

**Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project
Oral History Initiative**

**Interview with Catina Lowery
March 24, 2021**

Interviewee: Catina Lowery
Interviewer: Alexis Mattson
Date: March 24, 2021
Location: interview conducted remotely over Zencast
Duration: 59:49

Transcription prepared by: Lucy Perry

0:00 = Childhood in Christiansburg (1972-1980s); experiencing racism in the public school system

11:30 = the intersectionality of discrimination experienced by Black lesbian women (race, gender, and sexuality)

13:34 = Her parents' experiences in Southwest Virginia at mid-century; history of the Christiansburg Industrial Institute; Black communities in Southwest Virginia

19:22 = Racism within the LGBTQ Community; experiences in Chicago working for Lambda Legal

24:30 = Marriage Equality as a white people's issue; racism within Lambda Legal

28:00 = LGBTQ coalition politics with Black and women's movements; failure to adopt intersectional approach

30:28 = Volunteer work in Chicago; moving back to Southwest Virginia in 2009; trying to connect with a gay community here

34:00 = Moving back to Christiansburg in 2009; commentary on the Charlottesville riots (2017), white supremacy, and emotional labor

42:21 = commentary on the U.S. Capitol riot (2021); how to overcome white supremacy and racism

48:10 = the dominance of white gay men in the LGBTQ Community

55:36 = Differences between Chicago and Christiansburg, dating in Chicago (2000-2009)

59:11 = Closing thoughts

00:00

AM: Today is March 24th, 2021, and I'm here with Catina Lowery who I will be interviewing as a part of the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ Oral History Project. Thank you so much for being here today and contributing to our project. Typically, these interviews tend to be in person...

00:20

CL: Yeah, thank you for inviting me!

00:22

AM: Yeah [*laughing*] no problem. These interviews tend to be in person, but understandably this year due to COVID-19 there's been some reasonable precautions... we are going to be remote

this year. It would have been nice to meet you in person and hopefully we can in the future. But I want to go ahead and get started, with asking you about your upbringing in Virginia. Were you born and raised here?

00:45

CL: I was born and raised in Christiansburg.

00:52

AM: Alright sounds good. Where did you go to school?

00:55

CL: Did you hear that?

00:56

AM: Oh, yeah yeah.

01:00

CL: Okay, I'm sorry. Where did I go to school? Alright, let's see... I graduated through the Christiansburg system, so primary school, middle school, high school. Then college level, my freshmen year I went to DePaul University out in Chicago, Illinois. Then I transferred to Virginia Tech. I was at Tech for about, uh, a few years... and we can go into why I left Tech... not gay related, more color related. Then I moved out to Chicago from there and I finished up my degree at North Park University in Chicago. Two degrees, I have a master's degree too.

01:49

AM: Oh wow, so lots of moving around between Chicago and Virginia, it sounds like?

01:53

CL: Yeah, Chicago is a good town.

01:57

AM: So, kind of going back more to like your childhood and how it was like growing up when you were young, was your childhood upbringing... was it normal? Did you face any difficulty growing up... were you bullied or anything like that?

02:07

CL: Like in terms of being LGBT?

02:09

AM: Just in general...

02:11

CL: Cause I'm a lesbian... I'm not going to say LGBT because I'm a lesbian. So, in terms of being like a lesbian or just in general?

02:20

AM: Yeah, sure absolutely, and we can look at that question a few ways. How was your upbringing growing up? Was it difficult because maybe... did you face any racial discrimination or was that like more paramount over being a lesbian? So, anything like that... that you faced growing up in your earlier years?

02:47

CL: Right, well okay I will say, growing up in Christiansburg, I didn't know that I was a lesbian... and I know I had mentioned this to you before on our initial talk together, so I grew up... I mean, I would say I'm a child of like the '80s and the '90s, because I was born in '72. There were no out LGBT people, and I'm not saying they didn't exist, it just wasn't as you see today... out. You know, these days people are out. So, I really had no concept to be honest with you of sexual orientation when I was growing up... didn't really think about it. You get what I'm saying. When I look back on it, when I think about my friendships that I had, with like women and my interaction with my male friends... looking back on it I can identify it as, oh, ding ding, I was a lesbian. You know what I'm saying? So... my female friends, we would have like sleepovers and be snuggling and everything, but I didn't associate that with anything but friendship... Because I had no other model or influences to associate that with anything other than "oh, well we're just women, this is what we do when we're friends." And then when I look at my relationship with males, and to be honest with you even to this day, it's kind of weird all of my close friends have always been male friendships. Like I said, looking back on it, I think that's just associated with my sexual orientation. So, I really didn't identify any way, as straight, gay, or anything growing up just because like I said, I had no context for it. I had no role models. It wasn't talked about in my growing up. I was never called a lesbian or a dyke, or anything of that nature.

