

Transcript of Interview with Brianna Tong by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Brianna Tong

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 05/10/2022

Location (Interviewee): Baltimore, Maryland

Location (Interviewer):

Some of the things we discussed include:

Humor in the early stages of the pandemic and developing a fear for the safety of others; empathy. The journey from vaccine apprehensions to getting the first shot of the vaccine, household and coworkers doing the same; the importance of vaccine access for Black and Latinx communities; resisting the narrative that all rural people and Black people are anti-vaccine. White supremacy, the murder of Black people by police, the mainstreaming of “defunding the police” activism. Difficulties getting out of bed and noticing new behaviours; taking up new activities: stick-and-poke tattoos, embroidery, cooking elaborate meals. Therapy. Pre-pandemic life: going to queer parties, busy with rehearsal. What community support means for health, the harms of for-profit healthcare, growing up with access to good health care coverage and racism and sexism in the healthcare system, ableism, fatphobia, and the crises of inaccessible healthy food, lack of parental leave, pollution. Working in the public library system: working remote for the first two months, reduced libraries services upon reopening, prophylactic supplies and cleaning regimes, the importance that libraries serve in communities (access to internet, printing, and books), enforcing mask mandates, shifting to online programming. How the return to work at the library normalized being inside indoor spaces when it is still unsafe. Doing outside live music. Looting as purposeful resistance to corporation. Union of Musicians and Allied Workers protests against Spotify. Biden’s failure to get the \$15 minimum wage. Murders tied to racism, sexism, sexworkers, anti-Asian violence that was committed the day before the interview. The expectation that lots of art and reflection will come out of this experience, wanting solutions from the humanities and social sciences, the importance of preserving stories of people ignored by media.

Kit Heintzman 0:01

Hello.

Brianna Tong 0:03

Hi

Kit Heintzman 0:04

Would you please start by telling me your name, the date, the time and your location?

Brianna Tong 0:09

Sure. So my name is Brianna Tong. I am. Let's see, it's 11:10am. It's March 18 2021. And I'm in Chicago, Illinois.

Kit Heintzman 0:22

And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded and publicly released under a Creative Commons license, Attribution Noncommercial sharealike?

Brianna Tong 0:32

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 0:34

Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this? What might you want them to know about you and the position that you're speaking from?

Brianna Tong 0:42

Sure, um, I am sitting in my bed right now, as I've done for a lot of this quarantine. I am. So I'm in your regular size. And I guess still now I'm in three bands. And I also work at the library, like the Public Library. So I've been working there in person since I guess we came back to work in May. And I was contacted about this interview through my band, bussy queen power trip, which is a black queer punk band with three people, no guitars, so my close friends and then I'm in two other bands. One is called giraffe and one is called Cordoba. And one person each from bussy queen is in each of those bands. Um, haven't played a show in forever. And see what else have I been doing in quarantine? I guess I can give a little about what I look like you're and like, I'm like, I'm, I'm, I'm a woman. I'm 26. Almost 27 I guess. I'm black and Asian. I'm kind of short. And yeah, during this pandemic I've been. Yeah, in general, super lucky to have a job still and a great living situation. And I met my partner right before the pandemic. So we've been chilling a lot. And that's been amazing. She is so great. And, yeah, just going to work and working on all types of things in my home and sometimes having the energy to do a bunch of music and crafts and other art things and sometimes lying in bed for a full day. That's pretty much it.

Kit Heintzman 2:52

Would you tell me what the word pandemic means to you?

Brianna Tong 2:55

Yeah, it's, um, I guess it is what I use it to describe, I guess the past year we've been having. I'm used to I guess I used to just say quarantine and then we weren't released. Quarantining for real anymore. But yeah, just, I guess this wild time where COVID is, like, pretty uncontrolled, that we have been living through for the first time in most of our lifetimes this year.

Kit Heintzman 3:33

I'm curious in the extent to which you're comfortable sharing what have been some of your relationships with health and healthcare infrastructure prior to the pandemic?

