

Interview with Jacqueline Jones Royster

JJR: Hello.

US: Hello, we are the students that were with Stuyvesant High School asked to interview you. We were informed that we were supposed to call between 5 and 6.

JJR: That's right.

US: Is this is this JJ royster?

JJR: Yeah, Jacqueline Jones Royster.

US: Is it alright if we record you so we can have a record of what we asked you?

JJR: Ok

US: Alright, thank you so much. Can we start now?

JJR: Yes. Now we have till 6 so

US: So it's going to be really quick. thank you so much for your help.

JJR: Mhm

US: The first question is why do you think Ida B Wells is less known to the general public compared to her contemporaries such as Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Dubois?

JJR: Well, I would guess that it's because she was female but she was pretty well-known in her day.

US: So, you think that it's the historians from modern day that sort of forgot her efforts? Or paid less attention to her efforts?

JJR: I don't know if it's just modern-day historians, but if you look at the way that women have been included in American history, obviously their lives and participation have not been treated with equal concerning value as the male counterparts who had more traditional power and authority in our society. So, Ida Wells was an African American woman so, the African-American part is a strike, so to speak, and then being a woman is another strike, and the kind of things that she's concerned with like lynching and social justice and things like that are not mainstream topics that would be passed down in mainstream account of what happened in this society. So it's not just a recent thing if that's what you're talking about. It's the way that history has been formed over the century. You know, How many women can you name?

US: Yeah, acknowledging Ida B Wells efforts during her time how great what is your opinion of how Well's activity in the alpha suffrage club and its regards to how it impacts the roles of women in politics today.

JJR: Well, I don't know as much about her role in the Alpha Suffrage Club. I know that she was involved in women's suffrage. I noticed she participated in some of those marches. But what I have come to know about her more is her lynching campaign. That's what my research has been about, her anti-lynching campaign.

US: What do you consider as Wells greatest achievement that left a lasting Legacy on the modern-day world?

JJR: Well I think her tenacity as a crusader for justice is what has been her hallmark. The thing upon which we have to give her credit. She fought that campaign for decades and she was not afraid to be honest in what she saw and thought, and was really relentless in her talking about the terrorisms of lynching. The fact that it was about politics and economics and not about the cruelty of just black men. The lynchings were of women and children as well. So that's what created a legacy that has been brought forward for her.

US: How do you think her background and her identity prepared and affected her involvement in these campaigns?

JJR: Well, She was born a slave in Mississippi. She was born into a very activist family. her father was a part of a

generation of what we call            so he was concerned about social justice as well. They died from the yellow fever epidemic that went through in the 1870s, I think it was. She was quite young and she had a responsibility thrust on her shoulders very young so she could be personally, from what she had to deal with, and try to take care of the rest of her five siblings, for example, and to stand by the crestfalls between how she was raised and her advocacy for what was right, her tenacity in doing whatever it was that she could to ensure that justice happened was both in her own interests, but in the interests of her community as well. So it was she was part of a context and environment and landscape that made activism, which is what you might describe that she was always engaged in, normal. She was a believer in righteousness, and she was a believer in Justice, and she was a believer in doing something when you saw that there was something that needed to be done. That's what she did. She saw that something needed to be done and she tried to do her part to do it

US: Considering the historical times that she grew up in where it was particularly sensitive since it was just briefly after the end of slavery that she grew up. How do you think

this time period affected what happened to her and her campaign?

JJR: Well racism was alive and well in this century, it certainly was alive and well, then. So, it was a dangerous task that she chose for herself because it would show unsanctioned and unauthorized during that time, one for women to speak, two for black women to speak, three for black people to speak, and so there was nothing comfortable about what she chose to be actively engaged around.

US: What do you think it was so powerful about Well's journalism and campaign that made people like Frederick Douglas applaud her for her work.

JJR: She spoke truth as she saw and she was not...Can you hear me?

US: Yeah, I can hear you.

JJR: She spoke truth as she saw and she as not not really afraid to do that regardless of the context that she found herself in. She into a lot of trouble because she was very straightforward about being articulate about what she did, what she said and what she did. She was also a [unclear] She expressed herself in ways that ordinary people could understand, so there is a phrase in her, there's a sentence

in her autobiography for example, where she said that she never used a two syllable word when one syllable would do. So she tried to be accessible as a writer, straightforward as a writer, and most of all, truthful about what she was looking to [unclear] and had experienced.

