

**Interview Records of Parker Boyden
Completed for the Black Lives Matter Oral History
Project**



**Parker Boyden was interviewed By Romy Ahn
02/25/2024**

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Narrator: Parker Boyden

Interviewer: Romy Ahn

Interview Date: February 25, 2024

Location: Sewanee, Tennessee

Parker Boyden Abstract Oral Interview

Parker Boyden is currently a student at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor Michigan, where she studies on a pre-law track. Previously Parker attended Middlesex School in Concord Massachusetts, where she served as DEI officer. During her time at Middlesex, Parker participated in and led student protests in support of the BLM movement. Parker also had a leading role in the BLM walkouts against the previous Middlesex Head of School, David Beare. Parker continues to pursue roles to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in all the communities in which she is a part of. Parker was raised in a rural town in Pennsylvania with her highly educated mother and father, as well as her younger brother.

Parker opens the interview by describing the vast locations in which she lived and found community in, a factor that contributes to her cultured background and allows her to connect and empathize with a diverse group of people. She later describes her transition from rural Pennsylvania to a socially progressive Massachusetts suburb. The majority of the interview is based around her work as a DEI advocate at Middlesex School in the midst of a racial scandal that occurred her junior year. Her narrative revolves around the Middlesex School Head of School's decision to uninvite Nikole Hannah-Jones and not allow her to speak to the student body. Parker speaks upon the power dynamic between the school board and trustees with the students and faculty. She speaks about the process in which students banded together in protest and then further learned from the experience. Having a leading role in the protests, Parker offers

a unique perspective to the situation.

Parker attributes her personal growth as an ally to her work conducted at Middlesex school as a DEI officer. She is proud of the effort she had put forth to make Middlesex School a safer space. She continues to lead by example and strive to make the world a more equitable place for her peers. At Michigan, Parker looks for opportunities to expand her education both in the classroom and as a member of the Michigan community.

Romy Ahn

Dr. Andrew Maginn

Hist 232

9 March 2024

Field Notes Oral Interview

Narrator: Parker Boyen

Interviewer: Romy Ahn

Interview Date: February 25th, 2024 (2:40PM)

Location: Zoom Call

NARRATOR: Parker Boyden was born in Colorado on July 8, 2004. Parker's family moved to Clarion, Pennsylvania in her youth with her younger brother Wyatt, where they still live today. Parker's parents work in higher education, a factor that has contributed to her pursuit for rigorous education and instilled in her a strong work ethic and appreciation for education. Parker moved out of Clarion at the age of sixteen to attend Middlesex School in Concord, Massachusetts. During her formative years attending preparatory school, Parker was a highly contributing member of the varsity volleyball team and co-captained the team her senior year. Additionally, Parker was heavily involved in the arts, landing lead roles in the spring musicals and leading the school's choir as a choral officer. Parker also served as a proctor in the girls dorm she lived in, as well as held multiple other senior leadership roles such as DEI officer. Parker now attends the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan where she is a member of a pre-law student organization.

INTERVIEWER: Romy Ahn is a first year undergraduate student at the University of the South: Sewanee. Currently she is conducting oral research regarding the impact and influence of the

Black Lives Matter movement on her community. Additionally she is working on researching the effects Brown v Board of Education had on black educators during the time.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: This interview was conducted over the Zoom platform, which allowed the narrator to communicate from her home in Clarion, Pennsylvania with the interviewer in her dorm room in Sewanee, Tennessee. There is a large portion of the interview dedicated to the narrator's background which is crucial to understanding her unique perspective and lens in which she views history from. There were few to none interruptions in the interview, which lasted approximately 45 minutes. Overall, the interviewer was enthusiastic and obviously excited to be reconnected with the narrator, which comes across in both of their tones. The narrator maintained an upbeat tone throughout the interview and was open to answering any questions. Although she admitted there are flaws and gaps within her knowledge on the topic, she was eager to answer each question to the best of her ability. The interview was based around the time they spent together at Preparatory school during the Black Lives Matter movement, heavily influenced by the global pandemic.

NOTE ON THE RECORDING: This interview was recorded over Zoom. Around miniature 12, the interviewer reminds the narrator that this is a project being turned into class and asks her to adjust her camera angle, fearing the visual of the interview would be turned in as well. Additionally, there is a small portion of the interview that was cut out in transition from one zoom call ending to another zoom call reconnecting.

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

I'm going to introduce us for the recording. Okay. So this is Romy on from Sewanee, the University of the South. It is Sunday, February 25th, 2024, and it is 2:40 PM. I'm sitting in my dorm at the University of the South, and I'm with Parker Boyden from Clarion, Pennsylvania, who currently is in her [00:00:30] home in Clarion, Pennsylvania. Okay. Thank you, Parker for being here first of all.

Speaker 2 ([00:37](#)):

You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

Speaker 1 ([00:39](#)):

Anytime. We could do a follow up if you want to. Oh, perfect. Okay, so we're going to do some background stuff. So where are you originally from?

Speaker 2 ([00:50](#)):

Well, originally I was born in Colorado, but while my parents were in getting their PhD and their masters, [00:01:00] and then we moved to Minnesota for two years, and then we moved to Clarion, Pennsylvania when I was about four or five. And my family has lived here ever since. So for the last 15 years about,

Speaker 1 ([01:18](#)):

Okay, so how is where you're currently living, I would take that as probably Michigan different than to where you were raised.

