this, this, the Black Lives Matter, stuff really boiled over, I felt actually content because with the work I've been doing, [30:00] I mean, I'm not perfect, but we actually have a pretty good platform. Like, we have our history the way we teach it recognizes indigenous people and recognizes African Americans. We have like specific units that are, we teach, we teach U.S. history from beginning to end with a focus on race. And then we teach U.S. history from beginning to end with a focus on women's history. And then we do another unit, that's a focus on our global. And I forget what the fourth one is, but we basically, over the course of two years, if a person takes our class for two years, which some of them do, they'll be exposed to the basic story of U.S. history, but from a different lens each time. And where was I headed with that? Oh, so the other things, right. So outside of, so I felt content about where we were at with our curriculum. And in our like, I was able to like have a staff meeting where I said, like, [31:00] "These are the things we're already doing that address that." And then the other thing I think is that it's, again, it's not the work of the low literacy adult or the immigrant who's learning English to fix these problems. It's for middle class people like me and probably like you, I would assume, that our, that's our work, right? And actually, the thing that is really important that we haven't addressed is our relationship to property ownership, and in fact, and also how we think of ourselves as citizens. So there's two things I'm going to keep going and I'm sorry.

AK: No. Please don't apologize. This is amazing. I am riveted by this. So please continue because I won't be the only one. Our listeners will be, too.

BM: Okay. So there's two things I really think we need to do. Okay. One is we need to begin to transition land ownership. So for context, right, the land ownership system that we have is a colonial structure that was imported [32:00] with the kings of England, right? It's like, I love teaching this to my GED students because it just blows their mind. Like, you know what happened, right? He sent people over in a boat, they drew a map, and then they went back and they said, "All of this is yours." And they were like, okay, well, we drew the map that's done, you know. Like, like, they just assumed that because they drew the map that included it and wrote their name on it. Now it was theirs, right. Well, that's, that's been a very powerful system

that's been enforced with violence and, and cultural sort of enforcement, right. Like, and when I think about, you know, in my generation, so now I'm 45 and I have a wide range of connections because I've been in Providence the whole time. So arts people and education people and a lot of college graduates in my same position. Well, what's been our, what's been our thing we've been working on for the last decade? Most of us, housing. Finding a place, buying a place, getting the financing. [33:00] And unfortunately, for the majority of us that capitalist lens of like it's an investment, you know. I already did, like I had, I inherited \$20,000 from my grandmother when I was in my 30s, early 30s. I bought a house, you know, I bought a house in Providence. It did not increase in value whatsoever and the entire 12 years I owned it. Like I know that that's, I know that that's, like it's a, it's an illusion, right? But what that, what that home ownership system does, which is all tied back to that original kind of colonial mentality, but what all of white college educated, or just college educated America, buying into that system does is we incrementally just make it more and more expensive for anybody to even have a place to be period. So we should be taking land that we should be coming up with a specific land ownership class which is sustainability, [34:00] which is where you agree, like, I would love to do this, if a bank offered me this, I would take it in a minute. You agree that I'm going to place this land into a class of ownership that is new, it is not private ownership, it's not nonprofit, it's not in government. It's stewardship. And by doing that, when I sell this house and the acre or whatever it is, in the end, if I want to, when I go to sell it, I agree that I'm not going to sell it for more than – the working figure I go with is five times the median income in the state around me, the watershed around me. So, so we're talking about a mechanism that slowly over time, draws people into the middle and fights against that, like, well, I bought it for \$300,000, but I'm selling it for four kind of a thing, you know, which is so dangerous, because no matter what you do, somebody puts the next tier on top of it, and it's this constant, constant competition and then people are locked. [35:00]

You know, when I, when I think about the changes we had as a result of the Health Care Act, the amount of things I was able to do. I was able to take jobs I would never have been able to take because I knew I could get health insurance from the state. And I was able to work on projects I would never have worked on before, because I would have been worried about health care, especially when I have kids. And when I think and I'm not sure for you, if that's perceptible or not, I know from my perspective, like there are some older employees where I work who are

