

Grace Howe interviewed by Fei Fei Friedman
October 20, 2020
West Village, New York via Zoom

Feifei Friedman: My name is Fei Fei Friedman, I am interviewing Grace Howe in the West Village, Manhattan on November 5th. Do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history?

Grace Howe: I do.

FF: All right. I'm going to be asking you these questions if you're willing to answer then you can. If you don't want to say then you don't want to share. Your name is?

GH: Grace Howe

FF: Your age?

GH: Twenty.

FF: Your occupation?

GH: Full-time student.

FF: Racial identity.

GH: Asian-American.

FF: Gender identity?

GH: Non-binary.

FF: Sexual orientation?

GH: Bi-sexual.

FF: Where are you from?

GH: New York City. Wait, China. Nationality or ethnicity?

FF: It just says where are you from? So you're from China and you came to New York City and how do you end up here?

GH: I was adopted.

FF: Now, I'm going to read the consent form. This oral history project is being conducted by Fei Fei Friedman, the interviewer, a student at Guttman Community College City University of New York. By signing this form below, you Grace Howe have granted permission for audio recording, notes, transcripts, video, and photographs results from this interview to be gifted to a collection held by the City University of New York without any restriction.

GH: I do.

FF: If you, Grace Howe have granted permission to do so the interview may be part of an archive and the interview will be available to be used with consent with the City University of New York. [inaudible]

GH: I do.

FF: Thank you! So starting with the first question, pretend to be an alien. Explain to me why these anti-protests have erupted?

GH: So basically, there are some people on this earth, who due to the fact that they have more pigmentation in their skin others have decided to go after them, racially and in their social context and shoot them. And so these anti-racist protests are here because this is not alright, and this is not what we stand for. The shooting of a person due to profiling based on their skin should not be a thing. The anti-racism protests are that we aren't happy with the situation and this needs to change because the shooting of unarmed black men in the streets is awful, terrible, and not condonable.

FF: Why do you think New York City became the epicenter of protests?

GG: I think it became an epicenter of protest because, as so many people have said it's a melting pot of ethnicities, culture, identities. It's been a real place that has supported rights for minorities. Stonewall for LGBTQI+ rights. And a lot of protesters here, people who identify themselves as activists and will stand up for the rights of others even if they may not fall into that group and the city has protections on protesting. Non-violent protests are safe in the city so I think that also helps, and just like the media coverage here. Also, there are so many eyes here.

FF: How have the uprisings across the country shifted, How do you think about your ethnicity, identity, and place in U.S. society?

GH: I actually found it really interesting. Asian-Americans have a history in the U.S. of being exploited and also them being forgotten. So, I actually feel like (inaudible) where my place is in the U.S. As for the change in protest or the evolution I can't say I know much about it.

FF: Do you have any stories you are willing to share about encounters with racism or the police?

GH: Well, racism yes. More like insensitivity, I was at a laundromat where everybody does their own laundry. I was wearing a black shirt and a big flowy skirt And I was there with my little white dog. Puffy little thing. I was waiting by the dryers, and I was sitting kind of like twiddling my fingers. I looked over and the man was reading Sapiens, which is a book I wanted to read. Oh, he was reading Homo Deus, which is the second book in the series. And I was like what do you think? And he said it's really good and we kinda chatted and we stopped talking. So I was just sitting there and he turned to me and asked "do you work here?" And I was like "NO. Do you work here?" It was really weird, because in New York City at least there are a lot of Asian cleaners, so I kinda understood but also the assumption that I work here, just because of how I looked was really stark and aggressive and I was taken aback by it. We live in New York City, are you really gonna say something like that. But I haven't encountered the police or police brutality part.

FF: Are there any other stories with friends or family members who have faced racism or police since the protest has started? And have you learned from these experiences? Close family or friends?

GH: I have one story of a friend whose family adopted a young black man. He actually has a history of running away, so at one point the two brothers got into a huge fight and the young black man ran away from home and the family was really very worried about them because of the fact that they are black and that he's young 16 years old and it's in Brooklyn. They were really worried about his safety. But he came back safe and he wasn't hurt, because he ran away at night and he was only wearing a hoodie, which is set up to many shootings. That's the only story, but I assume people have stories but they haven't told me.

FF: Were you at all in digital or in-person activism for the last six months?

GH: No.

FF: How have protests in context with the Coronavirus shifted the way you think about race in America?

GH: I think this country definitely has issues being accepting of all races and the current sitting President has definitely made the racial tension even worse, because of his personal siding off it. He definitely hasn't helped. And that's all I have to say about it.

FF: How have the past few months changed? How do you think police and racism in the U.S. has...?

GH: I feel like they haven't changed, but I don't have statistics.

FF: Did you learn more about the history of racism in the country since the protests?

GH: No.

FF: What have you seen from your peers that inspire you while protesting during the pandemic?

GH: My close friend has gone to a lot of protests and a lot of marches. So, that's been really inspiring.

FF: What do you think about the cop's response to the protests in May 2020, after George Floyd's death?

