

Jeremy De La Cruz interviewed by Wilton Guerrero
October 13th, 2020
Washington Heights, NYC

Wilton Guerrero: My name is Wilton Guerrero and today I'll be interviewing Jeremy De La Cruz currently in my home today's date is October 13th 2020. Jeremy do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history?

Jeremy De La Cruz: Yes.

WG: I'm going to ask you for some basic information if you are willing to share with us so the first question is what's your name?

JD: Jeremy De La Cruz.

WG: What's your age?

JD: 20.

WG: What's your current occupation?

JD: Unemployed.

WG: What's your gender identity?

JD: Male.

WG: What's your Sexual Orientation?

JD: Heterosexual.

WG: Jeremy where are you from? If you can give me a little background

JD: I'm from the Dominican Republic, but grew up in New York City, specifically Washington Heights.

WG: How has coronavirus changed your life?

JD: Since I caught Coronavirus it has been different lately, the past eight months I look at food in different ways. One because I can't taste and two because I can't smell. Corona really changed my life, too with the people around me unaware if people have it or don't. Having insecurities walking around the streets taking the buses and trains, or being around my family. I'm afraid they'll get it because of me.

WG: Do you know when exactly you caught Coronavirus?

JD: Around March at the very beginning of the virus.

WG: Where do you think you caught it?

JD: On my way to work in the train station

WG: Has this affected your school performance, has this hurt you mentally, physically

JD: School performance hurt me the most, because I had a good GPA but I had to recover from COVID-19 which was about 6 months. I failed three classes because of my recovery, two classes I couldn't go to, and I basically had to pay my own medical bill because of failing school. My mental health is kinda weird, there's some days when I'm kinda depressed because I can't eat. There's things I wanna do but I can't, things that I wake up too that I just had to deal with everyday.

WG: So you said there's things you wanna do that you can't do you wanna tell us?

JD: Stuff like going out with my family, three of my sisters had kids and I can't see my nephews or nieces. I'm afraid even though I have tested negative around the virus. I'm still afraid they'll catch the virus because of me including their parents. Hanging out with family are things I'm unwilling to do right now.

WG: Do you think COVID-19 has impacted your family in any major way?

JD: Yes it impacted them alot, impacted their homes and now many of them are living in shelters. Some of them have lost their jobs, many family members lost their lives. My grandmother cries everyday because she lost 10 family members due to the COVID-19 I'd say it impacted my family a lot.

WG: Are there still any people in your household still currently working?

JD: My mom and stepdad are still working.

WG: What have you learned about yourself and your family since the beginning of the crisis of the pandemic?

JD: What I learned is that when it comes to my family in the household we're strong, we support one another. When I was dying in my bed, they were all making sure I was alright, they kept waking me up at night since I couldn't breathe. I realized my family is a strong one and the pandemic made us an even stronger family, in a way COVID-19 helped my family grow but it was also one of the worst things that would ever happen.

WG: Is there anything positive that has come out from this pandemic for yourself?

JD: The only thing positive that came out of this pandemic was the money we kept on getting but everything else was not as good.

WG: So after this pandemic and the outburst and its current state, what do you think the nation and the world should learn about this pandemic.

JD: I think one thing we should learn is don't take money for granted, if you're getting help don't waste it on nonsense that you shouldn't be wasting it on. You should save it because anything can happen especially since it's getting cold and COVID-19 might hit even stronger. So people that didn't save their money are messed up right now because it's gonna be stronger than ever before. Also I feel like we learned now you have to clean everywhere you go and wear a mask. I feel like it's one of the best things that could happen. Since now everyone is washing their hands, now we don't have to question people whether they washed their hands or not. It's now guaranteed and the chances of catching COVID-19 can become lower.

WG: So money and sanitation were positive comes of COVID-19

JD: Yes.

WG: Can you explain to me why these anti-racist protest have erupted.

JD: It all started with George Floyd we saw on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram where the police officer was putting his knee on George Floyd neck, while the officer got out of jail and hasn't faced any justice. And nobody did anything about it. It was time that black folks started to do something about it. It should have been happening a long time ago, people of color should have had respect, something like these protests have spoken up for our people.

WG: Why do you think New York became the epicenter of the protest?

JD: I feel like when it comes to New York it's one of the cities everyone knows, So I feel like since everyone is from New York a lot of tragedies have also happened in New York involving black folks, Being one of the main targets.