Speaker 2 ([01:29](#)):

Well, [00:01:30] Michigan, so yeah, I go to the University of Michigan, which is in Ann Arbor, and even though Ann Arbor isn't a city, the combined population of the student population and just the population of Ann Arbor in general is definitely significantly larger than where I grew up. I mean, the student population at Michigan is around 50,000 I believe. I don't even know what the population of Ann Arbor is, but [00:02:00] anyways, it's much greater because the population of Clarion is around 5,000 I think. So that was definitely the first big, big difference. Ann Arbor's pretty white, but there is more diversity in Ann Arbor than Clarion, Pennsylvania. It's pretty much all very white and homogeneous in Pennsylvania. Ann Arbor is also definitely a lot more wealthy [00:02:30] than where I grew up.

Speaker 1 ([02:33](#)):

And you'd say Clarion is probably more rural than Ann Arbor?

Speaker 2 ([02:36](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, right. Ann Arbor isn't a city, but it's definitely has lively businesses and lots of stores, and it's 30 minutes from Detroit, whereas Clarion, the closest cities, Pittsburgh, which is two hours away, very small businesses are always in and out. Nothing ever really sticks. The movie theater [00:03:00] just closed.

Speaker 1 ([03:02](#)):

Oh wait, really?

Speaker 2 ([03:02](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So everything's kind of, well, we did get a Dunkin last year, so that was what

Speaker 1 ([03:07](#)):

Will it stick around.

Speaker 2 ([03:09](#)):

I mean, yeah, we'll see for how long, but Right. The only things that stick are fast food joints. Anything else doesn't work out.

Speaker 1 ([03:18](#)):

Okay. So growing up, where did you find a sense of community as a child? Let's take that before you went to Middlesex.

Speaker 2 ([03:25](#)):

Yeah. Honestly, I feel like I didn't [00:03:30] really ever find a sense of community growing up. I mean, I obviously had friends, I made friends who I really liked, but community wise, I think I really struggled because my town is very, very small and very conservative and super, super religious, and I am none of those things. I'm a liberal, [00:04:00] atheist who also likes the Patriots, so it was kind of a rough combo. My parents didn't really have any, they didn't pass on any of the, they grew up in California and Massachusetts are very liberal, and so they kind of passed those values down onto me, and I really, really struggled with that growing up, trying to like fit in with people or the place, which eventually led to me leaving.

Speaker 1 ([04:30](#)):

[00:04:30] Right So then moving on. So when you did leave, how would you describe the community that you were involved in? How old were you when you moved out?

Speaker 2 ([04:40](#)):

I guess 14, 15.

Speaker 1 ([04:43](#)):

You were a new freshman? Yeah. But you repeat. You were probably 15. No, you were probably 15. Yeah,

Speaker 2 ([04:50](#)):

I think I had just turned 15 that summer.

Speaker 1 ([04:53](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([04:54](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([04:54](#)):

So how would you describe that sense of community that you found in high school [00:05:00] being a kind of unique setting compared to most?

Speaker 2 ([05:03](#)):

Yeah. I feel like it took me a little while to really settle in and find a community at Middlesex that I really felt comfortable in. I mean, definitely from off the bat there were a lot more people that were more similar to me in their values and political views, because being a boarding school in Massachusetts, it was a lot of, despite all the wealth, [00:05:30] it was predominantly quite liberal with a range of religion. And so I never really felt singled out for either of those things.

Speaker 1 ([05:39](#)):

I would say that Middlesex is socially liberal,

Speaker 2 ([05:43](#)):

Yes. Economically, probably

Speaker 1 ([05:46](#)):

Pretty conservative,

Speaker 2 ([05:47](#)):

But people didn't talk about it that much.

Speaker 1 ([05:51](#)):

Right. Right. You could hide behind being socially liberal without having to discuss your family's finances or how left, you know what I [00:06:00] mean?

Speaker 2 ([06:00](#)):

Yeah. So everyone was socially liberal, which is what we all talked about. So it kind of gave the appearance that everyone was very liberal, but realistically, because of the amount of money that these families had, economically conservative was a running theme.

Speaker 1 ([06:14](#)):

What were some of the leadership roles you had as a senior or some of the organizations or I guess clubs that you were a part of?

Speaker 2 ([06:23](#)):

Yeah, so my senior year, my leadership roles, I was a proctor in the dorm. [00:06:30] I was a DEI officer, and then a choral officer and a captain of the volleyball team, and then some of the clubs. Oh, I was involved in Common Sense in environmental club.

Speaker 1 ([06:48](#)):

You did theater and choir.

Speaker 2 ([06:50](#)):

Oh yeah, I did theater and yeah, right. Theater and a capella. Sometimes dabbled in Backgammon Club occasionally.

Speaker 1 ([07:00](#)):

[00:07:00] You played some pickup sports here and there.

Speaker 2 ([07:02](#)):

Yeah, yeah. But I feel like a lot of what I did was with the arts.

Speaker 1 ([07:08](#)):

I say that you were heavily integrated into a diverse community.

Speaker 2 ([07:15](#)):

I had the arts down, but then I also was a member of two varsity sports teams, captained one of them. I also did my fair share of AP classes and rigorous classes, but also, I dunno, [00:07:30] I had my foot in a lot of different areas, I feel like by the time. But that took time. It wasn't like that, but by the time I was a senior, I had established my role on campus. I feel like very well.