Brianna Tong 3:43

Yeah, um, I mean, I was lucky to grow up with healthcare and like deep like good health care in general, I think I was definitely by the time I like went to go to the doctor on my own, like, as a more grown person I like quickly started to realize that they just will charge you for like any little things. So I think stopped going to the doctor. Or, like, didn't choose to go to the doctor for a lot of things. And now, I don't know during this pandemic, I was also lucky enough to like stay on my parents health care until I was 26. So I like just started buying my own healthcare during this pandemic, and that's been, um, kind of a mess. Like going through the Marketplace. I didn't even use the healthcare for like, up till very recently, because we were just inside and I was like, I'm not trying to go to the doctor right now. And thankfully, I didn't have any major health problems. But then the last day was like a mess. The insurance was tweaking. Um, but But yeah, I I don't know. And I think I just want on my um, I don't know, I think I've just seen a lot during this pandemic, with, I guess, people that I've known and people that I guess my loved ones are close to how just I think I've seen a lot of black women receive just bad care in the medical system. And I think that's something that I think my mom tried to like, warn me about, I guess or like always told me like, you need to advocate for yourself at the doctor and that's something that I hear from a lot of my friends. But I think during this pandemic, I just really saw in some cases how that happened. And it's like literally cost people their life. So that's been very frustrating to see and upsetting. But yeah, I don't know. I think I just

it's clear that our healthcare system is like a disaster and like it never should have been run for profit, but I haven't even experienced the worst of that. I guess. So. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 6:08

Staying in the pre pandemic timeframe, what was your day to day looking like before? March 2020?

Brianna Tong 6:15

Yeah, um, so day to day so I just actually I was working part time for I guess maybe six six ish months before the pandemic so I was going to work like every other day and then I was playing a lot of shows so usually if it was like the weekend I would be maybe going to work and then getting off and like getting ready to go to the show and then being there all night and seeing all the homies and if I was like if I wasn't playing it I was probably like going to someone else's show and then on a weekday I might like have rehearsal I like used to have this job that was like very I worked like a lot feels like a lot of hours and then like stopped that job went my current job my roommates were like you are still barely at home so I was truly out and about mostly yeah being it shows but also I guess occasionally doing stuff outside the house there was a shows going on friends places going a little little events in the city. I'm going to go into queer parties where I didn't I didn't even have anyone to avoid yet at the party just you know living life like we thought we could

Kit Heintzman 7:51

and what are some of the ways that you had to adapt that day to day living?

Brianna Tong 7:55

Yeah, um, so I think just like not being able to see people the same way and play shows the same way is probably the biggest change. Um, I guess so I was also super lucky that my job like let us stay home for about probably the first two months of the pandemic and like paid us so I was like, very blessed. Um, so that was like, very different and I think at the beginning of that I had like a lot of energy and was like wow, I'm gonna do all the things I didn't have time for and learn new skills and I started like, doing like, sticking poke tattoos and I was like embroidering i was i was truly exploring new things. And then we had to go back to work and that's that I guess was like a whole adjustment to because I didn't start my job that that far be before the pandemic. But it was still like a big adjust like we couldn't do any programs. We had to like yell at you all the time we still do about putting their mask on and like not let as many people in the building and they can't use the resources we have the same way so that's been an adjustment overall just at work and just even be like cautious of my co workers or like, just having to stay away from people and constantly be thinking about Okay, like, we could get COVID today and like so many people at other branches have so let's we're just constantly aware of that. But I guess otherwise Yeah, it's I've just had so much more time to sit in my home, which in some ways is nice and in some ways I think it does make me be like wow, I don't know if I can go back to the same schedule I had before. But in some ways it's like sometimes I really will lie in bed for a full day. like am I tired that I need this? Am I depressed? Am I just lazy like I've just what is there to do though I don't know, what else would I do instead of lying in my bed all of my day on my day off. So that's probably been the biggest changes. Any, I just not seeing different people very much fortunately, like a bunch of people I used to see at shows all the time or just out and about, I just don't see anymore haven't seen for like a year. So that's been different to just only interact with, I guess, like a really small amount of people regularly.

