

YOUTH ACTIVISM

With

Ms. CAITLIN LEGGETT:

This is an interview for the Youth Activists Archive at Duke University. The interview is with Ms. Caitlin (Skip) Leggett and is taking place on November 15, 2021, over Zoom. The interviewer is Ms. Lauren Relaford. A college student, poet, and activist; Caitlin Leggett strives to empower others through illuminating the power in the intersectionality of identities. Caitlin has recently published a book of poems entitled, “Mad, Black, Woman.: Diaries on the Intersectionality of a Black Woman.” Ms. Leggett’s activism has been focused on the Movement for Black Lives specifically in her hometown of Durham, North Carolina.

RELAFord: Hi Caitlin, how are you?

LEGGETT: Hey, I'm good. How are you?

RELAFord: Thanks for meeting. With me, hope your day is going well! How are you?

LEGGETT: Yes, I'm good. Sorry I'm late. I'm also the girls' basketball manager. So, they just finished their practice.

RELAFord: Oh yeah, no. No, it's no worries. The life of a college student, I totally understand.

LEGGETT: Yeah.

RELAFord: But just to get started and setting some norms for this interview. This interview will be recorded for future use and after our time together I'll send you the recording file. If there's any material that you'd like omitted from the final version, just let me know and that request will be met. And of course, given the zoom platform, if you need to take a break for water, use the bathroom, just let me know. We can pause the recording and if it's OK with you, I'll remain unmuted for the duration of the interview and I'll just type some notes as we talk and thank you for meeting with me again. Are there any questions?

LEGGETT: No, I'm good.

RELAFord: OK. oh, and I didn't say this. This interview will be preserved in the Duke University Archive of Youth activists. The class I'm in “Youth Movements Since 2010,” we're trying to focus on this idea of creating an archive that holds youth activists that aren't on like main media platforms that we see nationally.¹ So yeah, that's the goal of the project, and so just to start off, if you could state your name, your age, and where you currently work.

¹ Course entitled “Youth Movements Since 2010” and is taught by Wesley Hogan at Duke University.

LEGGETT: OK, so my name is Caitlin Leggett. Some people also know me by Skip. I'm 21 and I currently work for NPR's WUNC Radio ²and I intern at WHIG TV on North Carolina Wesleyan College campus.³

RELAFFORD: OK, awesome, awesome. So, when did your activism start?

LEGGETT: That's a good question, I guess. You can say I started activism pretty young, I just didn't know it was activism.

RELAFFORD: Right.

LEGGETT: It was me just recording my experiences by way of whatever method I had at the time. So writing was always kind of my outlet. I didn't realize it was really activism and until probably 2020.

RELAFFORD: Yeah.

LEGGETT: Really a lot of the things that I wrote and the things that I published and put out there was stuff that I had from back when I was in high school. And I'm a senior in college now. So, none of it was new, but it was still relevant. So definitely pretty young, I can't give an exact age, but pretty young.

RELAFFORD: Yeah. So let's go back to that piece of 2020. 2020 was a crazy year. COVID Black Lives matter, the Movement for Black Lives, the presidential election that was all 2020. It's crazy to think back to that moment.

LEGGETT: [verbal agreement].

RELAFFORD: If you could tell me a phrase or two, just about what did your life looked like in 2020.

LEGGETT: [contemplating] 2020.

RELAFFORD: Or maybe what was one of the most important parts of your life in 2020.

LEGGETT: Let's see. 2020 was the year that I actually published my book. And I don't know, it seemed small compared to everything that was going on, but my book encompassed the experiences that I'd had, since I started writing, so maybe middle school. With everything that was going on, there was so much. That was literally all I saw in my family. We're a family that watches the news a lot. So anytime I turned around, there was a lot of trauma. My book encompasses the things that I experienced, but the things that I'm aware that a lot of other people experience. And sometimes that trauma isn't always something that we know how to validate.

RELAFFORD: Hmm.

² National Public Radio's (NPR) North Carolina station.

³ WIGTV is Action an independent television broadcast station which operates in Rocky Mount, NC.

LEGGETT: In the news we saw a lot of death, a lot of Black and brown death. But sometimes it's just as simple as a little kid calling you an Oreos.⁴ There are things that we don't recognize. Things like just everyday experiences, microaggressions, everything, things that we don't recognize. All put together and the experiences of my life. With the pandemic everyone being forced to sit and watch the plight that Black people deal with on a daily basis. I felt like again, most of my writings was they were things that were from years prior. I might have actually written one poem in 2020 in the entirety of it, and I think my book has 40 in it, so I think with all the time for people to sit and just watch what was happening. I felt like this was a good way to say, one: there are people like me. And this is for you. I hear you. I see you; we are here. But there are people who don't understand. There are people who don't have to deal with these things, who don't have to experience this, and this is also for you because we know you don't go through it.