WG: Since you caught COVID-19 and heard about the news of staying home as much as possible by our mayor, governor and president. Did the concern of your health and for others on top of obeying the law limit you from going outside the streets of New York and to protest for the Black Lives Matter movement?

JD: Yes unfortunately I couldn't go protest because of having COVID-19 and I did have concern for everyone around me, starting passing around COVID-19 like a trend. So I stayed home and did everything I could do at home, like talk about the movement on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to show the more people to talk about it the more people would be heard.

WG: So you did it more because you cared for others and your health rather than obeying the government?

JD: Yeah.

WG: So If you didn't have COVID-19 you still wouldn't have listened to the government officials and you would go out to protest?

JD: No because I was more concerned about my family members at home especially since my mother, step-dad and brother were home. I didn't want to go outside to catch it again and then my whole family would get it. God forbid something happened, so I would've still stayed home.

WG: You would express yourself through social media, rather than being there due to health concerns?

JD: Yeah.

WG: Do you have any suggestion, ideas, or concerns that you would share to help support the structure of how the Black Lives Matter?

JD: My only concern that I have about the Black Lives Matter movement is that I feel like one day it's gonna end and no one is going to remember. Stuff like that always happens and I don't wanna go back to the old routes, where they went out to protest and the only thing they did was destroy stuff. Which i disagree with, they should never be doing that, that's the only concern I have. The Black Lives Movement should be talked all over the news every single day on social media every single day, so people can understand like hey we want something better for the black folks that are going through so much hell occurring in this world.

WG: Has your friends, family coworkers or classmates voice their opinions, concerns or thoughts about this re-spark in activism, protest and riots throughout the world during this pandemic?

JD: Yea so I had a lot of family members that actually went to go protest and you know they had to leave because the first thing people were doing was throwing things at one another. They said it was one of the most uncomfortable events they ever went to. Even though they knew there was a risk of getting COVID-19 but they still went to get support but the thing is that people weren't behaving correctly. Throwing stuff at cops and cops were hitting people, so my family were concerned with the structure of the protesting.

WG: How have the past few months changed how you think about the police and racism in the United States?

JD: I feel like nothing has changed, as we know a Breonna Taylor got killed last month or a couple weeks ago the officer was barely charged with anything, I mean that guy should have gone to jail and served time for justice. But I guess that's how it is to be white, now he's home I guess chilling and we have an innocent lady who's in heaven without her family and her family is suffering the most. Knowing that the guy that killed her is living his life normally right now.

WG: Since the Coronavirus outbreak we know that sports have been shut down by the NFL, NHL, MLB, and NBA. How do you feel about these professional athletes in different sports using their platforms to voice their concerns and problems in our society?

JD: I feel like when it comes to sports and stuff, one person that comes to mind is NBA superstar LeBron James as we know he's the best player to ever exist and he has a big platform himself. You know with him saying all this stuff I feel like him saying stuff that should've been said a long time ago, I feel like it's showing other people that we really didn't care about anything and now to start caring more. I'm glad that sports did get canceled for this because it shows people that we are serious and it was one of the greatest things that could've ever happened that sports were actually speaking up. As we know some guy in the NFL Colin Kaepernick was kneeling and lost his career just because of that, it goes to show how now everyone is trying to come together as a family to speak and I was glad they cancelled all the sports for that reason.

WG: Would you give any of these any professional athletes suggestions on the way in which they went about this structure of protesting?

JD: The only thing that would be better at least for me was if they cancelled all sports, just to show even more to everyone they are truly serious about this. As we know now in the NBA they were going to cancel the playoffs but they decided to start it back up, if they had cancelled playoffs it would have been a lot better.

WG: In the NBA the tv viewership has gone down extremely low, it's been the lowest ever including the NBA finals do you think that has to do with COVID-19 or the actions the NBA took to protest against the social and racial injustices?

JD: I'm gonna say both but I'm going to lean more towards the COVID-19 side because with COVID-19 even though we were getting a lot of money, but recently stopped a lot of people were losing their homes and couldn't watch the game. There are people that don't agree with the Black Lives Matter movement and they like sports so they probably stopped because of that. Though I lean more towards the COVID-19 side because a lot of families were not receiving money and had to cut off their cable just for them to survive in their household.

WG: What have you seen your peers doing that inspires you during the Black Lives Matter Movement?