05:00

Now in terms of the color of my skin, which is the obvious part... yeah, I mean I was called a "nigger." The first time I can remember the word "nigger," now keep in mind '70s, '80s, right... growing up in Christiansburg which is, especially back then—less now, because it's more diverse—but when I was growing up it was a predominantly white community. My graduating class was probably a little over a hundred people and I'd say there's probably five or so of us that were people of color. When I say people of color, we're not talking about Latinos and Asians, were talking about you're black or you're white... or you're mixed, you know? So, I do remember when I was a little kid we were... it was me, my sister, and my mother in the car... and we were just driving along in Christiansburg, on College Street where I grew up, passed the little hot bin, and I don't even remember where we were going, and it was a sunny day and my mom had the windows down and these white men drove by us and screamed out "nigger." And that was the first time I'd ever even experienced the word "nigger." And I didn't quite get that concept, but I can tell you that in like third grade, I believe it was, before you like change classes when you hit junior high when you have different teachers, [but] you have the same teacher in third grade, at least that's how it was when I grew up... I remember... but you have to think about the history of Virginia, it was one of the states once they integrated the school system that practiced active resistance to integrating the school systems. So, the fact that I was born in '72... so by the time I hit third, fourth, fifth grade where you don't change classes or whatever, and the fact that Virginia was one of the holdover states... basically when I went through school in my younger years what that meant was that the textbooks hadn't changed yet... forgive me, it wasn't

third grade it was fifth grade, so let me correct that, it was actually fifth grade. My teacher was Ms. Brown and because the textbooks hadn't caught up yet, and we were using the holdover textbooks when it was all white and everything was segregated, there was a chapter that we all had to read—I'm the only black person in class—and it was describing what a negro is. And this wasn't even coming from the teacher, it was literally the textbook that we were required to read and study... and it said "this is what a negro looks like: they have thick full lips, they flat broad noses," and I remember all of the kids in class kinda turned around and looking at me, and I think that was the first time that we all realized that "oh, there's something different"... I mean we're kids, we don't really care about that stuff until someone points it out, you know? And I would say after that, in terms of just growing up, next time I actually heard the word quote "nigger," actually came from someone who was mulatto—that's what we called it back in the day—meaning one parent was white, one parent was black. This was actually in middle school, when you get to change classes, and it was in gym class and it was co-ed, and we were playing dodgeball... and there was a kid there who like I said was of mixed race, one parent was black, one parent was white... and I got him out in dodgeball and he said "you fucking nigger." I'm sorry if I'm not supposed to cuss in this class.

09:03

AM: No, please do if you feel comfortable to.

09:08

CL: It just devastated me, because I was kind of like... well, it was just weird. And at the time my mom, because my mother for forty-something years worked in the Montgomery County school system, specifically in Christiansburg, and so she actually worked at the middle school that I was [going to]. And my routine was I didn't even use a locker, like all the other kids. I used my mom's classroom as my locker. So, after gym class when I'm going to my mom's classroom, and I'm dropping off my books to pick up the other books for my next class, she's like "what's wrong with you, why are you looking all down, or whatever?" and I told her what happened, "well this guy called me a 'nigger'." So, my mom like rips out of the classroom and she's like "who? who?" and I point the guy out... because again we were in the process of changing classes. I pointed him out, she rips him up by his collar and takes him to the principal's office... so yeah, for me that was my concept of discrimination. Yeah, the fact that I had no concept of sexual orientation from grade K through 12 probably prevented me from, you know, the LGBT type of discrimination, to be honest with you. Now was I perceived to be gay? I don't know... I mean I think it's clear... certainly as I grew older, and people just assume that I'm gay, but I guess like I said, the innocence of those times I don't think people really pictured all of that. But I will tell you when I moved back from Chicago, which was in 2009, and I connected with a few high school friends, apparently there was this whole gay scene going on [back then] that I didn't know about... so I'm like "oh, really?"... so, apparently someone was aware, it just wasn't me.

11:30

AM: Oh, wow. So, you would say like most of your experiences in terms of discrimination are more defined by your race rather than your sexuality?

11:40

CL: Well, that's a really hard question. Let me tell you why... If you're being discriminated against, someone doesn't like you [or] they're mad at you, is it because you're a woman? Is it because you're Black? or is it because you're gay? Uh, I don't know, unless they say "nigger," "dyke," "bitch." You get what I'm saying? Yeah, discrimination, even... you look at folks who feel like they've been discriminated in the workplace, like "I'm going to file a lawsuit, you discriminated against me because I'm Black" Right? Lawyers have a hard time when you're part of multiple minority groups, distinguishing what was the discrimination. Was it because you're a woman, was it because you're black, or is it because you're a lesbian? And is it a combination of all three? I mean it's a hard thing honestly to distinguish. Like how do I know? You don't like me because of what... I don't know? I mean the first thing that you see when you see me is that I'm Black and that I'm a woman. Maybe when you get to know me and you see my mannerisms then you'll know that I'm gay. So what's the discrimination? Is it a combination of all three? Who knows?

12:40

AM: Yeah, that's interesting... and like knowing that you're a part of a group that has faced discrimination historically, you can just assume that somebody... you don't have to know the reason, you just know. So, I can understand, like does that resonate with you a bit? Hmm, that's interesting.