RELAFFORD: Right. Yeah.

LEGGETT: And it was also had been a personal goal of mine. With seeing a lot of trauma, that's not to say that my book doesn't have trauma in it, it does, but that was a way for me to get my trauma out and putting it all together, which is really a little piece of Black joy and all that we were looking at that year.

RELAFFORD: So yeah, yeah. Your book, "A Mad, Black, Woman.: Diaries on the Intersectionality of a Black Woman," I mean that title alone makes me want to read. 2020 was traumatic and having a book, a resource where we can read about experiences that Black women go through is so vital, especially in a year like 2020. Could you tell me a little bit about like where you grew up, what your environment was like? How did it allow your activism to grow?

LEGGETT: Right, so I'm from Durham, NC, the East. Usually when I tell people from Durham they go, "Oh wow, Durham." They always turn their nose up at it. You have Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, of the three Durham is a little bit of the trenches. I grew up right down the street from my high school, a park and two hoods. I want to say that I have a diverse experience, not culturally diverse, but more so socially diverse. I'm aware that I didn't grow up in the nicest of neighborhoods, and you know richest parts of town, but I know that they exist in Durham, and I've seen them before. Especially being an athlete, I play volleyball. Volleyball is a white sport, that's all I see. I didn't really start seeing Black girls in my sport until, I want to say about high school. I know everybody in my neighborhood. I know everybody in my church. Durham is one of those places where you, if you don't know nobody, you got to know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody.

RELAFFORD: Yeah. Right.

LEGGETT: It's a city but it's not anything huge. My environment, I'm very proud of being from Durham. I can't stay there, but I'm very proud of where I'm from. I have 919 tatted on me like

⁴ Insult pointed towards visibly Brown or Black individuals, mocking them as white on the inside and Black on the outside.

that's really my heart, but the city can definitely be brutal⁵. I had a lot of experiences that I didn't know were not normal until I got away from it. I buried a lot of classmates. I've been in a lot of situations that I probably shouldn't have and again things I thought were normal that were not normal. I don't know at the end of the day my city stamped me like I'm proud of where I'm from, it is what it is. I don't have no regrets being from my city.

RELAFORD: So, do you think being surrounded by people who look like you at a young age and throughout your life, what was the power of being around people who look like you, going to school with people who look like you? How do you deal with that, but then of course, like the opposition in college because you tend to PWI, right?⁶

LEGGETT: Well technically Wesleyan is 70% Black, so.

RELAFORD: Majority Black. yeah. It's not a HBCU.

LEGGETT: Definitely, definitely not. I definitely did grow up in a Black college town. it's crazy I was just talking about this today. How like that was one thing that I actually, you know, I never really had any regrets about going to PWI for college because being at HBCU was my entire existence up until going to college. And it was never a "I don't want to go to an HBCU." I never got any money from HBCUs. I would have gone if they would have thrown some bread, but you know it happens.⁷ My freshman year, I went to a school in Boston called Clark University and that was my first culture shock. When I say culture shock, I mean of course, nothing but white people, but the Black people that were there were not solely Black, they were immigrants. They were Caribbean. They were African. They were Puerto Rican. They were Panamanian, they were anything but just Black. Coming from the South, a lot of us don't really identify, we don't know too much about our heritage. We don't know where we're from. I just know I'm Black. I knew Black, white, Hispanic that was really about it. Up there, nobody is what they look like. You have white passing people who are Puerto Rican, whose first language is completely Spanish.

RELAFORD: Wow.

LEGGETT: You have dark skin, kinky haired girls whose first language is Spanish or French or German. It's things that I've never seen before. So, I was very appreciative of that experience because I don't think I would have gotten that anywhere near the South. But one thing about being up there was the racism is very covert versus here is very overt. I see your Confederate flag. I see your Blue Lives Matter. I see. I see all of that. And you're proud about it.

RELAFORD: Right.

LEGGETT: That's fine, so I know where to keep you. Up there it's, "Hey, can you come take this picture with me?" And then I hear statements and I hear whispers. I hear things like that. So very, very different experience. I think I do well in any space. I understand how to code switch. I

⁵ 919 is the area code for Durham, North Carolina.

