Interviewee: Janette Greenwood
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Date: April 27, 2017
Place: Clark University
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Abstract: Janette Greenwood was born in the mountains of western Pennsylvania into a working-class home. Janette and her family were a part of a Baptist faith that played a big role in her life and her career. Janette was given the opportunity to attend Kenyon College in Ohio on scholarship after finishing her schooling at a vocational high school nearby. After Janette finished her undergraduate degree she went to the University of Wisconsin to get her master's before taking eight years off. During these eight years Janette got married, started a family, and began teaching. Throughout this time, she had many different experiences that she discusses in this interview that motivated her to get her doctorate in history and write a dissertation that would later be published into a book, *Fruits of Freedom*, on the migration of former slaves to Worcester. Janette moved to Worcester in 1991 when she received a job at Clark University. Throughout this interview Janette discusses her activism in Worcester and the experiences that shaped her consciousness and her work, especially her work with the Bullard exhibit at the Worcester Art Museum, "Rediscovering an American Community of Color, Photographs by William Bullard."

AP: Do you want to still start with it?

LS: Yeah!

AP: Okay yeah, awesome. Lauren will be mostly asking the questions and then I will just pop in but we know that you're super busy. We also kind of have class at two, so it will just be a forty-five, fifty-minute interview if that is good for you.

JG: That's fine, good with me

AP: Yeah, again thank you so much

LS: So just to start you can tell us a little bit about your upbringing, your family life, your neighborhood, your schooling.

JG: Yeah, okay. I grew up in western Pennsylvania near Johnstown Pennsylvania, in the mountains of Western Pennsylvania and I grew up in a family, in a Baptist faith. Basically Mennonite background, church of the brethren background. Those are two very small churches, I don't know if you're familiar with them but they're sort of relating to your topic, they're churches that are considered to be historic peace churches in the United States. Which makes it possible for example for young men to actually go through conscientious objector status and to have that accepted in wartime and things like that. They are pacifist churches. So, I grew up in a very small community where those kinds of values were really emphasized. I was the first person in my family to go to college. There aren't a lot of—I think partly, in that religious tradition there is sort of a concern about, or fear in some ways of intellectual life. And that, that will draw you away from the community and that sort of thing, which of course is what it did, but it was a very good way to grow up. I was the youngest of three and I grew up on my grandparents' farm, it had been in my family for many, many years. Surrounded by family like aunts and uncles and cousins and people like that. My father, both my parents grew up on farms and then my father went to work in the steel industry when he was a young man during the Great Depression trying to make a living. Then he worked on the railroad in Johnstown, a railroad that was connected with US Steel. I guess if we talk about my class background, which again is something I didn't really think about until I went to college because I grew up among people who were just like me pretty much or kind of, you know, come from a farm background but my father also—I guess you can call us a working class or low middle-class background. I was lucky I got a scholarship to college and there was a concern in my family whether or not I should go or go away. My father, was more nervous than my mother. My mother, I think always really wanted to get an education, she didn't have the chance. Both my parents grew up during the Depression so they weren't able to get a degree because they went to work right away. My mother always really had these desires to be a teacher and I remember one time, I was actually working on an oral history project when I was in college and I spoke to someone who had been her teacher. It wasn't a history project about my mother, but this is somebody who had taught my mother and he said, "Aw, your mother would have made such a good teacher." She just never had that opportunity, so she said, "Yeah, of course. You should do this." So I was able to go to college on scholarship which was great. Then, really never knew of anybody who was a professor but I got some really wonderful advice and support from some of my college professors and they said, "You should really think about going to grad school and think about maybe being a professor." And that was like, "Really?" And so I was lucky in that respect. I felt like my background, my path was very different in many ways than my sisters who both got married out of high school and had kids right away. So I was sort of the odd one, the rebel of the family.

LS: So do you feel that even from a young age there was always an emphasis on your education? Or not so much because you and your sisters seem so different?

