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Jacquelyn L. Bridgeman Interview; Oral History Project

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Transcript

Cristina Salazar: Hi my name is Cristina Salazar. I'm a 2L at the University of Wyoming, College of Law.

Shelby Nivitanont: And I'm Shelby Nivitanont. I am a law librarian at the College of Law. We are located within the Coe library at the University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY.

Cristina Salazar: Today's March 4th, 2022 as a part of the Wyoming Oral History online project, I will be interviewing Jacqueline L Bridgeman, director of the School of Culture, Gender and Social Justice, and Kepler professor of law at the University of Wyoming, College of Law. Professor Bridgeman, thank you so much for joining us today.

Professor Bridgeman: Thank you for having me.

Cristina Salazar: So we're going to run through a couple questions today and we're going to kind of start with your background. What was it like growing up in Laramie, WY?

Professor Bridgeman: Oh, let's see. So it's getting bad right? We moved here when I was nine when my parents got divorced 'cause it was a good place for my mom to be a mom so. There are a lot of good things about it, right? We could ride our bikes everywhere, we could hang out with our friends at the park and all that kind of stuff. The schools were good. Uhm, at the same time there were many times when I was like the only black kid here. Or the only black kid in my high school and that certainly had its challenges, especially when we do school related things and travel around the state, but for the most part it was good. It was good enough that. After I left to go to college and law school in the practice while I moved back and I've been back for 20 years so and I'm chosen to raise my own family here so.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, it sounds like Laramie is a really great place to grow up and raise a family, but after Laramie you decided to go to Stanford University to earn a bachelors in African and African American studies in anthropology, anthropology, social science? Why did you choose Stanford?

Professor Bridgeman: Uh, mostly because, well, I wanted to go to a good school, right? So I got into several of the top schools, but I also was doing a lot of sports, so I was running track. Then I was playing basketball then and I was recruited to do both. So Stanford was the best school. Uh, best athletic program that I got recruited to go to. And so, and it was warm. So the day I went on my recruiting trip to Stanford, I had run earlier in a meet with like a bunch of snow and a lot of wind and when I got to Stanford that day, 'cause when you enter there's a drive lined with palm trees and it was like 75 degrees and gorgeous and sunny and I called my mom up and said guess where I'm going to school? So it was weather, it was the school, and then the ability to run track there.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, sounds like it was really meant to be. Do you have a particular memory of running track at Stanford that really just sticks out to you?

Professor Bridgeman: Not a particular memory. The thing I remember most are the people that I ran with, so I made some good friends. You know we spent a lot of time together during that time, some of whom are still good friends with to this day. So I think I remember that more than anything.

Cristina Salazar: OK. And have you ever wanted to like coach track at the high school?

Professor Bridgeman: Not at the high school. I've coached it a little bit for individuals here and there. Once I left Laramie, I vowed I'd never stand out in the cold and the snow I did track again, although I did it last year to watch my daughter. Uhm, but actually. My biggest love was basketball, not track. I just didn't get recruited. I got recruited to Division One basketball schools, but not the same level as Stanford. So that's why I ran track instead, so I actually coached a lot of basketball. So I coached both my kids from the time they were in kindergarten until they got to junior high. So I coached basketball for about 7-8 years. And that I enjoyed. Quite a bit.

Cristina Salazar: Nice, I can relate to the sentiment of not wanting to be out in the cold and playing soccer. I think my parents kind of quit going to my sporting events around high school. They were like she can sit and freeze her butt off on her own, but they loved when I played basketball 'cause it was all inside. How would you say that your undergrad shaped your world perspective? Being out in California versus being in Laramie, WY?

Professor Bridgeman: I think the biggest thing was the research work that I did and the degree that I did so it was I just said African American studies as well as anthropology, social sciences, and essentially that was an interdisciplinary social science degree. So I took classes in economics and philosophy, you name it. So I took probably a range of both humanities and social science classes, and then I took the required science classes too. So a lot of the work I do today is interdisciplinary, and then for my honors thesis, I went to Ecuador and did a lot of original research on African cultural traditions. In the African communities that were there, you know, a lot of folks don't realize this, but they brought Africans all up and down the Americas, right, and so there's these communities. And down there are they largely ran away, they call a maroon societies. They were runaway slaves so they lived on their own and preserved a lot of African traditions that other communities didn't. And so going out there going deep into the Amazon by myself collecting all these stories and talking to all these people is probably the most life changing thing about what I did. It gave me a whole new perspective on the United States and what it's like to live with other people and understand other people. And just having that experience of being in a place where you show up and don't speak the language and have to learn it and have to figure out like how to live in a world completely different. So that was pretty life changing for me and has affected probably the work I've done in my view of the world ever since.