still terrified about losing their job because they're terrified about losing benefits, because they never even had the public subsidized benefits. But within Rhode Island, we have a huge coverage. And you can really, I think you can really see the difference in sort of people's ability to take on new and interesting projects because they've been freed up by this piece that I think we could get somewhere similar with having a banking system had special mortgages that like [36:00] you could get a 2% interest rate or less, if you agreed to put your land into stewardship. If you basically said like, my, my investment is not in a capitalist increase, it's in a sustainable system, and I'm going to make it explicit. I will borrow money to buy a piece of land that I will not sell for more than a reasonable amount when it's done. And I think if all of the middle class people did that, it would, it would like radically change the way in which money is moving through our economy. First of all, there'd be a lot less investment driven cash moving through, but maybe we could put that somewhere else. And I think that it would make space, make space in ways that we need to. Because right now like, I mean, when we're, when we're talking about like Black Lives Matter, like we're talking about, like how do we get equality and justice and like we're, we're so invested in a system like physically like the land ownership system that is segregated by class [37:00] as well as race, but there's, you know, correlation there. And then two ways to really sort of address that. Like, I'm like, because, because if all of the people in my neighborhood are like, yeah, we're going to put a Black Lives Matter sign on our lawn, and we're going to defund the police, both of which we should do, but they then continue to invest in their homes as a place that becomes increasingly exclusive. I don't know, I don't see how that problem gets solved.

And one other thing I really think we should do is have a new kind of citizenship, which is watershed based. So that is to do with our connection with the environment and how we think again, stewardship, like how we think about what, what, what our political boundaries are, what our responsibilities are. If we start looking at it by watershed, it's amazing what it does because it means that, like, [38:00] all of those little suburban towns at the headwaters of a place are connected to a place like Providence, which is, you know, full of EPA Superfund sites and mill buildings from when that river was being used as a, you know, an economic engine. So, I think I'll stop there.

AK: You certainly don't have to, if you have more to say, I encourage you to keep going.

BM: Well, those are those are my big ones. I mean, it like, it sort of in some ways though, as a result of the pandemic, I would say, we should not move online entirely. Especially in education work, we've got to maintain the vulnerability of seeing each other socially and physically, you know. Distant but still somehow.

And those bigger picture changes like, like having a new class of land ownership, like thinking of ourselves as citizens of a waterway rather than a political you know, the King of England [39:00] drew a map and now I have it kind of a thing. Those are ideas that have been, I've been working on and now sort of transitioning it into promoting for a long time. Just, it's just strange that like, all of this comes together and it's like now it's like, oh, somebody wants to listen. Right! Yeah.

AK: Well, I mean, that's, in this moment that we're in, we need more listening. We need more, we need people to share their ideas and we need to listen to them and consider them and, and make them so that other people can hear them, which is what I will hopefully do with your interview, you know. And so kind of to that end, very more personally and specifically, following the death of George Floyd at the hands of police officers in Minnesota, there has been news coverage, social media coverage, protests, [40:00] all sorts of things happening around us. How if at all, have you been talking to your children about this? I don't have children, but this is something that comes up is that obviously, of course, we need to be engaging them in this conversation and giving context to what they might be seeing on TV or in their social media. And to me, that seems like I haven't, I have two master's degrees and I haven't yet figured out how to like take the level here and explain it down here kind of thing. So would you mind talking about that a little bit?

BM: No, I mean, so and here's where, let's see, is it 2015 or 2017, must be of 2017 when it was Trayvon Martin. That's when I started that discussion with my kid and she's now, so she must have been nine. [41:00] Because I was listening to the news and folding laundry and weeping, you know. So, yeah. So I think, I think I mean, given where I work and how I work and the neighborhood we were living in and being in Providence in general, like I, that had already been a topic. Like the fact that racism is a factor, the fact that injustice is among us in the world, you know, the sense of I have not had, I didn't, what I described some times in my youth where I felt

somewhat disconnected, right? I don't think, I wouldn't say I've yet found a place where I'm like, this is my community, and it works, you know. So I think that we already have that active discussion in our household about like, how we have our values, and we're in context of multiple different communities. [42:00] You know, some of which work well for us in some ways, but not others. Right. So we've, yeah, so we, we've sort of had, like, to the extent possible my kids understand what racism is. And they also, which is so heartwarming to me and also like, I hope it sticks, right? They're like, outraged. They're like, "What really?" You know, like, "How is that even possible?" And I'm like, "Good, you should be." Where, whereas for me like obviously I'm, I'm you know, I can't, I can't take those individual things as personally because I've been, like I feel like my, my work life is as focused as it can be on working on these [43:00] problems anyway. So I did attend, I did attend a protest. I went to the Dike Trans People of Color protest.

AK: Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Did you bring your children with you?