Kit Heintzman 10:37

I'd like to follow up and ask what when you're working in a library and having to address clients around proper mask use? Would you be willing to say a bit about what those interactions are like?

Brianna Tong 10:49

Yeah, um, it's appears most people are willing to pull their masks up. So I think the problem of most people is either, they came in with no mask. So we're like, could you put a mask on, and we have masks, like offer them. So those people are usually cool. And they're like, oh, sorry, I forgot. Sometimes they're like, a little aggressive and are like I'm putting it on, like, okay, I don't know why you walk into a public place that's inside with no mask, but okay. And then the other people are people who came in with it on and then took it off for some reason. And those people, it is a mixed bag, I think most people have been willing to just be like, Oh, sorry, let me pull it up. A lot of people do not wear their masks over their nose. And that, I feel like I just have given up somewhat on that. So I'm like, if you, if I already told you once, and you don't still have it on, I don't know what to tell you. Um, and then some people will get aggressive with us. Over the mat. In the beginning, we had someone who was like, he told us he had asthma. And that's why he wouldn't pull his mask up over his nose. And we had to, like ask him to leave. And he was like one of our regular patrons. I was just like, Why are you fighting over this, like you were so close? I don't think we've had to. There. So I'm not even there every day. So I think some stuff may happen on the days I'm not there. But I think most recently, we had to ask someone to leave because it was super hot in the branch, because we can't control our own heat. But she was really upset, she had to wear her mask, even though it was really hot. And I was like I understand it is kind of hard to breathe, but we all have to be in here. And none of us are trying to catch this disease. So will you please and she got like, very aggressive and we asked her to leave. So it's a mix, you don't always know what you're gonna get. I think we've been lucky and mostly have people be responsive and just like, be like, okay, and move on with it. But some people do get aggressive or they're like, Oh, I already I was about to or just are aggressive for other reasons. But I think similarly to I don't know, we also would before COVID we had people come in and get aggressive with us for enforcing, I guess library policies, for whatever reason so it wasn't super different. It was just like a different cause.

Kit Heintzman 13:22

So you had mentioned that the shows have stopped when the library reopened Could you talk a little bit about the different kinds of value you think the shows and the libraries present and how you feel about different kinds of opening for different spaces?

Brianna Tong 13:37

Yeah, so So I think one thing so I was when I first found out I had to go back to work I think they told us probably about a week or 10 days in advance. So that was nice, we got some notice. Um, and I was like upset at first and I was like, okay, clearly I'm gonna have to go back to work. So I can have a job. So let me deal with it. And when we open I mean our branch is smaller so we got kind of adequate equipment. They gave us enough shields between us and the public. They gave us they don't really they didn't really give us masks but they gave us a disposable masks. There was like some face shields that I think another branch sent that so it wasn't like we didn't have enough stuff like that was enough hand sanitizer and stuff. Other branches were not getting adequate supplies. So I already saw that as a problem. And it was also it was I think we we went back in on May 20. Um, and it was I guess it was surprising to me at the time because we didn't open to the public until I think the first week of June, but still I was like this is not over. And libraries are so um, they welcome everyone which is great in normal times but in a pandemic is so like libraries are just germy. People are all touching the same things. They. So that was interesting. And I think I realized later that I think we're one of the only library systems in the country that's open to the public for them to like, come in and stuff. And I understand why they did it. Because I do see like, libraries are providing a lot of resources, people can't get other places. So we have computers, and people come in and use the computers and print and scan and make copies all the time. We have books that people might just need for fun, but also money for school, or their kids or something, we have just a space that's inside. For people who sit, even though they can only be there for an hour, right now, we just like have a lot of things that people might not have somewhere else. Um, so I do understand why they want I guess why the mayor wanted to open them. At the same time, I've been seeing other library systems and other places have come up with some solutions to those things that didn't involve like sending patrons