13:04

CL: Yeah absolutely, I can't distinguish... certainly there have been people in my life that don't like me for whatever reason, but I don't know why that is. Unless I heard—like I told you—"dyke," "nigger," "bitch"... then you're telling me why you hate me. Other than that, I don't know. I don't have just one aspect of being a minority, so I can't distinguish between the three what you don't like about me.

13:34

AM: No, that's absolutely right, I can understand that. How was your home life, like with your parents? Did you have a feeling that they knew that you were different in some way?

13:41

CL: Well probably so, because I was a tomboy growing up. I mean girls played with dolls and this and that, but I played with bikes and guns, and little army men... and it was totally encouraged. You know, I had a great upbringing in terms of my identity and coming into an adult. I was never judged. I was never criticized for being who I was... it was always encouraged. If I wanted a gun for Christmas, or a little army boy, or something that was weird, you know, my mom and stepfather didn't care. They said, "get it for her." So I never felt that being a tomboy was wrong... it was encouraged, like "that's who she is, if she wants that then get it for her." I mean, so I feel like my identity was always validated within my family, but keep in mind—and I'm not generalizing because not all Black people have that experience in their household... and it really depends on the people. But keep in mind that my mother was one of the very first Black people to integrate, racially, into Wytheville High School. Okay? My stepfather, being a Black man, was in and out of the system, you know, was discriminated against his entire life for being a Black man... and he also, back in those days—and this is something that you guys maybe can research on a side note, outside of your project which is

LGBT specific—but there’s something very interesting about the community of Christiansburg, Virginia that should be taught in history books across the nation, but it isn’t. And that’s the fact that there was a place called Christiansburg Industrial Institute. Okay? And I’ll just very quickly...

It was a school started by a Quaker called William Shaffer, who was a reverend of Quaker religion, and after the Civil War, when the South fell, he came to Christiansburg, Virginia and he basically educated the Black community. So you have Black folks running around, like “what am I gonna do, we don’t have plantations anymore?” They didn’t know what to do. He said “well I’m gonna come, I’m a Quaker,” as you know they’re all about the liberation of Black folk... and he came to Christiansburg, Virginia and he started a school. He didn’t just start it for Black people. He wanted everybody to attend, but white people didn’t want to go to school with Black people. So, basically what happened was, the Black community was more educated than the white community in Christiansburg, Virginia. And Christiansburg Institute was a massive institution where Black folks owned their own hospitals, their own education system, horse farms... I mean it was a self-sustaining community in Christiansburg. And if you look at history, because I know, I did my dissertation on it when I was in college and I studied this whole history of Christiansburg, which amazes me. And basically what happened was, finally when Virginia decided that they were going to integrate, in the [19]70s—the ‘70s, keep that in mind—white folks could not wait to get rid of Christiansburg Institute. And you look at news reports and they’re like “I wish that my son or daughter was educated like them Black folk,” because you had these kids going from this school to Ivy League schools, which was unheard of in the [19]40s, ‘50s, ‘60s, ‘70s. Well, that wasn’t happening at the white high school, so they couldn’t wait to tear that school down, because it made them look bad. In fact, if you look at the history of the NAACP, when they were bringing their case to integrate the school system, they first stopped in Christiansburg, Virginia at Christiansburg Industrial Institute. And they said, “we’re going to prove that separate but equal doesn’t work, it just doesn’t work.” So they went to Christiansburg Industrial Institute and then they buried it, because they realized that it does work. And I’m not trying to make any inference of anything, but what happened was, when they went to Christiansburg, and they saw these Black folks going to Ivy League Schools, owning their own businesses, their own hospitals, their own land, they got scared and they felt that that was going to hurt their case to integrate the schools, so they buried them. And that’s just the truth of the history. So I come from that tradition... and I’m not saying that all Black people in Christiansburg come from that, but I can tell you that the Christiansburg Industrial Institute, I mean these people are dying off, but they still exist and they’re trying to start up that museum in Christiansburg. But yeah, I mean that’s just my background... I don’t mean to ramble.

19:22

AM: No, that’s okay. It’s interesting because there’s this neighborhood in Roanoke, called—I believe it’s Gainsboro—and that’s where there was some prominent LGBTQ community forming there, and it was mostly and predominately Black, but overtime... [*CL interrupts to dim the shades in her home.*]

19:58

CL: Yeah, but I will just say this generally... let’s just be clear that there is racism within the LGBT community. So, when I lived in Chicago, first time away from home, and outside of the

college life, I worked, you know, in three very prominent non-profit agencies for the LGBT community. I worked for the Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, I worked for Affinity Community Services, and I worked for Lambda Legal, which you know is a national organization and the oldest LGBT legal organization in the country. And I just want to be very clear, that racism is huge in the LGBT community. And I experienced it firsthand as a professional working on the civil rights of LGBTQA... folks. So, I just want to point that out to you. I just wanted to say that in general.