BM: No, this is nighttime. I went by myself. It was good. They had some speakers, they talked about how the education system is failing queer people of color. They talked about people who'd been murdered, trans people. It's pretty, like really common and not cool. You know, it's funny because inside immigrant communities in general, I think there's an increased level of homophobia in part, because, like, immigrant parents are more protective of helping their children follow the rules and not get in trouble. You know, there's like an increased level of vulnerability so. [44:00] Obviously, I've never experienced racism in the way that many others have, but some of those stories resonate with me around like, being not only, well, in the case of queer people of color, it's like not only rejected, sometimes rejected by family, but also like, also rejected by society as well because of the race. So, so that's, that was the march for me that I mean, obviously I queer identify so, like I was not able or interested in attending larger rally. It was a workday for me. I gave my phone number to one of our staff who was going to go as a support and I was like, you go but that one was important to me because I knew that you know, you weren't going to get 10,000 people. But so my kids knew I went. Like they're, yeah, they're pretty, they're pretty on top [45:00] of things. It's my eldest. She understands sometimes it's a little tough because like, I mean, like, you know, I have a second grader and he'll be like, "Oh, well, that's racism," you know, you're kind of like, well, it's a little more subtle. Sometimes we

have to like work, work things out and understand them a little better. I have my concerns now we're participating in North Kingstown schools and what that's going to look like, you know. I did not really see anything done for Black History Month at my kids' school. I've had to talk to them already about some cultural celebrations that are appropriative of Native American culture in a way that's not okay. So that's sort of a conversation I'm opening. It's like ugh really like, okay, I'm going have to be on the North Kingstown PTO, I guess or something. Like move them that farther along in terms of what they teach for history. You know, I mean, my, my kids' history teacher is excellent, but like his content for U.S. history like, [46:00] here's some battles, you know, the Boston tea party or something. It's just like so, so not where it needs to be to give our community an understanding. That's the problem I've got. It's like you, you're not going to be, I mean, maybe if that's really what you're interested in, being in an all-white community forever. Like, you'll probably be able to manage it. But like, majority of people are going into a world that's very diverse and to walk into that with no understanding of history or context. I mean, for one thing is a waste of time. Like I went, I went in like that, you know, I did not have any sense of context or responsibility. It was just like, no, you just do really well and get a good job and that's what matters, you know. So that slowed me down. I could have been where I am now, a couple years earlier, maybe without. Yeah, so, so like, so I do talk to the kids [47:00] and, you know, they're, they're, they're – I'm not easy as a parent because of that kind of thing. It's like ugh, with the justice again. But they get it. So what are you doing? Speaking of which. Okay, I'll be done soon.

AK: So I don't want to take up too, too much of your time here. So I do have a, just a couple of more questions that are, again, totally just a shot in the dark, speculation. But if there, if somebody listened to this interview tomorrow, what is one thing you would want them to know? And if they're listening to this interview, 50 years from now, what is one thing you want that person to know?

BM: Well, I mean, oh geese, she's for tomorrow – [48:00] I mean, if you're living in the Rhode Island area and you'd like my ideas about land ownership and watershed citizenship, find me because I that's like my, that's what's on my assignment right now, right. I have my particular things that I feel like we really need to do as a culture and that people who are privileged have

the capacity forward. So, you know, not directly responding to the pandemic, taking things starting from a layer out and talking about, like, really big tweaks that will take decades to result in change, but are worth looking at. Yeah, and then the other thing I'd say for people tomorrow is like, what can we do to support access to education in a way that also, that doesn't get on the hamster wheel of like, let's do more, more, more. You know, we're going to I've heard a lot of like, well, we're going to move on, but we're going to achieve just as much you know, and I think that [49:00] actually we need to slow down. We need to come up with government tactics that are going to explicitly support that person who's working as the CNA to only work 20 hours a week so they can take care of their children, so they can have their own time for education. And they think that this has shown us that we could perfectly well function with a lot less, a lot less workforce engagement. You know, we have an emphasis on it that is it's not helpful. It's sickening. Literally, it's, it's sickening metaphysically and it's also physically sickening, like so we've got to slow down. For the person watching tomorrow, like, how, what position are you in to reduce somebody's work hours to support like a, you know, the universal basic income idea, something like that? Housing Access pieces that will then mean that for me and my work, I am creating that, you know, [50:00] internet Zoom connection with our students. And it's, and it's not me as like privileged technological overlord telling them what they need to know. There's more equity and parity in terms of, especially in terms of what we expect. We say, like, "Get educated!" Well, it takes a lot, takes a lot. It takes being rested. It takes having, you know, cultural competencies and opportunities that we, our system does not support right now. So we could do a lot better with that.

And for 50 years from now, I mean, I would be super grateful if somebody was like, those are good ideas. I'm so glad we did watershed citizenship. You know, like, I'm so glad that we figured out how to move our property ownership mentality out of this investment orientation into something that was more focused on sustainability, you know. And I'm, I'm so glad that we figured out how to teach history and support civic engagement in a way that like has made our democracy stronger. That'd be nice. [51:00]

AK: So I don't want to close out without giving you a final opportunity to share anything that you would like to that maybe I didn't ask you about that you were hoping to get into the historical record today before we close out.