⁶ PWI refers to a predominantly white institution.

⁷ HBCU refers to a historically Black college or university.

understand that I don't need to code switch, but I understand how to co. I think for me, my decision was really all about the money.

RELAFFORD: Yeah. For sure.

LEGGETT: And what would be the best position, definitely. But transferring out of that environment because I honestly it had a lot to do with me being alone. I became very introverted there because one: it's cold. I don't do the cold.

RELAFFORD: (Laughter)

LEGGETT: I was by myself in Boston. I don't have any family out there and I grew up in a very family, church centered, oriented environment. I wasn't used to that. And then even when there were people who looked like me, they weren't really like me. And so, coming back, I knew I wanted to come back to the South. I didn't really care where, but my mom had a stipulation, "if you're transferring back in, you have to come back in state, no tuition." And I knew the coach at Wesleyan. And I will say, because Wesleyan is predominantly athletes that's why I say it's not a PWI, but it's definitely not HBCU. But honestly, everybody that's here is Black because they play a sport. One thing that I had heavy on my agenda when I got here and one thing that I made sure of is that my face is all over this campus, but not because I'm an athlete because I'm a part of clubs. Because I do the news here because I get academic awards like you're going to see me outside of what y'all brought me here for because there are a lot of students here, who are a lot more than that. But you would never know, because when you look at the honors college, you might see a couple of Black and brown faces.

RELAFFORD: In a school that's 70% Black US.

LEGGETT: In a school that's 70% Black. You look at your administration, you see a couple of Black and brown faces in a school that's 70% Black, so I think when it comes to culture wise, I mean Rocky Mount is like much of North Carolina.⁸ It's just like to the max. So, you have all your you know, country or whatever in North Carolina and Rocky Mount looks just like that. But then you have your Black folks, you have your downtown, your urban areas. All of that, so I don't think it wasn't a huge adjustment for me, being from Durham to Rocky Mount, but it was a shift between going to Boston and spending that year there.

RELAFFORD: Interesting, so it's you're a busy woman you do all. You're in clubs, you're an activist. That's a lot of stuff. Being a freshman, I don't know how you do it, I'm barely scratching the surface.

LEGGETT: Girl. OK (Laughter)

RELAFFORD: How do you balance it all, like how do you ever? Do you have to prioritize things over the other? How do you balance it?

LEGGETT: I don't. I'm not even going to lie to you. Especially lately, with me being a senior, I've stretched myself completely thin, but in the beginning, I mean in high school that's just how

⁸ Wesleyan College is located in Rocky Mount, North Carolina.

I operated. Like you know, it's like you could be busy in high school and it was nothing. College is different, you have to manage your time. For one, I'm big on like tangible wise I'm big on lists, calendars like my room is filled. I have a to do list on every single piece of paper that I have in my room. I have to see it over and over because I'm really one of those 'out of sight out of mind' people. I have a calendar for volleyball. I have a calendar for women's basketball, for work. I just have something for everything. I'm not the most organized person. I'm bad with planners, but I think one thing that helped me balance was that I learned that it was OK to fail. I double booked myself all the time. I will literally like this right here. I planned. I literally knew practice was going to end at 6pm and this just started at 6pm. And that I had five minutes to get home and throw a shirt on. I understand that it's OK to fail, it happens, and that's what you learn from. I power lift and a good day is when you fail. When I don't reach a PR when my muscles are tight like a good day is when I fail because I know "OK, this is my benchmark and I have to push past this."⁹ So I think allowing myself to fail sometimes and understanding that like even though I try to do it all, I don't have to.

RELAFFORD: Right.

LEGGETT: And I pile my plate mountain high, but it's ok if I don't get it all done. I think also asking for help, before college I didn't like asking for help, but I have a huge supportive community behind me. That was one thing when I transferred in, I didn't know what it was like to have a coach who really supported me, I mean really supported me. She watches my interviews on her downtime. She comes to my events, she understands I'm an athlete, but I have a lot ahead of me. I have a bright future. As bad as I want to play volleyball for the rest of my life, I have to set myself up for something great. And she's there for that. I have best friends. I have mentors. It really does take a village and sometimes that's what I need, even if it's not something physical or tangible, it's something. I just need someone to lean on. Yeah, I really wouldn't say that I ever do balance. Something always tips the scale. I'm always forgetting something, running to something, but I wouldn't have it any other way that's just how I function, in chaos. Seeing a thousand things on my schedule, it's daunting sometimes, but I'm used to it and that's just how I operate. I know that there are times that I have to multitask. When I'm at work. I'm almost always doing homework, but that's because that's really the only time I ever have. I remember someone saying something like, "there's a time for everything." So, when I'm in that space, I utilize it to the fullest of my potential. So, when I'm at work, I get my work done and then I do my homework, but when I'm at home, I'm not going to do work off the clock or

RELAFFORD: Yeah, NO.