inside. And we have so we all have capacity limits. But ours is like 12, which is fine, but like we don't reach it super often. But I'm in a bigger branch, it would be like more people. So I think it is kind of like I and then for a minute, like there was so many cases at libraries, like so many libraries, and they weren't closing the library. Every time someone had a case, they would ask them, they would kind of do contract tracing, but I don't think it was very good. Because a lot of times like our break rooms aren't very big. And they just weren't closing branches or one person had a case. And I was like, I know all y'all like been near this person. So y'all should just shut down. And they weren't doing that. And so there was, I think there's been they haven't told us the numbers recently, but I'm sure there's been over like 80 or 90 cases throughout the system. And I think he's only like 1000 people that work in the whole library. And they tried to tell us all this is one of the city departments with the lowest percentage of cases. So y'all are good. Like, oh, what, but I do think, I mean shows, I do think provide a lot of value to people's lives, whether it's the musicians or the people coming. Or I suppose the venue owners if there's a venue owner, but the and I do so we had, I don't know, I guess shows are usually inside to do this. And I I get that they're not providing like a vital resource on my need. Like they're not helping people file for unemployment. They're not helping people do their taxes. Um, but um, yeah, I guess I see a lot of value. So we've been doing a lot of library programs online. And a lot of those programs are kind of like, there's all types of programs. There's like community resources that there's also like artistic stuff. And I think those have been really well attended. And I think that just shows, like how much people still want to have, like art and creativity in their lives in this time. And I also think, like we did some outside shows over summer, which were like, amazing, it just felt so good to be able to like play safely and like, play live music for people again.

Kit Heintzman 18:41

I think you may have cut out for a second. Yeah, I can't hear you. Oh, wait, there you are.

Brianna Tong 19:01

Am I back?

Kit Heintzman 19:02

You're back. Um, I didn't hear anything after you were discussing the library programming around arts that have been received pretty well.

Brianna Tong 19:13

Oh, okay. Sorry about that.

Kit Heintzman 19:16

Not your fault.

Brianna Tong 19:19

Um, yeah, so Yeah, and I think we had some live shows over summer, which are like amazing and just like such a just felt so good for me. And then also going to like, see shows was super fun. But yeah, I think it was just interesting how we, I guess a lot of places open too soon. And, thankfully, we had our branch like we were very strict about the rules, and I guess, careful and just lucky that we didn't have any cases at our branch. But it really did seem like I understand libraries are providing a vital service. I feel lucky to still have a job, but I wish I would have like, tried a little harder to make it safer to come back. So all these people didn't have to go to work and be exposed to or catch COVID. And all these people don't have to come into the building and like, also be exposed or catch COVID. So especially when a lot of other cities across the country have clearly figuree something else out.

Kit Heintzman 20:25

I'd be interested in hearing what you remember about first hearing about COVID-19

Brianna Tong 20:32

Oh my god, yes. Oh, oh, this is this is not cute now. But I think when I first heard about it, I was in a I don't know, I think I was just, like, joking mood about it. Because we didn't know how serious it was. And we were like, I remember being at a show and being like, someone lick my mouth. Let's, let's.

Brianna Tong 21:01

Um, so that was, you know, it was so fun before we knew what it was gonna be like. And I guess just Yeah, like, how deadly and contagious it was. Um, yeah, I think when we first heard about, we just didn't know anything for real. And it was, I don't know if murder Hornets was like, at the same time, but there was just like, a bunch of like, weird shit like going on in the world. And we were like, what a disaster like, we've already lived through so much mess. Like, here's one more thing. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 21:38

And how did that reaction come to change over time?

Brianna Tong 21:41

Yeah, so I think that pretty quickly, when we realized, or I guess, yeah, when I saw like, people were just is very contagious, a lot of people are getting it. And then a lot of people are just dying. And it was like, very painful to like, even have it, let alone like have very severely. That definitely turned into like, fear. And like, I guess sadness, and also anger for just how it was being handled, I think it became clear really quickly that like, they were not handling it very well, like we can see that across the country, obviously was a stream at first that we didn't expect, but I think after you know, a month or two are like, okay, like, they're not giving anyone money. Unemployment is providing a lot of problems for people to get on to, like, our healthcare system was already terrible. So it's not like people still don't have insurance and are getting COVID. They just couldn't be doing more. And obviously it was it was trump in office at the time, too. And like he was just not, he's not doing anything good about this disease. So yeah, so I think I pretty quickly changed to like, one still being really afraid of it at first, because we didn't even know how it spread that much. And I was just like, yeah, if I had to leave my house, I'm not I will go to the store, like every two weeks for like one very quick trip. And that's kind of it. And just fear for for people around me like being exposed and just feeling for people who still have to go to work in the public. And yeah, just I think that quickly turned into like, being upset at how it was being handled everywhere.