Speaker 1 ([07:42](#)):

Yeah. So would you say at Michigan, you're still finding your sense of community now? It's not.

Speaker 2 ([07:49](#)):

Yeah, I think definitely. I think when I went into Michigan, the first semester was a little bit rocky because I expected myself, even though I knew it was going to [00:08:00] be different with the size and everything, and the fact that it was just college and not prep school, that there were going to be some differences. But I thought that I was going to be, I guess, a little bit more prepared than I was when I went in, which really kind of shook me I think for the first few months, because as I said, my role on campus was so set by the time I was a senior and I had everything that I was involved in and people knew I was involved in. And so then when I went to Michigan and I [00:08:30] am not playing volleyball anymore, and I tried out for an acapella group and I didn't get in and I'm not doing theater anymore, even though those are things I can try and keep getting involved in, it definitely was a loss of like an identity crisis a little bit whenever I first got there. And I feel like now, this second semester, I feel like I'm finally starting at Michigan. I feel like last semester was kind of totally all over the place, and this is me finally [00:09:00] getting my feet under me a little bit more, which has been really nice. But yeah, definitely still looking for my sense of community. I mean, even something like Greek life has been interesting. I didn't join Greek life.

Speaker 1 ([09:13](#)):

Wait, I thought you did?

Speaker 2 ([09:15](#)):

What?

Speaker 1 ([09:16](#)):

I thought you rushed a frat...

Speaker 2 ([09:18](#)):

Right? I'm in a pre-professional fraternity. I guess technically

Speaker 1 ([09:23](#)):

That's way better.

Speaker 2 ([09:25](#)):

But I'm not involved. I'm not in a sorority in the classic social Greek life scene. [00:09:30] And that started, the sorority stuff happened this semester, but all of my friends from first semester got involved in sororities. And so that's been a little bit of a difficult adjust because they all have this new very large social scene that I don't really want to be a part of or choose to be a part of, which I'm totally happy with that decision. But it's definitely hard because a lot [00:10:00] of my friends from first semester, I don't really see much anymore, which is totally fine, but it's definitely, I don't feel like I've found my people yet, which I'm not stressed about it because again, when I was in high school, I feel like it took till junior year to really settle in and find my people. So I'm not worried about it, but it's definitely, definitely still looking for that and feeling around. I don't feel set with where I'm at right now.

Speaker 1 ([10:30](#)):

[00:10:30] Are you working right now, or no?

Speaker 2 ([10:33](#)):

No, I was going to work, but then I came into second semester going to apply for jobs, but then I underestimated how busy I was going to be, but I plan on getting a job.

Speaker 1 ([10:45](#)):

Where are you working this summer?

Speaker 2 ([10:48](#)):

This summer, I'm not totally sure. I mean, whenever I'm on the island in Maine, I'm going to work at the bar and [00:11:00] then the store, and then I'm maybe alternatively looking for a nannying gig, like a full-time, kinda like daily nanny thing. But I have the months of May and June where I need to find a job.

Speaker 1 ([11:21](#)):

Are you only going July, August?

Speaker 2 ([11:24](#)):

Yeah, I'm going to be on the island July, August. There's not really that much work out there. And there's not that You only have really good work when it's [00:11:30] touristy, unless you're working on a lobster boat.

Speaker 1 ([11:34](#)):

Luke's going to be Kennebunkport.

Speaker 2 ([11:37](#)):

Oh, really? Because the other alternative is I could find a job here, but I don't really want to be here for two months. So I'm also thinking about maybe looking for a job in Portland.

Speaker 1 ([11:48](#)):

Who do you stay with?

Speaker 2 ([11:50](#)):

My aunt. Maybe that's where Hannah lives at my aunt's house. So yeah, I may be thinking about finding a job in Portland for two months.

Speaker 1 ([12:00](#)):

[00:12:00] Okay. Brutal transition, but no, actually not yet. Not yet. This is kind of a loaded question, but who inspires you? Oh, wow. Parker. This is for my class.

Speaker 2 ([12:23](#)):

Are you turning in the video?

Speaker 1 ([12:27](#)):

I'll cut it out. I'll cut.

Speaker 2 ([12:30](#)):

[00:12:30] I thought we were just doing the audio. That's my bad.

Speaker 1 ([12:34](#)):

Actually. Dunno if I can do just audio, I'm going to do just audio.

Speaker 2 ([12:39](#)):

Sorry.

Speaker 1 ([12:43](#)):

Who inspires you? Parker.

Speaker 2 ([12:44](#)):

Okay. Okay. I feel like, okay. Cliche answer right off the bat. I feel like my parents, especially my mom, inspire me a lot. Just my family in general. [00:13:00] I feel like my parents did a really good job of showing me their morals and their values when they were raising me. And they both are very incredibly hardworking and very supportive. And so there are people that I really, really look up to. And then I also feel like I'm someone who, other than my parents, there's not specific people in my life where I feel like I take all of my inspiration [00:13:30] from them. I feel like honestly more than that, I am someone who is continually taking inspiration from just others around me. It doesn't even have to necessarily be someone that I'm super close with or that I know super well, but I feel like I just look at those around me, whether it's in a classroom or whatever, out and about. And I kind of take inspiration from specific moments with [00:14:00] random individuals I feel like.