BM: Well, I would say I've been a little bit focused, a lot a bit focused on education and sort of policy. The experience of being a woman and a mother are not really sort of pandemic-ly oriented, but sort of just for the record –

AK: Yeah, please do.

BM: You know, that, that, like I, I am a person who had, I had two children a little bit because I had older, I had some older friends who were like distraught [52:00] and somewhat devastated by not having been able to have kids or having a really hard time. And it was just at a time in my life where I was like, this is something I can do. Alright, let's do it, you know. Maybe not the best reasons to get started. But also, you know, you, you go through this, now you've given birth to a child and then you literally have to like relive your entire life and check every step of the way, like, okay, this is how it happened for me when I was a kid. Is it still the right way to do things? You know? And, and, in particular, the first like, seven years of life, like for a child, you know, I mean, it's everything from like, how do you poop to like, how do you talk to people out in the world? Like, there's just a huge curriculum there that as an adult takes a lot [53:00] of time and attention. And I would say that our culture does not support women or parents, you know, regardless of gender, obviously most often women to do that work. And in particular, when I'm talking about like working women, women who are low educated, you know, who are the majority of people in my classrooms. Like, how do we take that, like, the experience that I had of becoming a parent was I was a working parent for a lot of the time during my first child's birth, like first couple of years of life. And I had a great boss who supported me and I worked like literally a 15 minute walk from my house. So like, I could, like go home and breastfeed in the afternoon and, or my child could be brought to me and like, my schedule was very flexible. So that was excellent. Work was still hard, though, you know, work was still hard. And, and my second child, I tried to not be [54:00] working but the family income was so low, we were on food stamps for like a while. And that was its own set of difficulties and another eye opener in terms of understanding what people are going through where you're having, where you're like, oh, I could buy soap or I could buy food. Like those are intense decisions to have to make. And you really slow down and you start to, the way you perceive the world is fundamentally shifted

as the strategy of survival takes over. And like I think about, you know, for instance, within Rhode Island, there's this program, Rhode Island Works. Like, if you're on a certain kind of cash assistance you have to be looking for work. And you if you get offered a job, you have to take the job. And these are predominantly women who are in these roles and they're already doing – if they're working with a kid who's under seven years old, and they're, they haven't got a high school diploma, they don't have the basic skills to even navigate the civic landscape or, you know, what we're asking of them is impossible, [55:00] and it's not fair. So I'd say there's, there's some sort of my final piece. And it's less to do specifically with pandemic and more to do with just how we view that work. And that perhaps, culturally, looking at that, where if you're the primary caregiver for somebody under the age of seven, that you're doing a certain kind of work, like making it so that we offered workshops that are free, that are like, sort of somewhat universal and helpful, and that we, again, universal basic income. You know, I had a friend from Poland I met who was getting paid, I think \$30,000 a year just because she was home with a four year old. That was just the policy. And that was she was like the partner of somebody who was working at Brown, I think, or something. So it was like, even though she was out of the country, because she was Polish and she was raising a child there was something there to help her do that work. We don't currently have that at all, at all. And it's coming back to hurt us because that's, I mean, if, [56:00] if we have a goal of a more collectively healthy and happy culture, we have to support the people who are doing that caregiving in a more explicit way.

AK: And I think what you're talking about is not necessarily like, totally outside of the pandemic topic, right? Because women at this point of like, everything about the inequities and just how we live in the United States is being amplified, or being put under a microscope, and women's paid and unpaid labor is now very much intersecting and basically blowing up in our collective faces here, of like, what women are actually doing. Because now not only is it laundry and dinner and child care, it's those things in addition to doing your job all in the same four walls, and it's like what are we doing here? You know? [57:00]

BM: Yeah.

AK: So I'm so glad you brought that up. Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to add

or elaborate on?

BM: No, I think that's it.

AK: Well, thank you so much for joining me today. This has been really fascinating and I can't wait to make it available to all of our listeners.

BM: Thank you so much for having me. It's been really nice to get some, get some ideas off my chest. And, and thanks for doing this work. It's really, it's funny because I was, you know, I was a very skeptical undergraduate at Brown. I was like, ugh, this place. But also I do see like, you know, we've got some infrastructure built in here to catch things and make a record in a way that is helpful.

AK: Yeah, that's, that's what we're trying. We're trying to use our tools in this moment to, to capture all aspects of what we're going through and make it available to the widest, the widest audience we can.

BM: Yeah, which is excellent. Okay, well, thank you.

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