Kit Heintzman 23:33

You had mentioned the murder Hornets earlier 2020 was a pretty full year, as 2021 is shaping up to be. I'm wondering what, in addition to and perhaps intersecting with COVID-19 What have been some of the biggest issues on your mind over the last year and some change?

Brianna Tong 23:55

Yeah, um, I mean, I think a huge part of 2020 was, um, well, I guess first like, all of the police murders and just like black people who lost their lives because of white supremacy, which obviously happens all the time, but was like very, I think really blew me in a pandemic and how we were like, how are we supposed to all be inside and Police are still out here shooting black people, like how is this happening? And then I think I got so I used my like job before I came to the library, I was a community organizer. And I was like extreme like I don't I guess I was just like constantly being involved with stuff. Like just with organizing efforts, and then step back a little bit, but I think got a lot more into organizing and just going to our protests during 2020 and they look so different. From what I had seen before, I guess I think I was I was joining new title organizations, but also seeing, I guess, a much more much more, in my opinion, radical and maybe more also anarchy as lead form of protests. Um, and I guess but and I guess led and like community led and just like, related to what people needed in the moment. Um, like, I think there was no other point in life where I saw Okay, the police are like shooting us and we're actually going

to like fuck with the corporations they caught like that are really buying this, like creating the system by fucking looting their shit. Like, I'd never seen that before. So that was Yeah, that was just big. And that was something I thought about a lot during 2022. So I think that was kind of the biggest things for me it was like the COVID. And then also, both, how is it possible that even during COVID, we are having like, like, such, just awful things still happen to black people in the hands of like police and white supremacists out on the streets, but also like I'm seeing a type of protests and even a type of asked I think this is it's obviously been watered down since but like people saying defund the police was I think something. I was talking with some friends about, like, we used to say and seem so far fetched when we said there and now it's like a rallying cry around the country. And people are saying at least they'll defund their police departments in some way. So I think, yeah, seeing a lot of tragedy that was painful and just real upsetting to hear about a witness, but also seeing a type of protest I've never seen before, kind of a response to the all the things that were happening.

Kit Heintzman 27:11

I'm curious, what does the word health mean to you?

Brianna Tong 27:16

Yeah, hmm. That's a good question. Um, I think in some ways, just like how, yeah, like, how well is your body and mind doing like, is it doing the things? Are they doing the things you need them to do? I think in some ways health like really involves the community, like just the place you're in the community you're in, is that community healthy? Is that place healthy? I guess it it has elements of like being supported in it. Like whether that's supported by resources in your community supported by people around you supported by having access to the type of things you need to keep your body and mind healthy. Mmm hmm. Yeah, there's so much I'm trying I think there's like, I guess I guess as a able bodied person, I don't want to be like health is like when your body like works perfectly all the time. But also, I don't I don't know. Like, I think there's there's a lot of connections between like health and disability. And I think, I don't know, like, a lot of times people will be like, oh, fat people aren't healthy. And that's obviously just not true. And that's like something our society's made up. So I think there's a lot of, there's a lot of ideas we have about health that aren't necessarily really about health. But yeah, I do think health probably feels like is your are your body and mind getting what they need?

Kit Heintzman 29:05

What are some of the changes that you think might bring us as a culture to that version of health or helped more people realize it?