21:13

AM: Oh no, interesting. Do you want to elaborate on that? Like is there a certain situation or circumstance you found yourself in?

21:16

CL: To be perfectly honest with you, we could go on for days. We could go on for days.

21:20

AM: I mean, I don't know, if you're comfortable...

[CL interrupts to adjust the shades in her home again.]

21:36

CL: ... So, I can go on for days, but let's see, how about we start with....

21:48

AM: Did you want to talk about something else and maybe we could lead into it?

21:50

CL: No, No. I just want to give you a good example is all. Alright, Lambda Legal, the nation's... and you might as well say the world because it's not like there's some other country that has some LGBT legal organization. So, as you know Lambda Legal came out of Stonewall. Now, we all know Stonewall was a white movement. It's about white folk going to white bars, and getting their asses kicked. Now, I'm not saying there weren't Black people in the mix, but come on, let's just be honest. I'm not saying there weren't trans people in the mix, but let's just be honest. This was about gay white men mad because they got exed out of their privilege. And if it wasn't for them being gay, they'd be part of that other privilege and they mad about it! I mean, I'm sorry, let's just be honest. So, I worked for Lambda Legal for like four years and. to be honest, it would have been beyond that if I didn't have to move back here, because my mom got sick. But, we always had major issues at Lambda with race. So, all the attorneys, you know, most of them were Ivy League educated—Harvard, Yale—and they're all white, except for maybe one or two. They don't have an outreach staff now, they nixed that, but when I worked for Lambda Legal we had a whole outreach department. Like every office, because it's a national office, so we had offices in L.A., Chicago—I worked in the Chicago office—Atlanta, New York. And so, all the outreach staff, meaning the face of the agency that went out into the community to talk to folks, well we were all people of color. We were either Black or Latino. Okay, and the top of the agency, and the attorneys, they were all white people. Let's just be clear.

24:03

Now you look at things like the institution of marriage, okay. I helped with that whole thing. I helped pass marriage legislation in the state of Iowa. The whole thing is, when you even look at the institution of marriage, especially back in the day, when it was first coming up and we were starting to get legislatures passing it or fighting it in the court... The whole thing was, this whole institution of marriage as the predominant push for the LGBT community was a white thing. Now when you look at folks of color—Latinos, Black folks, Asians, whatever you have it—marriage wasn't their top priority. You know why? Because they were getting their ass beat for being gay, or lesbian, or trans. They weren't thinking about getting married. That's an issue of privilege. They were thinking about "Am I going to live tomorrow?" Right? "Am I going to go to school and get my ass beat?" "Am I going to go to work and get fired for being gay?" You get me? So, the whole marriage thing that Lambda Legal, and ACLU, and all these other agencies were pushing, I mean it was really just a concept of white privilege. It's just like "ok well, we're white, and if it wasn't for the fact that we couldn't be married, that's the one thing that's preventing us from our white privilege." Okay well that's great, and I'm not saying that gay marriage is a bad thing, I think it's an important thing. But in the whole concept of what is important, and what is the priority, the diversity of the LGBTQA community faces, that was not the major push for folks of color. That was the major push for gay white men. And that was because it was the one thing that prevented them from their white privilege. Well, we ain't folks of privilege, alright? We get fired every day, we're walking in Black communities and getting our asses beat for being gay, or perceived to be. So, our priority was safety, equality, equal rights. Not issues of privilege.

26:39

AM: Yeah. That's fascinating to me.

26:40

CL: I will tell you. So, every year at Lambda Legal, we would do what called an "employee retreat," to work on basically the overall strategic plan of the agency. And I remember, there was this one year, and I can't even remember where it was, I think it was somewhere in Connecticut or something. So, we all got together, like we did annually. Just to talk about "oh, what should the strategic plan be for the upcoming year? What goals have we met for this past year?" And it got so heated between us outreach staff, which was the "color" of the agency, and the white folk which was the attorneys and everybody above them. We're sitting there one day at this retreat, and its usually like a week-long, or something like that, and we're sitting there and [this woman] who was my outreach coworker that worked out of the Texas office, Dallas, walks in with a sign on her shirt that said "negro." That's how bad it got.

28:00

The other thing I will mention is how the LGBT lead agencies always want these other groups to sign onto their stuff to move forward their civil rights. NAACP, "oh please sign onto our amicus brief about marriage, or about this or about that." "Oh ACLU, please sign on to this, sign on to that." "Oh, Asian, Pacific Islanders." Everybody. They always want other prominent groups to sign on to whatever they're doing, to move their civil rights forward. Now let's just keep what I just said in mind. And that's fine. NAACP did it, and it was hard for them. They didn't want to sign onto that gay stuff because they homophobic, but they did. They did. When you look at the