JD: Well when it comes to friends and all that stuff what I like that my friends did was they bought a lot of Black Lives Matter shirts, masks and stuff like that. I feel like it's a good way to show that they support the movement, attempting to get stronger and stronger everyday, so that's one of the greatest things I'm seeing from my friends.

WG: How do you feel about the cops response to the protest in the beginning of May, 2020?

JD: At first I wasn't happy about it because there were certain cops that were saying this is ridiculous people shouldn't be doing this, you know I thought it was just ridiculous. The cops should have been on their side protesting, even though it might have meant them getting fired but it would be for a better cause. I never liked their response. The only thing I could agree with the cops was with the protesters breaking things, which was unnecessary. I think they could have

dealt with the protest in a different way, but life happens you can't go back in the future and change something.

WG: How do you feel about the local and national governments response to these protests?

JD: With their response you know at first it was BS, as time kept going and going I guess it got better, but at the same time it's still the same response every single day. You know I want to see a better response every single day when it comes to these movements but I guess we have to wait until more people speak up and more actions happen.

WG: How would you like to see this movement finally be resolved ?

JD: I want to see this movement resolved just knowing that we should all be equal, black folks should be treated the same way white folks get treated. I just hope we can come in term, for example, like those who killed Breonna Taylor he should be in jail forever. I would just say I would like everyone to come to an agreement where it says we are all equal, treated the same way but at the same time I went to see proof.

WG: How have the uprisings across the country shifted how you think about your ethnic identity and your place in US society?

JD: Since I'm Spanish you know and I'm afraid to run at night time, trying to cross the street or anything because with a hoodie anything can happen, you can get stopped by a cop. There's times when I go play ball with my friends. We sit down and the cops would come, come and stop us thinking we're doing drugs even though you're hanging out with friends trying to hoop. In the nighttime I used to go run to delis and stuff and buy myself sandwiches with my hoodie on and I got stopped by a cop because he thought I was selling drugs.

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

JD: When I was 12 or 11 I was playing basketball by myself and this kid had the skin tone and he was throwing water balloons at someone. As he ran away the cops stopped me and said oh you were throwing water balloons, and I said oh that wasn't me he said to me you guys look alike so they were gonna blame it on me. They said if they heard more about throwing water balloons at people they would come to my house and arrest me and apparently had to serve 5-10 years in jail, and arrest everyone in my household. I was a little kid and I was scared, because I know I didn't do anything but I was still getting blamed for it. It was one of the scariest things because I couldn't say anything they kept telling me to say yes or no. If not they would put me in the backseat. I was just 12 trying to hoop at the court, just encountering that moment that day was scary.

WG: Were you in at all in digital or in person activism in the last six months?

JD: Yes digital because one occurrence during the protesting me, family and friends all gathered in a ZOOM call one time. We were just talking about how we felt and coming up with ideas we would do at home to make the movement even bigger. We accomplished a lot in the ZOOM call, the next day my family were making videos on the movement on social media, so I was glad certain family members and friends on social media were doing something to spread awareness with their platforms with their followers sharing for other people to see we are serious about this and really wanna see change.

WG: How have the protests in the context of Coronavirus shift the way you think of race in America?

JD: When it comes to race it's just like how I said we'll never be equal. It's one of the worst things that could happen, you get accused of anything because of your skin tone. So I feel like when it comes to America keep calm and continue walking because anything can happen to you in America.

WG: How have the last few months changed, how do you think about police and racism in the United States?

JD: As I was getting older I started realizing that police officers are one of the worst things that can happen in the world. Them killing people, them doing anything to certain skin toned colored people. When it comes to white people though, like a specific school shooter he didn't get killed by having someone's knee on his neck, he was escorted back to the car and went to die. But there's people dying trying to get a soda who end up shot and killed.

WG: Did you learn more the history of racism in the country since protest have started

JD: Oh yes I learned way more, because it was something that was happening in the world so I wanted to learn more about it. I learned that no matter what in this world if you're a black person you'll never get the same treatment as other people will. You know I started to realize now I thought we was all equal, I was living under a rock. Now I know if your black you're not equal, when I mean other people I mean white folks. You'll get talked bad upon you'll never get the same opportunities that white people get since your black.

WG: Jeremy De La Cruz I want to thank you for giving me the permission to help record this interview and having you here answer these questions and giving me your thoughts about the currents events of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movements and protests.

JD: It's been a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

WG: Thank You.