Brianna Tong 29:15

Hmm. Oh, there are so many. I mean, I think one is just having. So obviously, healthcare just should be free and easily accessible for everyone. But then I think we do get to the problem of like, even if it's free, and we still have the same doctors that are like, very fat phobic like racist or like just playing out kind of racist notions in a racist system like sexist, not super, like clear, affirming, like, as long as we saw the same people in the whole healthcare system, and the only difference is it's free. I don't think that's everything. I think there's also like a huge need for like, want like one more places to get health care and communities that don't don't have that. And then also just like people giving you the health care who are just meeting your needs better, like a lot better. So I think that's one thing but then I think there's so many other aspects to it is like, everyone get, like being able to have healthy food they can like afford and like everyone like being able to have jobs that don't put their lives are in danger every day, or having the ability to take a sick day from work. Or like having time to safely like have a pregnancy and have a baby and like, bond with your baby after and like take care of the baby. So I think there's so many things like not being I think we've just seen how like stress can be both like mental like can affect your mental and your physical health. Like just taking away so many of the situations that are causing people so much stress that they are developing like health issues, and then also taking away so many of the situations or

like literally giving people health issues like pollution or like less lack of health care. or violence, like any type of violence, just like so many different things that are that are unnecessarily harming people that that we just don't have to deal with. Like, I think there's some level of like, things will always hurt us, like so does your trip and fall. But like there's just so many things in our society that are like, really harming and killing people that we just don't have to have.

Kit Heintzman 32:02

Following up, would you tell me what safety means to you?

Brianna Tong 32:06

Mm hmm. Um, yeah, I think that's another word, I guess I thought about a lot in 2020. And I think also word that I think has been I don't know if it's been, like, claimed or like taken over. But I think a lot of our ideas of safety are our policing and like, police state or like, have to do with prisons and the prison industrial complex. But I think Yeah, like, what, I think safety to me, yeah. It's related I guess to health in like people having strong communities, people not feeling fear from their own communities, people not feeling fear from institutions in their own communities. people having the support they need people feeling safe enough to that there, if there is a problem they like are able to, to, like resolve it in the way that they need. Yeah, just, I guess, a lack of a lack of fear, a lack of or a lack of like, yeah, constant and constant fear about things that people shouldn't have to be afraid about. And a feeling of real community and connection, I think, a feeling of trust, I guess.

Kit Heintzman 33:38

So safety's had a very specific narrative within a sort of dominant COVID discourse for a moment. And under that, perhaps reductive idea, how have you been determining what's safe for you? And how have you been negotiating that with people around you?

Brianna Tong 33:58

Hmm,

that is true. I think my my, my idea of safety during COVID has changed a lot over time. Like, I think, after I went back to work, I think at some point, I was like, Well, if I have to be in here, I don't care that much about going in any store. Cuz it's the same thing basically, when before I think I'd be like, Oh, I'm not going anywhere except like the grocery store like the drugstore. And I think also, I would, I don't know, we were just like, I think as we've evolved like our understanding of COVID safety too like we used to, like really disinfect all our groceries. So we just started like we don't, I don't think it's spreading like that that much. I think you just put the groceries in the fridge at this point. And even now with the vaccine, I was like, lucky enough to get it I guess first or my neighborhood and then my job are offering it about a week, a week and a half ago. So I think that's kind of been changing. I guess what I'm about to feel like is safe. But yeah, I think I both feel like I was talking to a lot of people who kept working from home the whole time or just kept being at home. I think I felt less afraid and more safe going out to do maybe things like going to the store or like, going somewhere to pick up my takeout or I don't know, doing stuff like that. Then I had before, but then I think also, like, I still don't feel safe like eating in a restaurant. I also think it's super wack that no one who works in restaurants can access the vaccine yet. Just very weird to me. But so I think that's it's jarring to see other people being like, Oh, that's, that's safe now. Like, I don't think so. Um, and then, yeah, it was also I think during the protest, it was really interesting. to negotiate, like, I guess we can be outside in large numbers, if we at least I'll have a mask on and stay kind of far apart. And it seems more important, right now to like, I guess, don't like do take action for like longer term safety, um, than the end, like, just take as many COVID precautions as we can to, like, stay inside and just like, say that this shit is okay, that was happening. So that was also interesting. But yeah, I think my, I think the more that I had to just be exposed at work, to, or just yeah, be closer to people do whatever in work, I was like, Okay, I guess I can go in other places that are like my

work, and also just be in there safely. Because I'm clearly already at that risk level. So I'm not gonna not go to like the beauty suppliers or something

Kit Heintzman 37:12

How are you feeling these days about the immediate future?