flip side—okay you got George Floyd, you got all of these things going on in communities of color—do you think these LGBT prominent groups are signing onto their amicus briefs? They will only do it, if it specifically affects what they consider their rights as LGBT people, even though they've piggybacked on every other movement. The LGBT community, all the rights that we've achieved is a piggyback of the Black civil rights movement and the women's movement. Alright. Now they'll sign onto anything that has to do with *Roe v. Wade*. Now keep in mind that our right to privacy as gay people, meaning the cops ain't kicking down our door because we are having sex in the bedroom, comes from *Lawrence v. Texas*. That's the case that changed the law for the LGBT community. Now what's that case based on? It's based on *Roe v. Wade*, that's what that case is based on. And that's my whole point. Now if it's just generally, "oh well this Black man got beat in the street, and it's Black Lives Matter" they ain't signing onto that. Why is that? I mean there are Black people in your community. You get what I'm saying? There are women in your community. You want everybody to sign onto your stuff, but where are you when our civil rights are trampled on? But you're there if it has something to do with the law and your rights. And that's just my take on this whole thing and I'm sorry I don't mean to rant.

30:28

AM: No, it's absolutely fine. Thank you for that. Wow, yeah that's lots of information. I wanted to continue on and ask you about some of your experiences in college. How was that like for you, and what did you get your degree in?

30:45

CL: Let's see, my undergraduate degree is in non-profit management and I have an MBA.

30:54

AM: Oh, very cool, very cool. And where do you currently work now?

31:07

CL: I work for Housing Connections. I basically oversee the housing choice voucher program for Pulaski County.

31:15

AM: Okay cool, alright.

31:18

CL: Housing equality.

31:21

AM: Housing equality, sounds good. And you do a lot of volunteer work from what I've heard as well. So, what exactly do you do?

31:30

CL: I'll admit, since I've moved back... When I was in Chicago, I did a lot of volunteer work. I worked on immigrant issues. I served on the board and did school trainings as well for a prominent agency that looked to bring equality to LGBTQ youth in schools, like K-12. I did a lot of education with staff and students. But since I've moved back here I tried to get into that, and

that's actually how I met Garland.¹ When I first moved back, I was like "where's the gay community here?" I mean, I haven't been here since I was a kid, so I don't know. And when I was a kid I wasn't gay here, or didn't know I was. And so I tried to get into that, and that's how I met Garland. There was this group called Roanoke Diversity, because they were afraid to call it "gay," but that's just another story [*laughter*]. That's how I met Garland and I mean I tried to get into that for a little while, but it just wasn't for me, personally. Just, you know, not my speed, not my thing, not for me. To be honest, I don't really do a lot of volunteer work anymore. My job and just the significance of the communities that I serve is pretty fulfilling to me. But yeah, if I found an agency that I thought would be great to connect with, then I certainly would.

33:29

AM: So yeah you met with Garland... [*CL makes off-record remark to another person on the call*] So you know Garland, so how exactly did you guys meet?

33:53

CL: Yeah, so Garland was my buddy. He is like one of the first folks that I met when I moved back here from Chicago, in 2009.

34:00

AM: Yeah, he spoke to us in one of our first classes, because he's also doing an interview I believe. Or he's at least a community partner that is working with us. Seems like a very nice guy. It's awesome that you guys are helping us work on our project this year, so we really appreciate that. So, I wanted to ask you a bit more about when you moved back to Virginia. Why did you? And if you can remember when you moved, was this before or after what happened in Charlottesville in 2017?

34:40

CL: It was before. So, I moved back here in 2009 for my mom. So basically, in the '90s my mom was diagnosed with these seizures and overtime they got worse, they became grand mal seizures. And when I was out in Chicago—I lived in Chicago for over 14 years—and when I was out in Chicago because my family didn't want to worry me, they would never really tell me what was going on. And I would come home typically once a year around Christmas, sometimes I'd come twice around Thanksgiving as well. And my mother got significantly worse, like her grand mal seizures were just out of control. I was worried, so I came home. That was the initial reason why I came home. Then it was a different health problem that she eventually passed away of. So yeah, that's why I came home initially.

35:35

AM: Oh, okay. So, you said that you ended up moving before what happened in Charlottesville in 2017?

35:50

CL: Yeah, I moved back from Chicago back to here, Southwest Virginia, in 2009.

¹ Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project, "Oral History Interview with Garland Gravely," February 19, 2017, Virginia Room Digital Collection, <http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/GravelyGarland>.

36:00

AM: 2009. Okay, so you were here for a quite a long time before. So, that's interesting. Did you notice anything change between... because that was around the year that Obama got elected, as well, into the presidential office?

36:14

CL: I was actually, when Obama got elected, I was still in Chicago. And keep in mind he was a soon of "Chi-town" ... So...

36:18

AM: Yeah, it was around during that time, I guess. Have you seen a transition between that time you moved back to 2017 when the riots in Charlottesville occurred, you know, in terms of race relations?

36:29

CL: Do I see a change?

36:32

AM: Yeah, like did you see, in the political sphere as well, during that span of time when you lived here did you see a shift?