JG: Yeah not so much. I mean I was always interested and I always liked school a lot but, you know, in terms of, I guess sort of family it's so different from the way I even raise my own daughters or the way that most middle class believes of course you're going to need your education its really, really important. I think there was an emphasis on getting the basic education and getting a job where you could have a good source of income but there certainly wasn't much emphasis on getting an education. But I did have, in addition to my mother being supportive, my sisters were really supportive too. Again, they didn't take that track but they thought it was really nice that I had that opportunity.

LS: That's lovely, so you did have the opportunity to get a scholarship and to go to college. Where did you go to college?

JG: I went to Kenyon College in Ohio.

LS: Okay, and what was your major there?

JG: History major. I had started out in chemistry though because I had gone to a voc-tech [vocational-technical] school, which makes my background even stranger to go from a voc-tech school to a liberal arts college. I think I was the only person who probably has ever done that at Kenyon College. Much more people come from private schools and things like that. But I had gone to this voc-tech school because it had more of a challenge and they had this chem-tech program, this chemical technology program, and I was very interested in science at the time so I had done this project in high school that was part of the National Science Contest and I was actually a finalist and that's how I started getting these offers from different colleges which was very exciting. So I started, so I went to college with the intention of being a chemistry major but once I got to college I realized I didn't really like it as much and then I just, I think because I was at a liberal arts school I thought I really should take a history class. And I took it and I said, "Oh my god this is so great." I mean I always kind of liked history and I liked it mainly through hearing, talking to my grandmother mostly about how, you know, her life was like growing up and things like that and something just clicked and it was like, "Yeah, this is what I have to do." That was tough though because I think if you're the first person, you're first generation college student at this point, you're going to college because you're going to get a really good job and make all of this money and be secure, all of these things. But you know, history major didn't

quite have the ring that my parents necessarily understood. But again, I give them credit because they allowed me to make my choices. They didn't always understand my choices but they trusted me to make my choice. That is like such a great life lesson that I try, try, and maybe not always successfully but I try drawing upon good for my own kids. Like, "Okay, I don't understand what you're going to do but I am going to try to trust you and this decision." And so, I give my parents a lot of credit for that because this is all new to them and they didn't have a child that had gone to college and they didn't really understand why I would switch out of something from this really practical kind of education to something with much more kind of theoretical, and out there and, "What are you going to do with a history major kinds of questions," but they were like, "We trust you,' and I give them a lot of credit for that.

LS: That's great, do you feel that your experience in college as a woman is different or did you have any experiences that you felt that at the time because you were a woman you didn't have the same opportunities as your male peers?

JG: Yeah, that's a great question because the school I went to, Kenyon, I was in the first all co-ed freshmen class.

LS: Oh wow

JG: And they had brought women in, in this kind of haphazard way, as juniors and seniors, but they had gone a full four years so it was a huge issue on this campus and it's very all male, very macho culture there. I mean super macho culture. It's kind of like Dartmouth, it is kind of the Dartmouth of the mid-west. It is very kind of macho-man, athletic, out in the middle of nowhere. They used to bus women in for dances on weekends, it was just horrible. Fraternities ran everything, there were virtually nothing there for women and so it was interesting because when I first started there, again I was really aware of this issue because there was still professors who were making nasty comments in class. There was one English professor who—this didn't happen to me, but I heard this story that this English professor would say the most disgusting sexual innuendos in class trying to chase the women out of his English class. It was crazy, and my RA [resident advisor] my first year there was one of the first woman to actually desegregate this institution. She talked about going to the dining hall and having men throwing food at them. Like whipping rolls at them and throwing food at their heads and things like that because they did not want women there. By the time I graduated, when you looked at the commencement program it was the women, the majority of people who had honors and were apart of Phi Beta Kappa and all of those things were women. So you know, by the time I graduated things had settled down a little. It was like, "Oh, women really can do this." But it was kind of a crazy time