Cristina Salazar: Oh, it sounds like that was a really incredible experience, and I think it's so rare to hear someone come from Laramie, WY and get to experience all these incredibly different cultures and lives that you kind of got to experience, so that's incredible. Did you always know you wanted to go to law school and practice law?

Professor Bridgeman: I did. Although in hindsight I probably should have explored other possibilities more than I did. So when I was in 9th grade, we did a mock trial in my social studies class that I loved. And I decided then I was probably going to go to Law school. And so when I was in undergrad, I actually took the LSAT, it would have been, I think my sophomore year. I took it early like I took it a year before like the February before I was even going to apply to law school. That's how sure I was I was going to go. In hindsight, I think I might be like the acting in the mock trial. But who knows when you're 14? But yeah, the other part of it though was, I liked competition and I liked the challenge and I figured you could do that in law. I like to read and write so that was another place and I just liked sort of the intellectual logic. All of my family are math and science people, and although I don't love it the way they

love it. That kind of logical. Evidence based thinking, I still like quite a bit. And so all of that had an appeal to me too.

Cristina Salazar: OK, that's great. I think I actually also did a mock trial type thing in 8th grade and I think that solidified that I wanted to go to law school and it turned out a lot of the people that did that mock trial with me. They also went to law school, so I think it's funny that something that's small and seeming so insignificant when you're in high school ends up having such a great impact. Can you tell us about earning your JD at the University of Chicago Law School?

Professor Bridgeman: Well, say I got a good education. Yeah, that was not a good experience, in fact it has shaped the whole way I teach law, but not like you would expect because I came out of there saying I would never do to another student what was done to me at that school. If you ever see "Paper Chase," it was similar to that. Except he didn't like flip a coin at somebody, but it was really cutthroat, nasty. It was a place, at least when I went there, where people would hide books that you needed in the library. But I did make some good friends there. I actually went to the University of Chicago because my grandparents lived there and I was really close to my grandfather and so I got to see him all the time. That was great. At that time Professor, but then later President Obama was there, so I got to take classes from him and see him speak the first time. So all those parts of the experience were good. I think there was no question the education I got there was really good. Uhm, but it was an illuminating really, not great experience. So I have all my educational experiences that was the one I would trade in a heartbeat.

Cristina Salazar: OK, did you apply to other schools too? Or you always thought you wanted to go to Chicago?

Professor Bridgeman: No, I didn't think I always wanted to go to Chicago and that's I kick myself 'cause I applied well, quite frankly, I applied to all the top ten schools and I got into every single one, and then I went there because my grandparents were there and they gave me a lot of money. I'll say that too, of all the schools they gave me a ton of scholarship money to go there, so the debt load was a lot less. I think it was like 40,000 a year or something like that. They gave me money to go. Uhm, so it was partially the money and then the location and my parents are both from Chicago so I had a lot of family there. I thought at that time I would like to live there because I used to spend summers there as a kid, and then I realized I don't know. It's probably be offensive to people who love that city. But it's segregated as all get out. There's lots of classism in there, and so. And the weather is horrible. The sun never shines. It's cold and miserable. And then it's hot and humid in the summer. So like some of the worst winters and were summers I ever spent were in Chicago, so I left it. I'm like, I'm never coming back. So that just convinced me I'm not living east of the Mississippi River if I can ever help it.

Cristina Salazar: OK, yeah, that's really fair. You said that President Obama actually taught one of your classes. Can you talk a little bit about that experience?

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah, that was really good and I really liked him quite a bit, so he taught a class. It was called like race and law or something like that? Which is kind of ironic now. In fact, the paper I wrote for his class was the paper I used as my writing sample to get the job that I have now. And one of the good things about being in class with him because it was another place right there, was like a handful of black students, you know. And I felt alienated or intimidated in the other classes. And I'd have teachers in those classes that would reference things that just didn't have any meaning to me and I