GH: I didn't think it helped their cause. I think that a lot of their actions were not thought through and definitely gave the protesters more evidence of brutality.

FF: Could you think of a specific time you felt the police didn't help their cause?

GH: I read in Atlanta that there was a lot of aggression and that (inaudible) was really bad. I have a friend down in Atlanta, he had to go down and help clean up in Atlanta after one partially bad night. I read somewhere in an article about like dads with wind blowers, like leafblowers, standing in front of protesting crowd blowing back the gas on the policemen. And then also mothers standing in front of crowds, white mothers particularly using the racial injustices to their advantage to protect young protesters of color.

FF: What do you think of the local national government's response to the protests that happened since May 2020? Like Andrew's (inaudible) response? The mayors?

GH: I didn't know they responded.

FF: I'll respond to this because you didn't have a response. When I was protesting for Black Lives Matter, I think the security level of cops was just astronomical. When I would have just a peaceful protest marching up to (inaudible), they would have shields, guns. It was just astronomical how many cops would just come to peaceful protests and Gracie Mansion. And then in my area of the West Village, there's a recent incident what police's on West 10 so just showing more the abuse of police, in their power, they have among us even though they just carry weapons and it makes them feel superior. This reminds me of the Stanford trials, Stanford experience. How would you like to see the movement resolve, what achievements or outcomes do want I guess?

GH: I understand that they won't fully defend the police but at least a cut in their funding that could go towards reallocation or like infrastructure. Or, like even the restaurants are struggling from COVID that need more money or colleges that are still really struggling with COVID. My college is falling apart. So, I think that would be a really good thing to happen, I hope.

FF: And then the last question is, is there anything else about the anti-racist uprisings you would like to share?

GH: No.

FF: Well, thank you.

GH: Thank you.

Part Two

FF: Hello, today's October 20, Tuesday 4:57. This is the interviewee, Grace Howe, and I'm the interviewer Fei Fei Friedman. So, let's get on with the questions, which will be about protesting and pandemic. So my first question for you is, what are your thoughts on police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement?

GH: So I have some mixed thoughts on this. I definitely think that the misuse of their power in the Black Lives Movement is atrocious, to say the least. However,

Like the tear gassing and Atlanta is, like, way too far. And because in protests, police are there to protect the protesters not harm them themselves, no matter what the content of the protest is. So like in like, gay rights protests, LGBTQIA + protests, they're there to protect the protesters from whoever might like tried to hurt them. And so it's really interesting that then in this, like, Black Lives Matter movement, the police are like, their job hasn't changed. But the people that they're protecting them against has, it's now themselves. So I think excessive force is never the way to go, and violence is not how one should resolve conflicts. And I think that this weird change of events, like it's easier to see the line, like I'm a policeman, and I'm trying to protect you from this person who likes, doesn't believe in gay rights, even regardless of my personal beliefs. But then it's here, here's a group of people marching for Black Lives Matter, and they're marching against me, but I'm still supposed to protect them. It's a very confusing dynamic, and it's a loaded dynamic in a way that I think past protests, in America, haven't been loaded in that way. So I like hands down, don't believe that police should be using any sort of violence, like they're policing, like Denmark or something that doesn't even carry guns.

FF: In the UK too.

GH: Yeah, that, again, those are smaller countries. We're a very, very, very large country, and so I understand like upscaling to that can be more difficult, especially when we have like, gun laws. I think I kind of strayed away from your question.

FF: Yeah, So the question was thoughts on the police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement, but it's okay.

GH: And the Black Lives Matter movement?

FF: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

GH: I don't condone police brutality, and I support the Black Lives Matter movement.

FF: Okay.

GH: As a person of color myself, that's a whole other conversation. And, like, as you well know, like, this is an audio recording. I am Asian. So I'm not black. But I am a POC, which I think-

FF: Is a person of color we are.

GH: Yeah, no I know. And I just think Asians are overlooked. But that's like a whole nother conversation that I could get on with. But I support the Black Lives Matter movement. I think that black lives matter. I get a little frustrated when people are like, but all lives matter. Yes, all lives matter, except Black Lives are the ones that are being persecuted in the U.S. and not white people. So yes, white lives matter. But right now, Black Lives are the ones that are being taken, not white lives. So that's my stance on that. And I think I have said police brutality. Thumbs down. No, like, I don't think we did.

FF: Yeah. So then, how has the Black Lives Matter movement impacted you? And if it hasn't, why hasn't it?

GH: Can I think about this for a hot second? Okay. I think it hasn't directly impacted me, but I can see the impacts around me. And it's like, changed how I've been thinking. So I'm not gonna lie. When I first started, I was like, I was lowkey- I was ignorant and I was like, but then I realized as I understood. I'm educated now. And I think it's also been interesting as a person of color living with a family of white people in a white affluent...

FF: Neighborhood?