to be there, but it's funny because in retrospect, when I first got there, that wasn't the thing that concerned me most. In retrospect I think I was kind of oblivious to a lot of it, other than the stories that I had heard because initially my big issue was sort of the class thing. I really felt like my high school hadn't prepared me very well and again I was a first-generation student and I felt like I was around these students who were so much better prepared, who were so much smarter with so much more money and those were the things that I was really struggling with. I was like, "Am I really going to be able to hack it here," and also feeling like I didn't dress the right way, I didn't have the same clothes as they did and I didn't talk the same way. I mean there were just lots of cultural things. But it really hit me more in terms of unequal treatment as a woman when I played basketball. I didn't go out until my junior year because I was doing all of these science labs for my first two years. So I played on the team the last two years and we were given the worst possible practice time because there was one gym and the men got the gym, the men got the prime practice time, always. Like between four and six. So we would have to eat dinner and then go practice between like seven and nine or seven and ten or something like that. And then we had a terrible senior year, it was like one of the worst winters in Ohio, and pipes froze and we couldn't even use our gym and they ended up bussing us to this other nearby community college to practice. The men didn't have to do any of that stuff. Once the facilities got up and running they were allowed to have them first. So things like that...And then I thought, wait a minute, this isn't right and I always sort of felt that—I kind of came of age in the time of second wave feminism was really taking off. I remember buying the first copy of Ms. Magazine, and it had Superwoman on the front. Or Wonder Woman on the front, and I was like, "This is like reading the bible." It was just like incredible to me to read that and to think about the possibilities for women and all of this stuff. I always felt that I, something that I was turned into and something I wanted to be connected with. I didn't really feel it so much until I was on the athletic team. I was kind of lucky in college because there weren't very many women professors, but I lucked out in my first year somehow and I had two of my four classes, and these were actually year-long classes which is crazy. Two of my four professors were women so that was good so there was that kind of connection there and they were really suffering as well in this male dominated, kind of hyper testosterone place. But I think it was really I think when I played basketball to feel it at Kenyon that we aren't being treated the same way.

LS: Would you say that shaped your activism or raised your consciousness?

JG: Yeah, I would say so. I mean, I think there were a lot of things going on even when I was in high school that because it was during the Vietnam War, the war didn't really wind down until I was in my sophomore year in college. What was it? 1975. So the Vietnam war was going on and my older sister actually, even though she was not college educated she was very involved in the

anti-war movement. She was writing lots of letters to the press and being involved in local organizations and things like that. So that kind of consciousness and awareness was there. And that was also sort of connected to my religious background too which was pacifist, anti-war background. So that certainly was something that I felt was very important. I think there were lots of sort of informal things going on in college. I think there was, I'm not even sure we had a women's center then. I think they were just talking about it. We had a women's dean I think that was the one sort of concession they made to us then. There was just a lot of conversation with other women and friends. I was in a women's dorm my first year, and there were co-ed dorms, but I was in a women's dorm and there was just a lot of casual conversations. And again, I was with a lot of women my age that were deeply into thinking about feminism and what our lives should be like and how we should be treated the same and that sort of thing.

LS: And so you had the opportunity to go to graduate school?

JG: Yes, I went straight to graduate school right after I graduated from Kenyon which turned out to be kind of a mistake because I just realized once I started in a doctoral program that I was really tired of school, but I still needed to get something out of it. So, I went to the University of Wisconsin for graduate school in American history and by October I was like I really need to take a break from this. But I wanted to get something out, I wanted to leave with something so I ended up with master's from there. And then I took eight years off between that and going back to graduate school for a doctorate. So I did some teaching. I taught at a private school and I've been, I got married and we moved to North Carolina and I got involved in doing some historic preservation and things like that and curriculum development. And then came across a whole set of documentation that made me really want to go back to graduate school because I felt like I could write a really great dissertation on that. So then, it turned out my husband, we are since divorced, my then husband I guess I can call him. He was an Episcopal priest and he had started in Charlotte North Carolina and he had started an assistant and then he had gotten a job where he was in charge of his own parish. So we moved to Virginia and fortunately it was like twenty minutes from the University of Virginia so I was able to go back. I had already had my older daughter by that point so I went back to school when we moved to Virginia at the University of Virginia and got my doctorate there.