LEGGETT: Me, I'm going to go to sleep. I'm going now, I'm taking a nap.

RELAFFORD: Right.

⁹ PR refers to personal record.

LEGGETT: I do understand. I have a lot to do. But yeah, doing everything in the time you have to do it. Creating spaces with those things, creating spaces for things that you like because you will burn yourself out. Just as much as I get stuff done, I be out. I be in the streets, I do.

RELAFord: Right, you got to.

LEGGETT: I need balance that's probably the only balance I have is my work and my play. Everything else is just some stuff that weighs you down and some stuff that don't.

RELAFord: I want to go back to that idea of failures. When you were describing it, it was small in terms of small, subtle failures as opposed to life changing failures. I think when we hear that term failure. It's always attached to a negative connotation, as opposed what you were saying, which is just a barrier to go past, just another mark. How does that translate into your activism?

LEGGETT: Failure in that matter is really a norm, I think. A lot has been done since Civil Rights, even passed that, a lot has been done, but there's also a long way to go. I think failure again is a benchmark, but I think failure in that sense is knowing that you might not be failing because of you. You might be failing because the system was not built for you. The system was meant for you to fail. So, you failing is not always really a failure on your part. You might be succeeding, but the system was built for you to be down.

RELAFord: Right.

LEGGETT: So, if you're not coming up, it's not on you all the time. It's how things were built up. One thing that I thought about a lot with this movement was that it bothered me that we didn't have a solidified leader or leaders. When you look back in history people rally behind ideals, yes, but they love to see a face on that ideal. The faces that we saw were dead bodies. We didn't see any living. No, I don't want to say any, we didn't have a cohesive person to rally behind because there were so many protests in every city.

RELAFord: Right.

LEGGETT: There were people were fighting for different things that were all under the same umbrella, but there was no one person. There was no two people for people to really follow behind. That was one thing that I always felt would be a failure because if you look in history that's how we've operated. It makes it easier for people to understand. When you think of MLK, you think of nonviolence and love and spiritualism and all of that. And you think of Malcolm X, and you think of hardcore, more stick it to the man type things.¹⁰ But people had options. I understand "I'm fighting for the same cause, but how I want to fight is different.

RELAFord: Yeah.

LEGGETT: Here are these two ways to choose from and without that centralized face or those centralized faces, it was a lot of I don't want to say work for nothing but ultimately, like that's

¹⁰ MLK refers to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

what I was most afraid that it would come to. I didn't want a movement to be confused with a trend.

RELAFFORD: Well, Wow. Yeah.

LEGGETT: I also felt like that was another big, big failure was that trends die off.

RELAFFORD: Like that Black square right after with George Floyd's death, I'm pretty sure right?¹¹

Leggett: [verbal agreement].

RELAFFORD: The Black box where that everyone was posting on Instagram and Twitter in solidarity.¹² And then you'd look the next month it was in their archive or not on their Instagram.

LEGGETT: Trends die. Yeah, yeah.

RELAFFORD: And so, I have a question about that piece about like seeing faces. I totally agree that people can agree on the same ideas, but it's hard sometimes to unite when you don't have a person to unite with. People had kings and they followed them. People had Martin Luther King and they followed him. Malcolm X, they followed him, but also like the movement, the Civil Rights Movement was founded around religion and believing in God, leading in the ideals of God.

LEGGETT: [verbal agreement].

RELAFFORD: And here we have BLM, or the Movement for Black Lives is so far away from that, like which isn't a bad thing. It's just like different.

LEGGETT: Right. Right.

RELAFFORD: But what do we unite with, besides like our shared oppression? And is that enough to really progress the movement?

LEGGETT: That's what I think of when I say there were no living faces, there were dead bodies. Honestly, one of my biggest fears is that I know when I die, I'm literally going to be forgotten. I am going to stay one someone's mind, every now and then, but eventually I'm going to be forgotten. We have all of these faces where yes, there are names that are worldwide now, but eventually they're going to be forgotten. These were people. Most of them were not activists. They were just regular people living their lives. They didn't give up their lives. Their lives were taken for them.