US: What do you believe was the psychology behind lynching during this time and particularly its treatment as a public spectacle.

JJR: What was behind lynching was racism.

US: Yes, but what do you believe like let it to be so popularized as a public spectacle when it itself is a rather gruesome act?

JJR: Well it's a gruesome act and people do lots of things in a mob that they wouldn't do alone. So it's just like, you know, being in a crowd and rounding them up to to do or say things. That happened. I am not a psychologist so I'm not going to proclaim psychological expertise in what we're talking about, but it is a mob mentality. She wrote about this herself. She wrote about these things, people coming together with bad intentions and encouraging each other and beating each other's worst [unclear] and inclinations and having that rule the day has no consequences and because of

the racist environment in which America has historically been, and the consequences not comprising that they can do whatever, the crowd that is, that they can do whatever, speak whatever, be engaged publicly in whatever, and not feel that there were consequences that they would have to suffer.

US: Do you think that do you think Wells' rhetoric still continues to be relevant in today's times and today's society.

JJR: Have you heard of black lives matter?

US: Yes

JJR: Well, yes. Because it's about the same thing, which violence against people who violence but certainly, violence against people in ... ordinarily horrific ways, and by people in authority. So the same sentiments that [undercuts] black lives matter [undercutted] the lynching campaign that she ran because black people (men, women, and children) were being lynched because of being oppressed and terrorist sentiments that people were exercising freely during that day. And if you look at the violence against people of color during these days, it's the same kind of thing. So yes, there are patterns about that

oppressiveness, about that violence, about the ways in which people in power or who feel empowered, are able to exercise violent behavior. Where's our expectation of passiveness? that it be normalized, that people don't really see it as something that needs to be addressed. And of course, in terms of violence against black people, I mean, look at the pattern, you can answer that yourself, just look at the pattern.

US: Given the fact that lynching was only outlawed 10 years ago, was only recently abolished around 10 years ago. What do you think are undermining the efforts of abolitionists such as Ida B. Wells herself.

JJR: Racism. I mean, I don't know how you can think of anything but that. If it were right according to law, if it what was right according to human rights, if it was what was right according to the way in which one citizen is expected to engage with another citizen then it would have never have been in the first place. [unclear] You're talking about people being terrorized who were black slaves. When we had slavery, there wasn't as much lynching in the way that we've come to know it, because Africam Americans were viewed as property, and as property, they would be killed,



maimed, all that things and after that, there was even more because there was that sense of power, control, limitations on possibilities, all of those things. So it is not possible to talk like this without talking about the impact of racism, and racist beliefs, racist practices in the United States of America. Do you otherwise, what do you think accounts for that?

US: Well, first of all, we are definitely, we know what's going on, and we know that racism is a big factor about what's going on and we just wanted to see if there were other underlying factors such as socioeconomic status or particularly powerful anti- versions of the activists such as powerful groups of white supremacists or a renewal of mob mentality that's also contributing to the desensitizing of what actually happened during history or, even so how history textbooks erased a lot of happened in reality in certain parts of the state, things like that, like education wise that affects how people view what actually happened and the cruelty of what happened to black people in our society.

JJR: Well all of these things are complicated. I'm not trying to

simplify that all, but because of the complexities of the power dynamics and a belief dynamic separation, all of these things that you just [unclear] are true. Yes there are economic implications, yes there are sociopolitical implications, yes, there are implications of the power dynamics between the two groups, yes, there are implications in the educational system, when there is no commitment to be fair, inclusive, or just in the way that you present the history of the country or the contributions of our country, or the ways in which various groups, not just african americans, various groups that had been a part of what has made the country so great. Yes, so all of that is fair, but standing there as the elephant in the room is always the racist behavior, the racist beliefs, the racist dynamics, as they are implicated in all of these other things that we can also look at. So yes, it would be nice if black people had more money, it would be nice if we had better schools. Why don't we have better schools? Why don't we have money? Why don't we have this? Why isn't this the case? why do well, [unclear] might say the the supreme for everything, everyone, and everyone else is inferior. Why is

that so? So, I think once you realize the complex nature of what racism is, you know, you have the ability [unclear].

US: Alright thank you so much for your time and spreading the advocacy of Ida B. Wells.