GH: Neighborhood in New York City. It just reminds me how, sometimes monotone, the place I live in can be. However, that's to say, I'm not saying it's completely monotone. Like if I go upstate to Rhinebeck. It's really monotone and it's like, only white people. And then I'm like, really aware of like, how not white. So it's been interesting because marches have gone like, kind of around my neighborhood, but not like, directly in it as much. And I think that might be because of the like, general color of my neighborhood? Well, it's gone through like Washington Square, it's gone through more parks where the community around parks is more of a mixture rather than one toned. Again, I strayed away from the question.

FF: Interesting that you say that the parks are more diverse, but I think living by parks are can be more expensive. So I think it's still people like, wealthier-

GH: I see as like a lot of the (inaudible) homeless people have a range of skin tones. They like hanging out there, like the chess guys who hang out in Washington Square Park. I just think it's more of a culmination of people rather than like the pier. So it's not, I mean, I have seen marches along the river, but I feel like they've been more through like parks and like (inaudible) spaces in the city. How has it affected my life? I guess it's more affected my mental life. Because I've, like, read about it. And I've also like, taken some classes about, feminism, and then looking at a different color, like, feminist groups

of a different color. So it's just been interesting to tie my like, in-class time with my out-of-class time in a way that I hadn't foreseen.

FF: Gotcha. Yeah. Yeah. Can you think of a protest in the past that has been effective in change?

GH: Effective?

FF: That's been effective and has changed society?

GH: Oh, well, the first one I think of is MLK.

FF: Okay.

GH: A black man fighting for change. What was I supposed to say about it?

FF: So you thought of a protest? And then what were your opinions on the protest as a form of change?

GH: Oh, got it.

FF: I didn't say that one because I wanted you to think of the first one, yeah.

GH: I'm a firm believer in peaceful protests and sit-ins, especially if you have a good comfy pillow. I definitely think that it's an effective mode of expressing a societal want or a societal flaw that needs to be addressed. Especially because of the nature of a peaceful protest, or a sit-in. It allows for people who may not identify in that community or may not be directly harmed by the societal norm that's they are trying to change. Allows them to, like, enter in and help like, okay, like they were protests with... Not recently but like in these past months where they were a bunch of dads and they got like leaf blowers and they like blew the gas back at the police to like protect the, and they were like white people white identify people. And so they were, like stood in the line in front of the black protesters to like help them and was a way to use their own race to protect a minority race that is needing protection at that point because of targeted actions toward them. A bunch of like white mothers, white affluent mothers like stood in front of a protest to protect young black people. You could look up videos of White students standing in front of Black students like trying to protect them from police brutality because they know that they are less likely to be hurt than black people. So I think that peaceful protests are a way that like, people can unify.

FF: People do unite. Yeah. Nice. And now have you been to a protest? Why or why not? For Black Lives matter.

GH: I went to a protest in Union Square, actually, and then I went to a vigil in Union Square. And then I went to another, like, protesting Union Square? I actually haven't been to a lot of them because my mother has an autoimmune disorder. If she gets COVID-19 it's not good. So, I value my mother's life a lot. Not I say I value it more than these people's lives. It's been as a single child with a single mother, it's been really important for me to make sure that she's safe.

FF: Are there other ways you've been supporting the protests, like donating or doing meal kits in the neighborhood?

GH: I haven't. Wow, I feel guilty.

FF: It's okay. It's a hard time right now during the pandemic anyways.

GH: And as a full-time student.

FF: That is true. Yes. And then there's the last question, has there been current events of police changing your opinion? Or not?

GH: I don't think so.

FF: I can agree with that.

GH: Okay, I would say I don't think so. But then again, I haven't been like, scanning all the papers to like, really be like, ooh, a micro change. So, I would probably say no.

FF: Yeah, I actually like a couple of months ago, there was an incident on West 10th. And like Hudson and it was interesting because we don't, I guess in our neighborhood, so we live in the same neighborhood professor, and we have this precinct. And usually, we don't have any disputes with the police. I've never witnessed it. The disputes with the police are common in my area, likely just because there's a lack of people of color in my area, which is unfortunate. But recently, due to the latest protests in the last couple of months, there was a big outbreak of like 20 cops that broke down and protest at West 10th Street. So I have never seen I haven't yet seen a change.

GH: Yes I would also like to add on. I'd like to add on as the excessive police presence at protests has, it seems to be more than protests I've seen before. I saw a group of

like, maybe 100 protesters, and they were like six police vans. That just seems disproportionate and what our tax dollars paying for. I may not directly pay taxes. But when I do, where would my mother's tax dollars be?

FF: Reallocate the money.

GH: Colleges that are suffering and can't survive during COVID right now. My college is going under right now.

FF: Alright, I think that's all the questions I have.

GH: We as a country value, and right now we don't value Black Lives, apparently. And I think it's a stark realization. It's a stark realization, even for people who do value black lives. Because like it's an expression of like, maybe not even the majority, but the majority of people empowers, which I find disturbing.

FF: Yeah. Well, I think that's all I've got to ask you about if there are any other comments you want to make go ahead.

GHL: I'm okay. Thank you.

FF: Thank You for your time. Yep, appreciate it.