¹¹ George Floyd was killed in police custody without fair trial. A police officer knelt on his neck for 7 minutes and 46 seconds, until he passed away.

¹² The simple posts are intended as a way of expressing solidarity with the Black Lives Matter protests that have swept the US after the death of George Floyd. The postings occurred on June 02, 2020. When archiving a photo on Instagram, it removes it from the public's view. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/Blackout-tuesday-instagram-Black-squares-how-post-box-a9543896.html>

RELAFFORD: Yeah.

LEGGETT: We put their face on this movement. They don't know that. They have no idea. Or they do, looking down, unable to do anything. I think rallying around trauma, it's something that'll bring people together. It's something that'll that people can relate to, but what are you looking forward to? What is coming out of this? Trauma. I think that was something that a lot of people were missing. And again, everybody has their different soapbox. Some people wanted less disparity within the medical community. Some people wanted...

RELAFFORD: (interrupts) School reform

LEGGETT: The disproportionate amount of Black people to stop being arrested. There was just something different. There were different hills for people to die on and all of them are equally as important. But because there was no real unity. And not to say, people didn't march, people did all that they could, but there was no real sense of what we're coming together for. This is what we're trying to accomplish because I think a lot of us don't know. We want change but we don't know what change will ever look like. Like we wouldn't know how to grasp the idea of real change.

RELAFFORD: How do you think the protests could have changed to focus on one idea? Because some people might say they focused on police brutality. But police brutality is also a really big umbrella too. What changes in that period, where people were marching in every city rallying under deceased people's names? What change do you think could have occurred if their tactics would have changed?

LEGGETT: So, I mean, personally I think the system has to be completely dismantled, but...

RELAFFORD: (Interrupts) the police or the system is in the government?

LEGGETT: The system as in the government, as in the entire thing. A more tangible thing to do would be to start at the top. You have all of these government officials, people in office who, these were the same people who 60/70 years ago were telling us to go to the back of the bus. So how do you expect these people who have these ideals, the very people you're marching against, who are holding these ideals, to make decisions in favor of us? That's not what they were put there for. The system put them there to make decisions against us. And that's what they believe. There's no reason for them to do anything else, they're doing their jobs. You start at the top, you dismantle these politicians, the government officials, who uphold these ideals, who are upholding the things that the government puts in place. All of these things that work against us. Even if you can't get them out, you make it work in your favor because I don't think a system like this can be reformed. You can make it work in your favor, but it can't be reformed.

RELAFFORD: Right.

LEGGETT: It was quite literally built to put us down, so there's no reforming that it's doing its job. There's never been a time where the system wasn't doing its job. However unfair it may be. You start at the top and then things trickle down again. It's a marathon, slow and steady change.

And then those things, they become norms. Things that become legislation, things that begin to work in our favor and you go down from there.

RELAFFORD: So, the key change would be voting or voting for people who have the same ideals as you?

LEGGETT: You know, I wish that was it. I do.

RELAFFORD: yeah.

LEGGETT: I'm always going to vote but I do understand how...

RELAFFORD: It's a loss of hope.

LEGGETT: Yeah, I understand. I will never fight anybody on their heel of I don't vote. I get what you're saying but it would be hypocritical of me to not do everything within my power. Just because I feel like it's not going to help. I'm pretty sure there were a lot of people 60/70 years ago who thought that hopping in that crowd of people wasn't going to help. Yet here we are. So, I think it has to be more radical than that. I think it's literally taking people out of office.

RELAFFORD: [indiscernible]

LEGGETT: Yeah, it's literally taking people out of office because there haven't been any successful revolutions that weren't radicalized. And I understand everybody sees it differently, and I get the consequences that do come with a radical type of revolution. But I don't know, maybe it's the college student in me, maybe it's because I'm young, but from my understanding.

RELAFFORD: People who make change are young people, so you're not crazy.

LEGGETT: That's my understanding that there's no easy way to do it.

RELAFFORD: Do you think that piece of being easy in gen z is less because easy is work for some, of the people in general.¹³ It's a lot of things as you said, that are working against the movement because it seems as though the generation, gen z, like the only people, really making change are seen as radical when that change isn't even radical in terms of the past 50 years.

LEGGETT: [verbal agreement].

RELAFFORD: Even if we think we're all in one accord, I don't think we ever all will be.