Speaker 1 ([14:03](#)):

For sure. Okay. Do you want to talk about travel or No; we don't have to if you don't want to, but you

Speaker 2 ([14:09](#)):

Can can whatever.

Speaker 1 ([14:10](#)):

Yeah. Okay. You've traveled quite a bit. So what are some of the more influential trips that you've been on? Or what are your favorites? What are your favorite trips that you've gone on?

Speaker 2 ([14:25](#)):

Well, obviously I go live in Maine every summer. [00:14:30] It's where my dad grew up on this little island and where he met my mom. And so it's very family orientated. So that's always something that I really, really love and is very close to my heart. And then I feel like,

([14:47](#)):

I don't know, I mean, just some of the trips, all of the trips I've taken with family for vacations and stuff out of the country have been very interesting. I really appreciate the way that my family travels because [00:15:00] I feel like when we go to a different country or something like that, my family really tries to find ways to obviously make the trip safe, but also integrate ourselves into wherever we're going. If we're traveling somewhere or out of the country, which we don't do very often, it's something where we want to see the culture of it as opposed to going on a cruise or living in a resor. [00:15:30] So I feel like just through those experiences, I've at least been able to, when I go visit other places, grasp a little bit of the culture or the real feel of where I'm at as opposed to kind of just going to be a tourist. It goes.

Speaker 1 ([15:48](#)):

Totally. Yeah. What is your favorite food?

Speaker 2 ([15:57](#)):

My favorite food is Mexican food.

Speaker 1 ([15:59](#)):

True. [00:16:00] Parker is gluten-free? Yes.

Speaker 2 ([16:02](#)):

I have Celiac, but Mexican food's always been my favorite food, but now it's even more my favorite food.

Speaker 1 ([16:07](#)):

It's all she can eat.

Speaker 2 ([16:08](#)):

It's also now all I can eat, but I love it.

Speaker 1 ([16:12](#)):

And so whenever we go anywhere, we have to make sure Parker can eat because Celiac.

Speaker 2 ([16:18](#)):

Romy calls them ahead sometimes. Yeah,

Speaker 1 ([16:20](#)):

Because it's the worst. You can't eat anything. I can't even send you a cake on your birthday, making it hard. [00:16:30] Oh, let's talk about your knowledge of international culture. That being said, do you want to talk briefly about the international presence we had at Middlesex, both speakers, teachers, students?

Speaker 2 ([16:52](#)):

Yeah. I feel like that was something new to me when I got to Middlesex. I [00:17:00] obviously come from a very small town, but I was able, I go to Maine every summer, and my family, we travel and we'll travel to different states, and we've traveled to different countries before. So I never felt like I had a small worldly view. I felt it was, at least in comparison to my peers, it was larger than my peers. But whenever I got to Middlesex, there was not a large portion of international students, but [00:17:30] there were a fair amount of international students.

Speaker 1 ([17:33](#)):

Wait. I'm going to look up how many it is, but keep going.

Speaker 2 ([17:36](#)):

Mostly from Asia, but that was something new and interesting. I'd never gone to school with anyone from a different country. So it was interesting to, I don't know, kind of talk with people about their experiences and where they're from, and cultural differences, which I've continued now to do at college. I have some [00:18:00] close friends who are international students. What?

Speaker 1 ([18:06](#)):

You have international kids at Michigan?

Speaker 2 ([18:08](#)):

Yeah. I don't actually know. I can look up the percentage. I'm not sure how many international students.

Speaker 1 ([18:14](#)):

It says Middlesex has 405 students, which this must be dated because we have more than that now. But it says from 21 countries, 24 states, and 12% are international. It also says 32 [00:18:30] are racially nonwhite, but that feels really high.

Speaker 2 ([18:34](#)):

It does feel high.

Speaker 1 ([18:35](#)):

I'm going to look that up. Actually.

Speaker 2 ([18:38](#)):

Fall term of this year, there were almost 13,000 international.

Speaker 1 ([18:43](#)):

That's crazy.

Speaker 2 ([18:43](#)):

Crazy? Students, scholars, faculty or staff? So not just students. That was anyone involved in Michigan from those international. But yeah, I guess that was something kind of,

Speaker 1 ([18:56](#)):

Were you a part of rep?

Speaker 2 ([18:58](#)):

No.

Speaker 1 ([18:59](#)):

Ah, [00:19:00] what did I think you were, wait, will you explain that? What that is while I look up?

Speaker 2 ([19:07](#)):

Yeah. Rep.

Speaker 1 ([19:10](#)):

It's now a every fall part of orientation for new students.

Speaker 2 ([19:15](#)):

Oh, shoot. Okay. So Rep was a thing that started our junior year, I believe, and it was a theater performance that was aimed at students to bring [00:19:30] up the conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion in a more, I don't know. Understandable. It was more

Speaker 1 ([19:40](#)):

About to end

Speaker 2 ([19:41](#)):

What

Speaker 1 ([19:42](#)):

It says, my meeting is ending in 10 minutes. If I don't upgrade, we're going to have to pause. Hold on, dude. What the...

Speaker 2 ([19:50](#)):

You have to upgrade Zoom.

Speaker 1 ([19:52](#)):

Oh, I can't afford to upgrade to pro.

Speaker 2 ([19:56](#)):

Wait. Zoom charges now for meeting length?