36:39

CL: Yeah, I mean what the change is, is that because of political correctness, whatever you want to call it, it used to be that racism was more hidden [*laughter*]. Recently, it's become like it was back in the day, people don't care. "I'm a racist" So, it's more... it's not that racism went away. It was always racism from the beginning of time. The difference is when it's hidden and when it's visible, when white folks feel they need to hide it and when they feel comfortable to show it. So, yeah, the difference is: hidden to visible. I mean, feeling like you have the community's support so you can be in the KKK again. I mean, that's the difference. Honestly.

37:30

AM: Did you see any of that live on TV, or did you see any of that footage at the time, and how did that make you feel if you did?

37:47

CL: In Charlottesville?

37:48

AM: Yeah, in Charlottesville, I mean.

37:49

CL: Yeah, I mean I saw much of that. I saw the little Nazis marching around talking about Jews and this and that. I mean look [*laughter*]... How does that make me feel? Quite frankly, and look, I don't give a good-googely-crap about what white people think, what straight people think, what anybody the fuck thinks. I mean when you're secure with yourself, what other people

do, it don't matter. You get what I'm saying? How did I feel about that? There was a bunch of ignorant white people marching around on my TV screen. That's what I think about it. Okay, now where it affects me is when that ignorant crap becomes law or policy, then that affects me. Now, you want to march around like a little idiot, looking like a little KKK, [or] Hitler [*makes mocking sounds*]. Now when it becomes any kind of law or policy that affects me or other people, then that's when I care. Other than that, people can believe what they believe, think what they think, I don't give a shit. I'm not here to appease you. I'm not here to educate you, and that important. Educate you. It appears that every minority group was put on Earth to educate people, about why they shouldn't be "this" or why they shouldn't be "that." Why do we have to educate folk? Did anyone sit you down and educate you on white privilege? No, you learned it, didn't you? Did anyone sit there and educate you on anything to do with a community that is not a minority group? No, we all learned that. You get me, but they [are] sitting back thinking our whole life is to educate them. "Oh, well this is what it's like to be this... and this is what it's like to be Black... and this is my experience..." When are you going to sit back and educate me on what's it's like to be white? Right, I mean that is not the expectation. So, yeah, I mean that's just my view of things. Now I'm not saying I don't educate people. I do it, but I don't feel like I'm called to do it. And I feel that minority groups—I don't care what minority group you fall into—it's kind of like this requirement that your whole life is to be educating people about why you should have your rights... Well okay, who you are, okay... Well, they're not educating me on who they are. Right, you get me. I'm not expecting someone to sit down and be like, "okay Catina, this is what it's like to be white." No. But yet I'm supposed to sit down and educate you on "this is what it's like to be Black." I mean come on, man. So, my whole thing is, yeah, like I said, I saw a bunch of idiots walking around on the screen looking like a bunch of dumbasses, and whatever, that's their right. But the point when it becomes any kind of policy or law, or they're fucking with me and trying to come after me, okay, that's my business. But other than that, whatever I don't let things like that... Because in the end folks change, in my opinion, based on personal experience. They know a Black person, they know a trans person, they know a gay person, and they're friends with that person. They have a mutual respect and a bond with that person. That's how people change, okay? Now there's the other route, you can make em' change. You can change the law, you can enforce policy, yes, but usually that's the hard way. I mean, people follow the law and follow policy, but that does not change people's hearts and minds, it changes their behavior and their action. How you change hearts and minds is when people get to know Black people, "oh my best friend, we grew up together, and I love her, you don't talk bad about her,"... "oh, my cousin's gay and I love him." That's how you change heart and minds. Now like I said we are always changing behavior and action, which is great, that's an important part of it. But, in the end, real change is hearts and minds. Hearts and minds. And that's a personal connection.

42:21

AM: Yeah sure, thanks for that. I know how you were saying how... and I can agree with you on a lot of what you just said, in terms of like we can't allow these people, who have these prejudices, to feel like their messages matter, and we need to care about them, or validate them through our attention to them. But then recently we had something happen at the White House on January 6th, with the Capitol riots—another instance where we have a bunch of white people going and exercising their right to essentially take over our government, or whatever they were

trying to attempt to do there. Those are things that we need to think about in terms of like, “what does that say about America’s acceptance to diverse perspectives and people?”

43:18

CL: I think it says exactly what I just said [*laughter*]. You have a bunch of boneheads who are racist as hell... [*several seconds of CL and AM talking over one another*]

43:41

AM: Or maybe I should say it differently... like, normalizing being discriminatory in the vein of having free speech. You know what I’m saying? Like normalizing this behavior. Does that concern you?

43:59

CL: I agree with you. Yeah, my whole point is, when you have members of Congress who are standing up there, and an ex-president standing up there condoning that behavior, right... Yeah that’s when you speak up, you... you get me?

44:20

AM: Are you hopeful though?