LEGGETT: It's going to be an age-old debate, but I do think there will be change. Simply because we have a world full of pandemic babies now. and these pandemic babies are different.¹⁴

RELAFFORD: Laughter.

LEGGETT: And you know a lot of them. They're going to have completely different experiences than us, and those before us. My hope is that the things that they experience, I hope they're more educated and they understand how to work within a system like that in their favor. I think you

¹³ Gen Z refers to generation Z, children born between 1997 and 2012.

¹⁴ A pandemic baby is a child who was born during the COVID-19 pandemic.

know there's been levels and each generation has worked within their system levels. But I think we have this age of technology, crazy technology, and this age of people like us, our age, getting rich, becoming in positions of power off of nothing. Currently, right now, we don't exactly know what to do with it, but as we get older, we'll learn.

RELAFFORD: Right.

LEGGETT: We'll hopefully, be in those positions of power.

RELAFFORD: Influencing policy.

LEGGETT: Yeah, those positions where you have these people who don't actually agree with things, like Black Lives Matter, and all of that who perpetuate the system that they're upholding

RELAFFORD: Right.

LEGGETT: They age out. And we get in and so then we have this whole younger generation who watched all of this, who was inside for all of it. They couldn't go nowhere. They know. They understand they might not have experienced it, but they understand. Hopefully it won't be so far removed because we sometimes look at the Civil Rights Movement like, "oh that was umpteen years ago."

RELAFFORD: Right.

LEGGETT: No, I still got aunts, great aunts, great, great aunts for a lot. They'll be the ones who say, "Hey, I want this and this to happen within this office. And these people are rallying behind me, and we've all been inside together. So, we know how to unify and we're coming to take it."

RELAFFORD: Right.

LEGGETT: Yeah, you can only hope.

RELAFFORD: Right. Yeah, let's see. What activist do you look up to the most? And one second the people beside me are being loud. I'm going to go ask them to please be quiet.

[exits room]

[returns to room]

RELAFFORD: So sorry about that.

LEGGETT: No, you're fine.

RELAFFORD: Or if you do have to do a top three? Maybe that's easier?

LEGGETT: I definitely have had a lot that I looked up to, but I think it's funny because I feel like a lot of activists don't really label themselves. As activists they just are within their field, and they happen to talk about that field. Definitely, Maya Angelou. I don't think I've ever heard her like label herself as an activist, but I always loved her story. More so how she at one point was a prostitute. At one point she was a pimp and now she's a world-renowned poet, who went down in history. It's always been her story for me. I think a big part of me being so accepted in all of the

spaces that I thrive in is because they see one part of me. If I'm around my teammates, they love me because I have a bubbly personality. If I'm in the hood they love me because I have a sweet face. Right? There's something that everybody enjoys but it's not the full thing. If I was to go in this whitespace and start throwing ass like she's all the same person.

RELAFord: (Laughter)

LEGGETT: I'm not just one person. I'm multifaceted. That's my favorite thing about her is that you're able to do that as a Black woman. You're able to exist in all of these different spaces. And in her words "And Still I Rise," like quite literally.¹⁵

RELAFord: Right.

LEGGETT: I'm a big fan of a lot of people. They wouldn't label themselves activists, but Phillis Wheatley. This was pre- honestly everything, pre-civil rights, all of that. But she was a writer who actually wrote for Thomas Jefferson. She wrote a piece that was published. But the white people, they went crazy. It was like, "I know this little Black girl didn't." Nobody could believe that she could be that well-spoken and that educated within that time. And thrived the way that she did. So yeah, I'll put her up there. In today's time, like recently, I don't know. I don't think I have like one specific person that I pattern myself after, nor do I really think of myself as an activist. It's usually a label that's placed me by other people. Sometimes it's just like me being me and I guess sometimes it just comes out.

RELAFord: Right. That's two great answers, talking about this idea of being able to communicate and take your education to the next level, how is your role as a journalist influence your activism?

LEGGETT: My role as a journalist makes me consider ethical and moral obligations more than anything because when I write poetry and when I write prose, posting all of these things, I'm writing for the sake of getting my emotions out. For the sake of easing my mind, but when I'm writing a story, I have to be conscious that, these are other people truths. I don't want to misconstrue. I don't want to misquote. I don't want to take anyone's truth away from them and make it something that it's not. Honestly, that's one thing that I contemplate even now as I'm like applying to jobs and masters' programs, all of this. Whether I actually want to go into journalism or I want to go into sports journalism because I have a lot of issues with the ethics of being a journalist. My pet peeve is when I see a camera in someone's face and they're bawling, crying and they're trying to explain what happened. Me as a person, if you walk up to me with a camera and I'm crying, I'm deck you because why would you do that?