Brianna Tong 37:15

Oh, um, I don't know. In some ways, I'm excited. I was like, I'm waiting to get my stimi I'm excited about that. Um, I am really glad that so at least in Chicago, I feel like the vaccine is getting more and more available. Um, at this point, my whole household has had our first shot, all my co workers have had their first shot. Yeah, like my partner, and one of her roommates has their first shot. So that's like, very hopeful for me. So at least like I think we we just won't have to worry about like, spreading and getting COVID that much in the near near future, which is super exciting. I think it still feels a little unclear to me, like what else will be possible. And I think over the last year, it was like, so hard to have long term goals for anything that I don't think I'm really like, out of that yet. I think it's really hard to think about, like, long term goals. But I guess for my immediate future, I feel a little more hopeful than I did. Maybe like half a year ago, I think for the for the world. I mean, just yesterday, we just saw another instance of like, white supremacist violence basically and like against women, and like working class women, too. And that's just, I don't know, that was his real, depressing, obviously. And like, I think made me think about like, worrying for my Asian family in a way that I hadn't really been thinking about this this whole time. So I was just upset. So I think for the whole world, and like, obviously, Joe Biden is like, better than Trump, but he's not doing great. And he's not doing all the things he even promised he would do. We can barely get a \$15 amount, like we're not getting a \$15 minimum wage, which at this point just doesn't even seem very high to me. So that's, I guess, looking a little more bleak to me.

Kit Heintzman 39:34

I know you had talked about the sort of difficulty of seeing into the long term future when it comes to goal making. I'm wondering if there are any sort of hopes about the long term future even if they're broader than kind of individual accomplishments?

Brianna Tong 39:52

Yeah, um, I mean, I really do hope that having lived Through this pandemic and everything in 2020 that we will make some like drastic changes to our systems that we saw were not working like I think the biggest of which were like people just receiving basically shift nothing during a pandemic to help with living and also the state of healthcare and the state of like policing I hope that this time brings those changes I think it's at this point I feel like I don't even know what it's gonna take because I just feel like we've lived through so much bullshit and people have already suffered so much and not enough has changed so I'm like I don't know what else it is going to take but I do hope for that I do hope a lot more people are seeing there's like no possible way we can go back to what we used to have and I guess yeah, I don't know I just want the vaccine I'm hoping that we can also play shows again and I think the musician community is getting like a lot of people were really active last summer in the protests and there's Chicago like the union... union of musicians and allied workers just had this cool actions against Spotify like paying artists like point o-o three cents a stream under this like nationwide set of actions and that was really dope so I think just like seeing musicians and music workers getting more active is like very helpful to me. But yeah, I don't know. I guess I can only hope for some large changes because

Kit Heintzman 41:54

You had mentioned that you'd you've all had your first shot of the vaccine I just wanted to create a little space for you to say anything you wanted about that experience.

Brianna Tong 42:05

Yeah, um I think I definitely want on a journey from not trusting the vaccine to wanting the vaccine when I got it, it was um, I guess my only side effects thankfully were like a sore arm and like fatigue so I didn't really feel sick or anything. It was like super painless like literally getting the shot and so they they're doing this program in Chicago for basically neighborhoods that got hit really hard by COVID which were really mostly if not all like black and Latino neighborhoods to get the to get shots with like frontline essential workers and like people over 65 so that was really great that they're doing that after a long time of I don't know I have a lot of beef with our mayor as well but at least we did this so so yeah, so I was just I'm glad to get it I encourage everyone to get it some like one of my co workers was like super skeptical and she just got hers yesterday I'm like so excited and it just seems like with the way COVID rates are going it really does seem like the vaccine is stopping spread and like stopping people from like getting it so severely so that's everyone if you can or when it's your time. Go get your shot. I don't know who's gonna listen to this or when but I don't know it was great. I'm excited. I can't wait for my second one.