LS: Okay great, and when did you move to Worcester? And what brought you here?

JG: 1991, my job at Clark [University]! My first job out of graduate school. I finished my degree in this spring of '91 and I was lucky as it was in a slow academic job market. I was very happy to get this position in 1991. I have been here ever since.

LS: Wow, that's crazy

JG: I know, it's a long time!

LS: Did you live in Worcester?

JG: I did! I lived in Worcester for about eighteen years. Both of my daughters were raised here and then I re-married how many years ago? About ten years ago. My husband is an attorney in the state of Rhode Island so it was pretty important for us to live in the state of Rhode Island. So once my youngest daughter was through high school we then moved to Providence.

LS: Oh okay, so could you tell us some of the major events or movements that you have been a part of in Worcester?

JG: Yeah, well I think, I don't know if I have been involved, I mean certainly at the time of the of the outbreak of the war in Iraq in 2003. I was involved in some of the protest movements here that I think there were some organized by some people, I think these were actually, I am trying to remember… I think they were mainly inter-faith types of organizations. We were protesting down in Lincoln Square every night anticipating the war breaking out in March of 2003. And then it broke out and our argument of course was that this was not the way to go about solving this terrorist problem. Nobody listened to us unfortunately. We are still involved in these places. I was involved in that. I think most of my—and this is where I was talking to your professor and I am not sure if I am the right—I hope I can contribute to your project because I think most of my activism hasn't been around particular organizations, but activism that has grown out of my own teaching here. I think one thing that has been really—so it is a different kind of activism I guess. I have always felt that there has got to be much more of a connection between what we do on any college campus and what gets out in the community. And that, we can't keep what we learn in our own research, just among ourselves. It has to go back to the community and we have to be informed. And there are people out there that inform us about many, many things and there has to be more of a back and forth and this two-way street between the academic world and the real world. So when I first came to Clark the second semester I taught here, I actually co-taught a course, it was called "Black Worcester." It was an attempt—and I didn't really know much about Worcester at the time or Worcester history, anything really at all. But the woman I was teaching with knew that I had some public history background and she said, "You know it would be really great if we could get our students involved with the Worcester Historical Museum. They have no archive of black history in Worcester," which we

still don't. But the idea was just to collect information, to gather information, to send students out and see what they were interested in local black history. And our students did that. They came up with an incredible range of topics. They looked at jazz clubs, they looked at abolition, the abolitionist movement, they looked at churches, all different kinds of things. One of my students did this paper on John Street Baptist Church, which is, if you know where Sole Proprietor is and Highland Street, sort of back that way. Not the WPI side but the other side, there is a historic black church back there that dates back to the 1880s and she wrote this whole paper on it and said it was really interesting that the people who founded this church were former slaves from North Carolina and Virginia. And at that time I was just sort of getting my dissertation put into shape to be published into a book. I had done my dissertation on race in Charlotte in North Carolina between 1850 and 1900 and the emergence of the black middle class and all of this stuff. So it was like, North Carolina? Why are there North Carolina people up here in the 1880s? You know, it didn't really make sense to me so that sort of sparked my interest and then that began to snowball into all kinds of things and I began to ultimately resolve it in a book I wrote about the migration of former slaves to Worcester and Central Massachusetts that came out of the era of the Civil War with so many white Worcester-ites going south. Soldiers, teachers, and missionaries that actually created these personal relationships with these former slaves and brought them north with them when they came back to Worcester after the Civil War. So that was the basis of the book. So that began to connect me a little bit more with Worcester's local African American community. And then I guess the project that's had the most social impact so far, and I hope will have a big impact, is this photo project that I am working on. You can see around my office that there are a bunch of photos...