RELAFord: Right.

LEGGETT: You see I'm having a moment. I understand we resonate with visuals and all of this. And some people genuinely want to get their story out there and that just happens. I get that. I just have my ethical and moral issues with it. So, I think being a journalist is making sure to tell and other people's truths in a matter that is their truth, not to make it my own truth because it's

¹⁵ "Still, I Rise," is one of Maya Angelou's most famous pieces of poetry,

not in that moment. It's not about me or even the things that I have to say, again they are minuscule. So, what I'm writing about, it's their truth. It enlisted a lot of careful writing, a lot of diverse eyes reading my work. But then I did have times where it was my truth. Yeah, I was writing about things that I understood that were relative to me and I was able to put my voice in there. More specifically to writing as a journalist, I try to take very good care of headlines because you can tear something up with a headline. We see it on the regular. It's another one of my pet peeves. I understand a lot of the times, it's literally on purpose, for the purpose of the clicks. I get that, I do, but certain topics should not be clickbait.

RELAFord: Do you think that there's a certain freedom in expressing your thoughts through words?

LEGGETT: Some people see thoughts and they jumble up for them. They never clear up, and it's hard to get out, but what they actually want to say and what they actually mean. But for me, I love words. I love the sounds of words. The rhythms that they make come. That's one of my favorite things about being a writer is that, like I say, I wrote poetry, but sometimes when I write, I'm literally writing stories, but I write it with a beat. I've never written a haiku. I don't know how to write it. I don't know how to write a sonnet. I don't know how to do any of that. I just kind of right to a beat. I hope that means I can be a rapper someday, you know.

RELAFord: Hey, bars! No, I'm just kidding!¹⁶

LEGGETT: Literally. Everything makes sense when I'm writing it down. Sometimes it's takes a minute, but it almost always makes sense when I see it in words and sentences. Sometimes it's even the shape of words. I will quite literally like write a poem just for this shape, because I want to see it in a triangle. Everything just kind of makes sense when it's in a word, it's in a sentence, it's in prose, yeah?

RELAFord: Yeah. We've talked about this idea throughout the interview of people who don't call themselves activists but are, what they do, even if it's not going out in the streets and protesting, but like what they're doing within their job is activism. What do you think the power of being an activist but not really called an activist is? The second part of that, is the title of an activist restricting or liberating?

LEGGETT: OK, so to answer the first question with the second question, I think it's liberating to be an activist who doesn't identify as an activist, because when you place that word upon it, it does become kind of restricting. But not necessarily with a negative connotation. I identify mostly as a writer. And I think when I place the word activist, it means that all my writings are about Black plight or Black experience. I do write primarily about Black experience because that's my side. That's what I write about, but it's not always Black trauma. It's not always anything trauma related. It's not always anything activist related. Sometimes it's just my experience as a woman, as a sexual human being, as a nappy hair little girl. It does place a box around it and I struggled with that a little bit. I told you, I only wrote one actual poem in 2020 because people had so much to say, and I was tired of saying anything. It was exhausting to see

¹⁶ Bars refers to the ability to rap well, it refers to bars of music.

everything, to watch everything and talking about it. At that point, it didn't make me feel better, it was no longer a relief. Not labeling myself an activist has more to do with me not labeling myself. I don't try to put myself in a box, period. I hold many titles. I don't mind adding that to the list, it's just not something that if I saw my name on Wikipedia, I don't want to see one thing behind it.¹⁷ That doesn't just apply to activism. I don't want to just see that I'm a writer. I'm an athlete too. I'm also an activist, you know, I have a lot to me. It can be a little restricting just because it places you in a box and it says this is what she writes about, this is what she is good at writing about, and that's all there is to her. It's not, I write about other things.

RELAFord: Yeah, that repetition of like Black people, Black women are like single face or one dimensional.

LEGGETT: [verbal agreement].

RELAFord: It's really hard to transcend that because that's what the popular narrative. It's activists who worked to get past that stereotype in general, but I totally understand what you're saying. My next question is what would your advice be to younger people who identify as activists or who are doing the work? What would your advice be?