Speaker 1 ([20:00](#)):

[00:20:00] Dude, you've got to be kidding me. Wait a minute. I need to, dude. Okay. Wait. Mute yourself. I'm going to FaceTime you.

([20:18](#)):

Okay, [00:20:30] recording. I hope it's recording now. Okay. I think it's okay. So yeah, so when my recording shut off, we were discussing really that in high school, well, I guess we'll get to this in the interview. So maybe not the reason for Rep, but just what is, because I thought she [00:21:00] was a part of it, but even though she's not, it's still an important part of what we were involved with.

Speaker 2 ([21:04](#)):

So Rep was, right, it was a theater performance to kind of present DEI topics to students in, what's the way I'm trying to describe it in a more,

Speaker 1 ([21:18](#)):

It was advertised as relatable.

Speaker 2 ([21:20](#)):

More relatable, thank you. And more, it was put in a format that was more engaging as opposed to just having lectures and speakers, which we also [00:21:30] did, but this was supposed to be kind of a more entertaining take on DEI. And so it was a bunch of students that participated in it, and they kind of would act out different scenes, different dynamics between students, often drawing on stories from Black at mx, which was at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement with all of the Instagrams that were made at different [00:22:00] institutions. They took some of those stories and kind of put them into rep, and then afterwards you would break up into groups, all the people that watched it, and you would kind of talk about these scenes that they played out and what they could have done differently or what the issue was, and kind of made it an interactive theater performance slash workshop that now they do every fall. It's become [00:22:30] a set thing in the orientation at our high school now, as opposed to just the one-time performance that we had junior year.

Speaker 1 ([22:39](#)):

So what would you consider, okay, so if the BLM movement started in 2020, it would've been

Speaker 2 ([22:50](#)):

It was the end of my freshman year is when it started,

Speaker 1 ([22:54](#)):

And so

Speaker 2 ([22:55](#)):

That June, the summer after my freshman year.

Speaker 1 ([22:57](#)):

So you weren't at school when [00:23:00] you started to hear about it?

Speaker 2 ([23:03](#)):

Yeah, it was during the heavy lockdown in the spring of 2020 when I was at home. No, I wasn't at boarding school.

Speaker 1 ([23:10](#)):

So how did you learn about BLM? Do you think that was over social media or was it from your parents?

Speaker 2 ([23:18](#)):

Yeah, I think the start of it was definitely social media. I feel like at that time, I mean, social media is always rampant, but definitely during that initial very, [00:23:30] very strict lockdown, I feel like everything on social media was very, very heightened, and I started to learn through it through social media.

Speaker 1 ([23:40](#)):

Did you ever post any political?

Speaker 2 ([23:42](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I definitely was big. Well, I mean that I feel like one of the issues of the Black Lives Matter movement is a lot of people took it as performance activism. I mean, I was a victim of, or not a victim, what's the word?

Speaker 1 ([23:59](#)):

Participant?

Speaker 2 ([24:00](#)):

[00:24:00] Participant. A proponent of this performance activism too, of reposting all these info graphics and whatever on your Instagram story, but not actually

([24:11](#)):

Really doing much. I feel like that was, I mean, that's kind of starting at one of the questions, but one of the faults of the Black Lives Matter, which wasn't even on the movement itself. I feel like it was the people around the movement and social media and all of that stuff. But yeah, I think definitely social media and my [00:24:30] parents are liberal, and we would talk about it, and then as it gained traction, it was all over the news and you couldn't not see it if you tried. I feel like it was very, very large.

Speaker 1 ([24:43](#)):

And did you see any on social media or in your community pushback against?

Speaker 2 ([24:49](#)):

Yeah, that was definitely super, because it was Covid and I was home and not at boarding school. It was very interesting because I would see on my phone, everyone from boarding [00:25:00] school and from that kind of life posting all of the same things that I was, all the infographics and statistics and stories about police violence and everything that the movement was about. But then also at the same time, I was living in my rural conservative town where people never wore masks. The public school night town is one of the very few in the entire country that never shut down for a day during covid and never required masks. Two people [00:25:30] on the board at my public school were at the January 6th capital insurrection. So there was a lot of pushback about the Black Lives Matter movement. People were not educated about it, people were not happy about it. They kind of took the other stance about the violent protests and how the cops need to be there and whatever, the whole other side, as opposed to Blue Lives Matter. [00:26:00] That whole rhetoric was very, very large here. So it was a super interesting dynamic being here and living here during that movement, which was such a big part of that time. Yeah, [\(26:18\)](#):

Yeah.

Speaker 1 [\(26:19\)](#):

Interesting. So when you returned back to campus, was the BLM movement, so that would've been

Speaker 2 [\(26:27\)](#):

Sophomore Fall.

Speaker 1 [\(26:28\)](#):

Yeah. Was that still [00:26:30] prevalent in your life, or it had died down at that point?

Speaker 2 [\(26:37\)](#):

I mean, it was definitely still prevalent because I feel like as we returned to school, because all of crazy, all these movements had happened during Covid while we were on lockdown, I feel like the school took it on as a responsibility that once we actually returned to campus to continue the conversation very heavily. Because also during that time, black [00:27:00] at MX had come out and all these stories had come out about micro and macroaggressions on campus. Teachers were being called out that still work there. So I think the school definitely felt like they couldn't do as much when we were all virtual. So it definitely was something big sophomore year. But again, on the other side of that, it definitely had died down a lot more than the initial movement. And I feel like it was just a [00:27:30] really odd time to have a movement that large take place in such aous at the height of a global pandemic, although there was a lot of conversation about Black Lives Matter and all these other movements that had taken off after Black Lives Matter.