AP: Oh yeah

LS: Oh wow

JG: I will try to keep this background short because it is kind of a crazy story, but out of the blue three years ago I got this email from this man. Somebody I didn't know and he said, "I have these old photos from African Americans in Worcester that you might be interested in," and it was the end of the semester and I blew him off quite frankly.

AP: [laughs]

JG: I will get in touch with you when I finished grading and then of course I forgot. And he called again, he emailed me again, and I said, "You know, I'm going to Worcester tomorrow, I'll go see what he has." I had no idea. So we made arrangements and his name is Frank Morrill

and he lives out in Charlton and he's a collector of many things. He said he had a collection of 5,400 glass negatives. The entire work of one photographer [William Bullard]. It was a white photographer. And within that collection, he has come across this fortress of over 200 portraits of people of color that were taken in Worcester. And he started showing me these and I was thinking, these are amazing I had never seen anything like this. And I mean not just for Worcester but anywhere in the country.

AP: Oh, yeah!

JG: Yeah, and then he said, "Oh, by the way, I have the photographer's log book so I can tell you who most of these people are." And I said, "Are you kidding me?" And then I started recognizing names because I had just written this book. I know this family, I know this person they are from North Carolina, this person is from Virginia. And I just couldn't believe it, so to make a long story short, in October we will be opening an exhibition of 80 of these photographs at the Worcester Art Museum.

LS: That is amazing!

JG: Will you guys be here?

LS: We are graduating!

JG: Well maybe you can come back and see!

AC: I just can't believe it, like look at the quality of that one! [pointing at a photograph on the wall]

JG: I know they are really amazing. So since that time, since 2014 I have been working on this and I have gotten my Clark students involved with it too and they have been doing research on them. This semester they have been writing captions to put under these and we are putting a website together to have additional information and even when the exhibition is gone we will have a virtual exhibition. So I guess where I have really connected, this project has really connected me in many and more ways, locally and in my own kind of activism. Because we know who these people are we can trace them back, but we can also trace them forward. We were able to find descendants and, "You don't know me, but I teach at Clark and I have this really amazing photo of your grandmother, I'm not sure that you've ever seen it." And so we connected with lots of descendants and family members and they have been wonderful in sharing

their information with us. So, we are able, so the goal is to basically to tell the story of this community which really hasn't been told. It's been left out of the general history books of Worcester. One of the things that I have really learned from this is, is we kept calling these photos of African Americans and when we began to show these photos to people in the community people began to say, "No this person is Native American, and this person is married into Native American and African American families," and so all of these stories, again, these sort of invisible groups in Worcester, whose stories we really want to tell. This has been a community that a lot of this community really isn't there anymore. It is pretty much gone. Because of this, it became really clear, right away that we really need to have community engagement in this. It can't just be this white professor at Clark or Frank Morrill who is also white, telling these stories. These are living stories, these belong to families as well. So one of the things that we did was organize a community advisory board. So, I asked around to a lot of people, who would be good community leaders, spokespeople, representatives from different elements of the community who could actually be part of this process. I didn't want this opportunity to be top-down, like here we are giving you your history. That would be a ridiculous way to proceed, an unfair way to proceed, so almost for a year now I have been working with this group. It is about six to eight people, and we meet every few months or so. Originally it was like, "Help us connect with other members of the community. We have this photo but we don't know who in this family we should talk to," and that sort of thing. And that was helpful but it was clear that it needed to be something more than that. It was clear that we needed to have their voice in deciding what kinds of events would be organized around this exhibition. For example, a number of the people in the community advisory board are former educators, so the former educators said, "We have to have a curriculum!" So they said we had to get school kids in Worcester to look at these photos and to connect these photos to the things they are studying in history. For example, we have this handsome man in the middle there who is a Spanish-American War veteran and there is this whole story about black soldiers in the Spanish-American War because there was a lot of talk at this time, "Should we even fight in this war when lynchings are in place and segregation is in effect in the United States?" And he is an example of one of the ten thousand black men who fought in the Spanish American War. There are so many ways that you can connect the photos not just to local history, but to American history. So this group has been very helpful in lots of ways. It connected us to individuals, to organizations, to churches in ministers, they are going to play a big part in getting the word out to the big community and other people about coming to see the exhibition. They have been extremely helpful in saying this is the kind of programming we want around this event. It is very important to them that we connect these photos to contemporary race issues in Worcester and nationally. It has been a wonderful project to me. It has been a gratifying project in so many ways because I have worked with people and I've met so many folks that I wouldn't have met