44:24

CL: Am I hopeful? Am I hopeful that America will ever be anything but a racist place to be? Ummm... [*laughter*], yes [*laughter*]. And I say this because... well, first of all, we can look at just the science of it all, you know, what year is it going to be where white folks are going to be in the minority and most people are going to be mixed anyway? I say that because, like I said to you, think about history and where Black people, Latinos, Asians—and I’m not saying this doesn’t happen today, especially when you go to bigger cities—don’t mix. I have my community and I never go outside of my community. Even when I lived in Chicago, let me tell you something, I met Black folk on the Southside, Latinos on the Westside, that never traveled outside of their neighborhood in Chicago. I’m like what are you talking about, how have you never traveled outside of your neighborhood? So, I’m not saying that doesn’t exist. Now my whole point is... look, this is about hearts and minds. Hearts and minds. Once folks meet other people, alright, they love somebody, “oh well that’s my best friend, we grew up, we thick and thin,” it’s hard to close off your heart and your mind... you get what I’m saying. Like once you have a personal connection with someone, and quite frankly, when you think about race relations, yes of course there is the whole legal aspect of it, the whole policy aspect of it, but that’s not what changed white folk. “Oh, well, the law says this and now I like you.” No, what happened was they began to meet folks who weren’t like themselves and they realized, “Oh, you’re not that much different than me and you’re my best friend,” and that’s how that shit changes. So, even with this crap that happened at the Capitol, it’s the same thing. Unfortunately, change is slow. Oh my god, it’s so slow. It is the slowest dag gone thing. We will all be dead and buried before then. I mean, change is a very slow process. So, do I believe that in the end there will be some sense of a kumbaya? Likely. Just because demographics are changing in relation to race, intermarriages, not even marriages, but mixed babies, people of color. And if you’re looking at the Latino community their coming over here like droves, they’re going to be over this place soon. So, yeah whether they like it or not, it’s coming. Because people of color, even when

you look at the LGBT community, no doubt. Did you know, that when you look at LGBT couples who are Black and Latino, that they raise children at higher rates than their white counterparts? They have and raise children at higher rates than their white counterparts. Yeah, change is coming, eventually.

48:10

AM: Yeah, all of that. You've said some very interesting points to me that I've been trying to see if I can circle back for the last few minutes that we have. I want to kind of go back and talk about some more about white privilege in general. And also, I want to touch upon white gay privilege, cause I thought you made some interesting points with that, too. So, with all that is going on politically and race relation-wise in the United States, just in general, do you feel like white men period feel like they are out of place in a world that is becoming more and more diverse, but in a vein it's kind of against white people in general? You know what I'm saying. It's coming to a point where white men probably feel threatened by the growing amount of diversity in the United States. Do you think that they might feel a bit left out, or at this point feeling a bit useless, and now they're trying to find some sort of meaning and purpose in their lives? Generally speaking, do you get what I mean when I say that?

49:20

CL: I see exactly what you're saying. Yeah, my answer is that the proof is in the pudding. When change is on the rise, that's when you see people act out. Alright, they weren't acting out before, right? Because they felt comfortable. The fact that they are storming the Capitol, you look at this Charlottesville thing, is because they feel threatened. Otherwise, why would they even march? If there's no threat, what's the march for? Alright, we march because there's a threat. They ain't marching, they're just like, "look at those people marching." Well, now they marching. So, that tells you that they feel threatened. Because people act out, they fight, when there's a threat. So, yes, I think it's obvious based on what you see.

50:12

AM: Yeah, and that's exactly right. I wanted to also talk a little bit about white gay privilege as well, because I think that's interesting. We also kind of talked about this in class, where even within the LGBTQ community... it's interesting because what we talked about was how white gay men feel a bit excluded from the rest of the LGBTQ community, because they are kind of like the ones who already have the most privilege, at times. And that seems absurd, and I frankly would disagree and say that Black LGBTQ tend to be the ones discriminated the most against...

50:49

CL: I don't know who told you that, but that is not true. They own the LGBT community. Girl, I don't know where you got that information from but let me tell you something....

51:00

AM: Well, just like...

51:05

CL: That is some BS and that is just not true. And let me tell you what, because the white men in the LGBT community, it's nothing but a reflection of all of society, where white men control the

world. White men control the world. These gay men are not what you just said. They're controlling the world too, and you know what, they control the LGBTQ community. Who's out front in the LGBTQ community? Yeah, they may put a person of color out front, but who's behind it? Who's behind the money, who's behind going to the courts, who's behind going to the legislator, who determines the LGBTQ agenda of what they're going to fight for? White men. Now you go back and prove to me that that's not true. Cause if you look behind all of these prominent LGBT agencies, you're gonna find white folk, and they're setting the agenda for what the LGBT community is going to focus on. It's their agenda. That's just a fact.

52:05

AM: Yeah, you brought up gay marriage and how... and that's true, I don't want to say that gay marriage isn't an important issue that people wanted to get passed... it's important to some people.

52:10

CL: No, and it's certainly not about whether it's important or not. It's not about whether it's important or not. We're talking about an issue of privilege versus issues of life and death.

52:24

AM: Sure, exactly.