[\(27:47\)](#):

When we got back to campus, another huge thing was we were all living at a boarding school during a pandemic, so everything was very shut down. Everything was very strict. People were trying to figure out how to make a boarding school run when there were all these international [00:28:00] kids and kids who didn't get near the school, who couldn't get home easily. So it was just a lot all at once. So I feel like that Covid definitely took away from attention to the Black Lives Matter movement. After a few months. It was kind of hard to put all your focus and attention onto one thing when there were just so many. It was just a crazy time, and I feel like no one could [00:28:30] really give a hundred percent to any topic or issue because everything was just kind of going to shit.

Speaker 1 ([28:39](#)):

So from that, to what extent would you say the Black Lives Matter movement succeeded or is succeeding?

Speaker 2 ([28:52](#)):

That's a tough question. I feel like

Speaker 1 ([28:55](#)):

Or I guess that's really broad for the time of our lives in which we were pretty [00:29:00] confined in a space. Let's talk about the impact that the Black Lives Matter movement had on our specific community.

Speaker 2 ([29:15](#)):

I feel like, again, bringing up black at MX was definitely a big thing. People were paying a lot, a lot of attention. Yeah. Do you

Speaker 1 ([29:23](#)):

Want to give an example

Speaker 2 ([29:25](#)):

Of, I'm trying to think of a specific story

Speaker 1 ([29:29](#)):

Or just, [00:29:30] I don't know if people know. So black at and then institution.

Speaker 2 ([29:35](#)):

Yeah. So during the Black Lives Matter movement, and also while a lot of the schools and colleges and universities were all shut down, a lot of Instagram pages were created, and it was this handle. So for us, it was black at Middlesex, and they existed at a lot of schools, universities, black and

Speaker 1 ([29:57](#)):

Private schools, and predominantly white

Speaker 2 ([29:59](#)):

Institutions, PWIs [00:30:00] for sure. And it was kind of like an anonymous platform for students of color to share their stories and their experiences that they've had at these predominantly white institutions, and kind of served as a way to try and give these underrepresented people like a voice.

Speaker 1 ([30:21](#)):

And it was heavily anonymous.

Speaker 2 ([30:23](#)):

Yeah, I mean, I believe there were definitely some posts on the Middlesex [00:30:30] one that people weren't anonymous. I think there were some people that kind of signed their name, but heavily anonymous as well. And

Speaker 1 ([30:37](#)):

I would say the people that did choose to sign their name were alumni, not current

Speaker 2 ([30:41](#)):

Not current students. I agree. I agree. Yeah, there were definitely, I mean, I remember one alumni, I am not sure how much older he was than us or when he graduated, but he was on the hockey team.

Speaker 1 ([30:55](#)):

Yes. He graduated, I think a year before [00:31:00] you got there.

Speaker 2 ([31:01](#)):

Yeah, it was definitely sometime recent.

Speaker 1 ([31:03](#)):

It was dangerously recent for, yeah,

Speaker 2 ([31:05](#)):

And I'm not sure where he published it or where it was found, but he wrote a whole kind of article about his experience at Middlesex as a black student, but also specifically his experience being on the hockey team, which was known for not having a great reputation.

Speaker 1 ([31:25](#)):

And I think he was the only student of color on the team,

Speaker 2 ([31:28](#)):

Or only black [00:31:30] person on the team at the time. And I think the head coach after him got fired for being the

Speaker 1 ([31:37](#)):

Whole coaching staff.

Speaker 2 ([31:39](#)):

The whole coaching staff got replaced, but that was in our time. I think that was after my freshman year. They replaced the hockey team, coaching staff, I think after this article came out as well. I think that was definitely a factor. So there were alumni, not even just on the black at mx, but just alumni that were posting and writing things on a pretty large scale as [00:32:00] well. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([32:03](#)):

Let's see. One of the questions that I'm supposed to ask you is how has the Black Lives Matter movement impacted your life? But I think that's just a good opportunity for you to discuss a really specific thing that occurred at Middlesex, and then just first of all, the situation at hand, and then have the responses, but then also the responses to the response.

Speaker 2 ([32:30](#)):

[00:32:30] Yeah. So I feel like

(32:35):

One of the things that...

Speaker 1 (32:37):

What you have to explain that.

Speaker 2 (32:39):

Yeah. Yeah. So I feel like one of the things that the Black Lives Matter movement did do in the long run is when issues of race do come up now, I feel like people are a lot quicker to jump on it and point out why it's wrong and the disparities in X, Y, and Z, it's brought a lot more [00:33:00] visibility to those topics. So people are a lot more cognizant and aware of them. BLM was the summer after my freshman year, and then at the beginning of my junior year, so this was 2021, the end of 2021 was the beginning of my junior year, and we [00:33:30] got a new head of school at Middlesex my freshman year. So he was starting his third year at Middlesex, and everyone really liked him. He was a super nice guy, got along great with everyone, and in the fall he called us all in to the theater, kind of impromptu, no one really knew what was going on.