Kit Heintzman 43:43

May I ask what some of the things you've been doing to take care of yourself over the last year have been

Brianna Tong 43:51

Yeah, umm hmm. I have been cooking a lot more and I think making I don't know, I guess I realized that I enjoy kind of like making elaborate meals for no reason. So I feel like I've been eating really good food that I've been making. Um, that's been nice and just yeah, I guess. Trying to make Oh, I don't know I'm trying to make healthy food I try to eat vegetables. So that's been good. What else have I been doing? I am also lucky enough to have been going to therapy. Which is great and I think has just been a big support during this year and has also helped me I don't know I think just helped me be more able to support other people as well. I've been trying to stay connected with people I was like zooming a lot of people we are all home I still like zoom some friends every Sunday. I see my girlfriend. A lot Yeah, so And yeah, seeing friends outside, it's just starting to get warm enough to see people outside. So I, like saw some friends recently over a bonfire. And it was nice. So yeah, I think it's been about, I guess, keeping connections, and then also just try to like, I guess, maintain my sense of well being.

Kit Heintzman 45:28

I at the penultimate question, and it might sound a little weird. So we know we're in this moment of a vast amount of biomedical and scientific research. I'm wondering what you think people in the humanities and the social sciences could be doing right now, to help us understand this moment?

Brianna Tong 45:51

Well, it's so interesting, umm, cool. Um, I'm trying to think about this, cuz I'm like, I guess when you say that, I guess I think of like, academics, but it's obviously like, not all academics. I do think, I think it is just so important to look at how existing social problems became worse during COVID. And I think that's a job for, like, social sciences, for sure. And probably also humanities. I think, um, yeah, like this is, this moment is just obviously impacted, everyone's life lived through this. So I think there will be a lot of art, and a lot of maybe reflection on this. And I think that's so important. And, I mean, if we need to, like, if reflection helps us get through shit in our own lives, like it, hopefully will help us process this as well. Um, what else is there? Um, yeah, I just think there's a lot of a lot of work on like, there, there were so many, I don't know, just so many ways that that this pandemic kind of like opened up. And let us see a lot of problems in society that maybe people weren't seeing as much before. So I think that's a lot of the work that humanities and social science can help us see and just like, deal with, and maybe also, like, put out some solutions that we can, that we know we need because of what we just lived through.

Kit Heintzman 47:48

And this is my last question. So this is an oral history interview. And as a historian, I carry some of the assumptions of my own time in history, by which I mean sort of codes of how one writes history and my

discipline. And one of those is that what my historical actors believe, I believe matters, deeply matters to me, as well. So I'd like you to tell historians of the future, what kinds of stories you want to be sure don't get forgotten about this moment.

Brianna Tong 48:29

I mean, yeah, I guess I would always say the stories of the people people's stories that don't get told a lot in the media of our time. Like, I'm... that- that's, that's so many people, I think. But I think there is a lot of people whose whose experience of COVID whether it was like being homeless, being like incarcerated, being already disabled, I had like a disabled friend who was like, y'all are really understanding what it's like to live, how I do every day, being inside and not able to do very much. Just like a lot of the perspectives of people who you're not seeing their stories, other places. And stories of... stories, I guess, that are going against like, narratives like black people don't want the vaccine, or narratives like I don't know, like everyone in rural communities believes COVID is fake, just stuff that we know is true in our minds and from our experiences, but that the media hasn't been great at like giving us so that's the type of stuff that I hope gets lifted up from these times.

Kit Heintzman 49:52

I want to thank you so very much for everything that you shared with me and whoever ends up listening to this later. Today and at this point, I just like to invite you if there's anything that you want to say about COVID-19 2020 2021 More generally, here's the space for you to do so.

Brianna Tong 50:14

Yeah, all I can say is I truly hope each... we like to use the lessons that we have learned from living through this mess and I hope we are all I hope we can all use them to make the next year's so much better for everyone. So that is really it.

Kit Heintzman 50:36

Thank you so much.

Brianna Tong 50:37

Thanks