52:25

CL: When you can't go to school without getting your ass kicked, when you can't go to work for fear of being fired, do you think you care about who you're going to marry? That is when you don't have to worry about going to work and getting fired, when you don't have to worry about going to school and getting your ass kicked, then you can focus on an issue of privilege. Which is, marriage is not a right, it's a damn privilege. And let's just be honest, it's an institution of privilege. Marriage is an institution of privilege. I'm not saying that LGBT people shouldn't have that right, they should. But what happened was the white community emphasized that over issues of life and death, that folks of color and trans [people] of all colors were facing at the time. And that's just my whole point. They're dealing with life and death, white men dealing with marriage. And that just tells you... I mean we can look at that just in the larger society, forget sexual orientation. I mean, what white people are fighting for and what Black folk are fighting for, right? I mean, I'm not really seeing this huge movement of white folks talking about police brutality. That's Black folk and Latino folk, right? And with this whole COVID-19 thing, I'm not seeing a huge population of white folk talking about how they're being discriminated against and it being called the "Chinese flu" and being beaten. That's Asian folk. And that's my point. We all deal with different realities based on the color of our skin, minus sexual orientation, and then your gender adds to it. You know what I'm saying. It adds to it. Now think about the Black Civil Rights Movement, the actual real Black Civil Right Movement. Guess who they didn't want represented in there? Gay people. Think about the Women's Rights Movement. The whole Suffrage movement, guess who they didn't want represented in their movement? Black women. That's my whole point. You get me? Because Black leaders during the Black Civil Rights Movement thought, "well, that whole gay thing, that's going to hurt our cause." White women during the Women's Suffrage Movement thought "oh, that whole Black women thing, that's going to hurt our cause." LGBT people, currently in their movement, "well, if we attach

ourselves to that Black stuff or that women's rights stuff, that's going to hurt our cause." And that's my whole point, you know. Each group alienates a certain portion of their community hoping that it will fare better on their path to whatever it is their fighting for. And that's just history, and that's the truth.

55:36

AM: That's sad. But no, that's very true. Um, I mean yeah, wow. You've said a lot here today that I wish I could go back to and talk with you about more. But I wanted to, we only have about five minutes left, so we should probably close up. But, I did want to ask you: given your experiences between living in Virginia and going to school in Chicago, and having your young adulthood there, in general as being a Black lesbian woman, what was the differences between living in those two places and was there anything from those experiences that you can draw from now, and that you could say that represent you very well to this day?

56:33

CL: Well, I mean obviously the difference is, in a big city you're going to have a large gay community. I mean in Chicago there's a whole neighborhood dedicated to just gay folks, actually two of them. Andersonville is typically considered the lesbian aspect, and Boystown, well, I guess that describes itself [*laughter*]. So, I mean you got a huge, millions upon millions of out gay people doing their thing and not thinking about "okay I'm gay whatever, I'm just shopping..." Right? In a community like this, obviously you're going to have a much smaller community and you're not going to have out gay-owned businesses, multiple bars or social scenes where gay folks hangout, and connect and meetup with each other. So, yeah, obviously that's going to be a significant difference. Also, you can't make a living... I've never seen any gay agencies here where you can make a good living working in the gay community. Let me tell you something, I made good freaking money working in the LGBT community in Chicago. I made my whole living on that. Ain't like you're going to find a job like that here, in Southwest Virginia. So, yeah, I mean there are significant differences. I mean, come on now. And let's not forget that we are in the state of Virginia. I mean, come on [*laughter*]. I mean the state that said "we're not going to desegregate schools until the late '70s," when everybody else in the world did. So, I mean come on now. You're dealing with a whole different scenario in the Commonwealth than you are in other places.

58:16

AM: That's true. So I guess, when you were in Chicago... you said you didn't date too much when you were in high school, so did you start dating while you were there? And start to get more familiar?

58:27

CL: Oh, absolutely. I mean obviously, yeah, because even if I wasn't gay in high school... Let me tell you something. My mama, because my real father died, when we were little and of course I was raised by a stepfather. My mom always worked full time and never had any kind of dependence on any kind of government or food stamps or housing; she always provided for the family. And so, she put us in everything, so she could go to work. Man, I was in band, I was in theater, I was in track and field, I was on the forensics team. I was in everything... and I was in

dance. I was in everything. I didn't even think about sexual orientation and dating because I was busy, doing my thing, you know what I'm saying.

59:11

AM: Well, that's great. I mean, we're really happy that you've been able to take this time to speak with us, but we do have about a minute left. But if there's anything else that you'd like to say that we haven't touched on, or if there's anything that you've been meaning to address to us about your perspective as being part of the LGBT community?

59:49

CL: I mean no, not really. I think I've pretty much told you how I feel. I mean, yeah. I typically don't leave nothing left unsaid.

59:55

AM: Well, awesome. We really appreciate your time. I hope you have a great rest of your day. I guess we will get back to you about the rest of this interview. Thank you so much for your time.

60:00

CL: okay, good luck to you. Sorry for the last minute I hope you guys can figure it out.

END.