(33:53):

We all went in and he kind of just started rambling about a bunch of random stuff using really big words, [00:34:00] and everyone was kind of like, what is he talking about? There was no intro. There was no, seemed very informal and rushed and confusing. But he mentioned, I remember the only thing I really picked up on is that he mentioned something about Twitter, so I was not like Twitter, so I obviously hopped on Twitter and I just looked up Middlesex school and immediately just tweets and tweets and tweets and tweets and tweets came in just bashing Middlesex and bashing the administration [00:34:30] and talking about the legacies of boarding schools and how systemically racist they are, and the socioeconomic just kind of really coming for boarding school and Middlesex in general, and messaging something about NiKole Hannah-Jones, who I think at that point, I knew who she was. I remember hearing about the UNC tenure scandal. I knew she wrote the 1619 project.

Speaker 1 (34:56):

Yeah, I think we were reading 1619 in history.

Speaker 2 (34:58):

Yeah, I think we were reading [00:35:00] some excerpts from it. I definitely at this point knew who she was, at least to a degree, to know what she kind of her message was and just who she was, and that there had been scandals involving her prior at other institutions. And so eventually, I'm not sure exactly how we all found out. There might've been another assembly call pretty much eventually everyone figured out pretty quickly.

Speaker 1 (35:26):

I think we found out when we read her tweets.

Speaker 2 (35:30):

[00:35:30] Yeah, that's what it was. She went to Twitter about Middlesex. And so we found out through her social media that in the summer she had been hired to come to Middlesex during Black History

Month and give a speech about the 1619 project. And it was something that people were really, really excited about. A really big name, obviously Nobel Prize winner. She is very, very famous. [00:36:00] And I think coming off of the heels of the Black Lives Matter movement, all of that, it was something that was a very big deal. But again, this speaker was set in the summer. We didn't know that she was coming yet. It was just something that was kind of up in the administration that normally doesn't reach the students until around the time whenever the speaker's going to come. And she had been all set up to do this. And then she got an email, I believe [00:36:30] from David Bear, our head of school.

[\(36:34\)](#):

I forgot what the email was, but it was a wishy-washy way of pretty much revoking her invitation to come speak. And the reality was is that a lot of the board members were really, really upset about having her come to speak. And a lot of them thought that if we were having someone as liberal and progressive as Nikole Hannah-Jones come talk to students, that it was only fair [00:37:00] if we had someone from the opposing conservative viewpoint to also come talk to the students. And I don't even know what exactly went down, but I'm pretty sure we all kind of figured out that a member of the board or some big large donor for Middlesex who's donated billions of dollars, made buildings, huge, gorgeous buildings threaten to pull all of their families funding if we let Nikole Hannah-Jones [00:37:30] come speak. And so it was without the knowledge of any of the faculty members, without the knowledge of Erika Praul, who was the head of the DEI office, who had kind of been one of the main proponents of organizing this speaker.

[\(37:44\)](#):

It was between, I believe, the head of the board. I can't remember his name right now, but yeah, Steve Larey the head of the board and David Bear, the head of the school, just the two of them made the decision in private to cancel her talk, [00:38:00] and then they let us know after the fact. But then of course, Nikole Hannah-Jones took this to Twitter and was like, this is completely unjust. They're canceling my talk because of X, Y, and Z. They're folding under the pressure of big money donors and not doing the right thing. So it just kind of blew up. It was all people from the Boston Globe were reaching out to me over dms trying to get information. One of the teachers at the school who does kind [00:38:30] of the PR and stuff for Middlesex, he told people to not reach or not talk to them until talking to him first.

[\(38:38\)](#):

And there was a lot of outrage among the students and faculty alike. People were absolutely furious that they had not been told about this conversation or this decision. And we wanted to make it known that we didn't stand with this decision as an institution. And so there were walkouts staged a lot of big student movements. There were Instagrams [00:39:00] made there. All faculty and staff came together, and they formulated a very formal statement about them not standing with that decision that they all signed and sent into the Boston Globe. So it was a very uniting moment for the faculty and teachers and students who all did not stand with this decision. And our head of school, he kind of disappeared and went off to Utah or wherever. [00:39:30] I'm assuming this major donor was to try and figure it out possibly. It was just kind of crazy.

[\(39:37\)](#):

And it was all over all these newspapers. It was in newspapers and tabloids in the UK. It was just a major, major scandal. And so I feel like with coming off the Black Lives Matter movement, that was something that you would read about these scandals happening at other schools, and it suddenly was [00:40:00] right in our face, and there was still covid, but it was the year coming off of the crazy covid thing, and then suddenly we were hit with this whole other issue right off the bat. It was a very turbulent, turbulent time, Middlesex, to say the least, but I feel like the Black Lives Matter movement and the black at MX and everything kind of prepared us in a way for something like that to happen. And then everyone was

immediately very passionate [00:40:30] and very driven about taking a stance and standing up for what's right and letting it be known that the faculty and students did not stand by this decision. And we were very unhappy with the way that the things had transpired, which then eventually the out of school got fired slash stepped down. I don't think he really had a choice, but the

Speaker 1 ([40:53](#)):

And the Chair of the board,

Speaker 2 ([40:56](#)):

The head of the board also changed. They both stepped [00:41:00] down. Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([41:04](#)):

I'm trying to think. There were meetings with trustees. We had a Quaker meeting in the chapel.