otherwise. And I hope the project has the ability to create a connection between Clark and the academic world as a community. It will also sort of help reshape the narrative of Worcester history or local history. We are calling the exhibition, "Rediscovering an American Community of Color, Photographs by William Bullard," because we wanted to say this is the Worcester community, but it is also an American community. We have photos of people who were born into slavery who came here and we have photos of people who were involved in all kinds of their own kinds of community acts of this time. There is a kind of richness to this kind of community, and to this community's life that people have sort of forgotten about or never paid attention to begin with, sort of the larger community. So this is bringing that back into the historical narrative and making it the sort of jumping off point perhaps for larger kind of conversations, is sort of that goal of what we are hoping for. So that was the very long answer to the question.

LS: No, that sounds amazing!

AP: Yeah, wow. That is so interesting!

JG: So that is what I'm working on now. If I have to define it as activism I guess it would be this project that I am working on most recently

LS: Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

AP: So I guess just lastly, kind of reflecting on all of these amazing things that you have done, what would you say were the most meaningful to you? Particularly in your role here at Clark and here in Worcester. And it might be this?..

JG: Yeah I think this project would be most meaningful. I had to write a review, even tenured professors get reviewed, we get post-tenure reviews still. Which is actually a good thing, because it is actually a chance to reflect a little on what you have been doing and where you are going and what you want to do. And it was a nice time for me to just kind of reflect a little bit about this project and thinking about the long-term and I wrote something in that review, something like it seems like everything that I have done up to this point in my career has led to this moment because it really brings so many pieces together. It is sort of the academic piece and researching and my own previous experiences many years ago back in North Carolina doing public history and thinking about how we get this community, how is this something that isn't just kept within the confines of the academic walls, but becomes a community oriented project and how do you get that history, and make it accessible to the public. So that piece and then as a teacher, it has just been a wonderful way to teach, research skills and to connect my students

with the community and to have them think about, "Okay, I have all of this information. I have students with notebooks full of information about the photographs that they have been researching, and how do I put that together in 150 words, that's all I can say. What is most important? What is the message that I want to get across? What is the story I want to tell? Or in my 850-word website entry how do I tell a story that is meaningful and how do I prioritize this information? How do I integrate it? How do I connect it to the larger narrative? So, I feel really, really fortunate, that I got that email and that I answered it because, it is just this wonderful intersection of all of these different pieces of my life and it truly has been, I've been able to synthesize in this really exciting way and I think it has meant a lot to my students too and they get really excited about this. This semester, they have all had a photograph to work on for the exhibition, and another photograph that we hope to build upon more extensively in the website. Each of the students got connected with a family member and that has been really exciting too because it makes it all real. When you have a picture of somebody who you are researching, I am learning, from them and my own personal experience. It has a kind of—it comes alive in a way, more than just a name or place. You kind of want to know about the person, you want to do justice to them and their families, especially when you begin to uncover some of the amazing stories.

AP: Awesome, thank you so much!

LS: Is there anything else that you would like to add that we didn't ask? There are a few just demographic questions that I can just email you? If you just answer we can add them to the transcription.

JG: Yes that would be fine!

AP: Well thank you so much for your time!

JG: Thank you for your work, what you're doing is wonderful. This work is very valuable. I think this will have a lot of impact.