LEGGETT: Don't burn yourself out. It's very easy to watch the news every day and to think about things that have happened in your life and to take other people's trauma as your own. It's very easy to burn yourself out. All of whatever your method is, it's very easy to put yourself in a block, where you're unable to create your work because you are quite literally burnt out. You've experienced, you've watched so much trauma that you've taken it on as your own. There's nothing you can do there, your creative method is no longer an outlet for you because you're putting out all the trauma that you're receiving. Be willing to learn. I accept 100% that I do not know. I do not know at all. I sometimes I say the wrong thing and I'm completely 100% OK with going back and being like, "I'm sorry I was incorrect, someone teach me." I'm willing to learn from anyone I don't shy away from conversations with anyone because you can learn from everyone, from everything. I think that's probably the biggest thing for me. That's another reason why I don't really label myself an activist because I feel like looking back at all the activists then and they just seem like they knew it all. Just looking back at it, I feel like I'm still a kid and I'm just doing what sometimes I think is right. And I don't know if that actually is the right thing. I feel that giving me that title places a lot of responsibility on my shoulders. Not to say that I won't accept it, it's just I'm still a human. I'm scared to fail as much as I know failure is OK, as much as I know failure is just a benchmark. I'm still scared to fail in that aspect. So, don't take it as the end all, be all, that title means that you care about your people so much that you put out a part yourself to stand up for your people, to do what you can to help. Maybe you're just talented. Don't let it be the end all, be all, be willing to learn, be open. Know that failure is OK, but it's also OK to be scared to. This year fail because it just means you're human.

RELAFord: And last question. Where do you see the movement going?

¹⁷ Ms. Leggett refers to the attributes attached to people's names when found on Wikipedia.

LEGGETT: I've actually got...

RELAFFORD: (interrupts) Or where would you like to see it?

LEGGETT: I feel like this goes back to; I would never know what change would look like. I know I want it, but I don't think I have any type of utopia in my head. I don't know what would start the change. I don't know honestly where to begin. I have what I feel like are logical answers, but I don't actually know. I would just want [Pause]

LEGGETT: A lack of the fear as Black people that we hold, the trauma, the things that we experience that are specific to us because of our history, because of our color. I would want those things; I feel like the best word would be to subside. Ideally, I don't want anyone to feel those things. I don't know how to put this politically correct, but I understand that what makes Black people so great sometimes is the magic that comes out of our trauma. We do some amazing things in spite of, when others are given the platform and the opportunities to do the same things. That's not to say that I would want anyone to stay with this trauma, but that's why I say subside because I don't want anyone to forget the things went through.

RELAFFORD: Right. Yeah.

LEGGETT: I do want there to be less of an imminent fear and imminent understanding. I want my children to be educated, but I want them to be so far removed that. That's not something they have to experience. I want those fears and that trauma to subside in a matter of imminent danger. I want people to understand the things that we went through, the things that Emmett Till went through. All of these names and faces that we've looked up to and that we've learned so much about I want you to understand. I want you to be educated, but I don't want you to have that same imminent fear. If I look at this man wrong, he's going to pull me over. He's going to ask me what I'm doing here. He's going to tell me; I don't belong here or that I have to make sure that I'm not driving this red car too fast because I'm going to get pulled over. And that when I do get pulled over, it's simply because "Oh, I want you to be safe because these are the laws." Not "you're coming with me because you look like this." I think for the imminent danger to subside would be the only tangible ideals that I can really think of. I use those examples, but I want that to be through everything. I want Black women to have full faith in their doctors when they go to the hospital. I want that imminent danger that we deal with every day, the things that we understand and that we go through without a second thought to not ever be a first thought, a second thought, not to exist in our minds outside of we were educated. We understand that was a thing, but it's no longer a thing. I don't know how any of that begins to happen.

RELAFFORD: That's powerful though, that really is. Well, thank you so much for taking some of your time to speak with me today. This interview has been great, I can't wait to transcribe it and just send it into the archive for so many other people to learn from you and to learn from your words and your work and just thank you so much. Are there any more questions?

LEGGETT: No, not really. Shoot if you get a good grade, let me know.

RELAFFORD: OK.

LEGGETT: Yeah, there's anything else you need.

RELAFORD: Thank you, you know Duke, it's getting to me, but you know.

LEGGETT: Listen more power to you girl.

RELAFORD: (Laughter) Oh, but yeah, well thank you so much for me with me again. And if you have any more questions about the interview or just life in general, feel free to email me. And yeah, have a great one. Have a great senior year!

LEGGETT: Thank you honey. You do the same.

RELAFORD: Thank you, have a good one.

[Meeting Ends]

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