Speaker 2 ([41:14](#)):

The board came, I mean, not the entire board, but I mean a lot of members on the board of trustees were also very, very upset because the board, I mean, obviously students and faculty should have been queued in, but the fact that the board of trustees wasn't queued in is I feel like an [00:41:30] even bigger deal. And so I think for the first time, they said in years and years and years, the board showed up at campus to have a meeting with the student body. I mean, it wasn't a required meeting any of the students could go, but it was without any faculty or any kind of oversight from the teachers and faculty on campus. It was just a meeting with the students, which that hadn't happened in years and years and years. So [00:42:00] they did try and take it as seriously as they could. I think it was tricky because obviously all the students demanded to kind of know what was going on, but there were all, I'm sure, a lot of formalities. And it definitely was like, I don't know, talked about a lot. But also there were some things that I feel like we never really got answers to as well.

Speaker 1 ([42:25](#)):

Yeah, I would say that was as [00:42:30] close as the two of us got to the movement itself, or as involved as I did at least.

Speaker 2 ([42:40](#)):

I mean, other than that, with the movement itself in its peak, I definitely went to some rallies and stuff, which was hard to find in Pennsylvania. So there weren't a ton all during Covid, but I went to a few. We also had some at Middlesex Moments and marches [00:43:00] within our own community, which is then it's like, what are we really doing? Not actually making

Speaker 1 ([43:06](#)):

Right

Speaker 2 ([43:09](#)):

To it within our own community, I guess.

Speaker 1 ([43:11](#)):

Yeah, I agree. I agree.

Speaker 2 ([43:14](#)):

Actually existing as a pwi, I feel like that was important.

Speaker 1 ([43:19](#)):

So just to wrap up that, how do you take what you learned from that experience we went through at Middlesex and [00:43:30] apply those lessons moving forward? Or do you talk about what happened as a learning opportunity for others, or is that something you're ashamed of, that it happened at a school you went to? How do you move forward after that experience at school?

Speaker 2 ([43:46](#)):

I feel like I take my experiences that I had at boarding school, that being one of the main ones, and I kind of take those as learning moments for myself, but also as learning moments for other [00:44:00] people, or even just ways to start conversations about hard topics. Because I feel like even aside from the whole Nikole Hannah-Jones scandal, there were a lot of aspects about boarding school that are controversial. Even just the thought of boarding school, the socioeconomic level within boarding school, the elitism, the privilege, all of that is very, very interesting. [00:44:30] And that wasn't the world that I came from originally. Obviously I was lucky enough to receive that education and be a part of it, but also it's not something that I blindly just accepted. I feel like it's something that I struggled with a little bit. And so taking my experiences such as the Nikole Hannah-Jones thing into college, I've definitely talked a lot about my experiences at boarding school. [00:45:00] I mean, I was in a class this last semester, a seminar about, or a lot of it was about the 1619 project. And I was like, well, boy, do I got a story for you? And then again, we talked a lot about Anthony Jack, who was another speaker that we had at Middlesex twice, I believe, actually.

Speaker 1 ([45:24](#)):

On MLK day, right?

Speaker 2 ([45:26](#)):

Yeah. I think he lowkey came twice.

Speaker 1 ([45:29](#)):

I [00:45:30] don't think I was there. He came, yeah. So I wasn't there as a freshman

Speaker 2 ([45:35](#)):

And then again junior year.

Speaker 1 ([45:36](#)):

But I was there for the MLK speaker.

Speaker 2 ([45:40](#)):

And the first two months of class were about Anthony Jack and the 1619 project by Nikole Jones. And I was like, so those are instances where I'm able to share these wild stories from boarding school that are exactly related to the things that we're talking about in class. I mean, I'm also interested in [00:46:00] that realm of study a little bit within politics, talking about discrepancies and disparities and how the law affects the individual, the system in place and whatever. All that stuff is very interesting to me. So I take a

lot of classes relating those topics where then I'm able to bring in my experiences of coming from a town with a lot of poverty to then going to an elitist white boarding school [00:46:30] in New England to then going to a large public university, kind of, I don't know. I feel like a lot of my experiences are very opposite ends of the spectrum, but I was also able to find odd similarities between them all. And I don't know, I just feel like I try and take all of those experiences and all of those lessons that I learned, and I'm still learning to guide myself through [00:47:00] absolutely whatever or just ya know

Speaker 1 ([47:03](#)):

Totally

Speaker 2 ([47:04](#)):

To start conversations with other people or bring awareness to, I dunno, because also now at the University of Michigan, there are not a lot of kids from boarding school who went from this world where everyone is from boarding school or knows someone from boarding school or went to boarding school and knows X, Y, and Z to a place where I'll be like, oh yeah. And then I transferred to boarding school and people are like, oh my God, I've had so many people never met anyone from boarding [00:47:30] school before, which is such a refreshing thing to hear in my book. I'm like, oh my God. Oh God, that's so nice. So it's really an interesting dynamic. I mean, they called Middlesex the bubble, but it's called the bubble for a reason because you really are in a bubble. And it feels like I was just in this little bubble for four years and now I'm back out and

Speaker 1 ([47:54](#)):

In the real world,

Speaker 2 ([47:56](#)):

It's a weird little space time continuum. Little, [00:48:00] I don't know. It was a weird time, but it was a good time. But it was a weird time.

Speaker 1 ([48:05](#)):

Okay. Do you so much for consenting to be interviewed. Do you have anything? I mean, I don't have any more questions for you if you, okay, I'm going to stop the recording then.