remember one class we were in when he was teaching he made her reference to a Chris Rock video. One of his standups, right? And I started laughing and I was the only person in the class that knew what he was talking about. None the rest of my classmates did that sort of thing at the time. And it was funny. It was really eye opening and helpful to me because I realized that kind of shared culture was what everyone else had with the rest of their teachers. And so it wasn't a shortcoming of mine, it was just an experienced difference, right? Uhm, so that was good and then just again he would come to a lot of our Black student events, you know. And kind of hang out and he is as much fun and as cool that in real life as he seemed. And I remember we had some event we're having for Black Law Students Association and we needed a speaker. He had just been elected I think to the Illinois State Senate so this was long before he became when he ended up being. And so whichever of our students was in charge of getting this speaker, she's like "I got Professor Obama." I'm like, "Why did you get a professor? We wanted like a good speaker." And she's like "No, really, he's good. Just trust me." So like, OK, fine, we don't have any money if he'll do it well, it'll be OK. And so then we went to this event when he spoke. And of course he was fantastic. Like after I heard him speak there I was like, you know I'd actually purposely go and vote for you. And it wasn't making a political speech, but he was just talking about these things and we were like, "OK, that was good. It'll count right?" Because it was just fantastic. And so I did end up working on his campaign in Wyoming and I was a delegate for him when he around the first time in part because I had had that prior experience and thought he was a good guy.

Cristina Salazar: Wow, that's such an incredible story and I think something that's kind of funny about that experience is that you got to witness him first hand as a student, but we have professors like Professor Romero and Professor Duff that pull out their yearbook and are like "You see that right there, I went to school with President Obama," but you have such a personal connection with him and that's really amazing. And I think something that you said that kind of resonated with me was how you felt like you were able to connect to him in a different way culturally. As you felt like, your counterparts were able to connect with their other professors. And I just wanted to let you know that I feel that way with you. I think being a student of color coming into Laramie, WY it's a very different place and so there, are very, very different things. You know, there's a lot of my colleagues, classmates who say "my parents are lawyers; my dad is a judge. This is going to be easy." This is what I know. Get along perfectly fine with professors, and I think you have created this great space for students of color to be able to come to you and speak to you. I really appreciate that good that was one.

Professor Bridgeman: Good. That was one of my goals, I'm glad to hear that very glad to hear that.

Cristina Salazar: Thank you for sharing your experience in law school. It sounds like it was an interesting experience and obviously experiences helped make you who you are, so I think either way, good or bad definitely gave you a good experience. So after law school you kind of worked in some different areas of law and you moved back out to California to practice there. Why did you decide to go back to California?

Professor Bridgeman: Well, like I said, I wasn't going anywhere on the other side of the Mississippi River, so that was part of it. I was like I'm going back out West. Although I did get a job in Florida that I think would have been good, but I just was like I'm not going to the East Coast anymore and there just weren't that many firms right? So there are couple firms in Colorado that I had interviews with that I didn't get hired at and then I got hired in California and so I went where I got hired. I had decided, 'cause when I was in law school I did work with a lot of migrant workers one summer. In Illinois, you know, everybody thinks it's Chicago, but it's a lot of farm country. And so I worked for the Illinois Migrant Legal

Assistant project and we represented migrant workers on all these different kinds of things. And so I got to do a lot of employment law in that context, on the plaintiff side. And really liked it. But thought that, I could make a better difference and do more work if I did employer side, which is a little counter intuitive. But when you're on the plaintiff side, if you don't like something that's happening or the way an employer does business, all you can really do is sue, right. If you're on the employer side, you can do a lot of advice and counsel work and be like you know you really shouldn't do this, or you should do these things better or for your employees so. And I had student loans out the wazoo, so those two things in combination caused me to go to. Big firms intending to do employment law and then at the first firm I was at it was during the time of the '.com,' so they were doing tons of corporate merger and acquisition work and all that and they just needed. You know they're buying and selling companies, and all these kinds of things, and so they needed a lot of all hands on deck. So I ended up doing a lot of corporate work for them too in some litigation, but I did a lot more advice and counsel, which is what I wanted. And then litigation work. And then the second firm I went to was all employment work, but it was a lot of advice and counsel. We were outside counsel for a lot of big public entities, so like the LA Unified School District, LA Department of Water and Power, and we did a lot of like their investigative work for them and that sort of thing wrote a lot of their policies. Whatever else.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, it sounds like it was a really great experience and I think. Something to take note of is you kind of worked with people like migrant workers who are plaintiffs. You know there are the plaintiffs in most cases, and they don't have much, and then you kind of made this this transition into Big Law. Can you kind of speak on how those two very different experiences change your understanding of the legal process or your perspective on it?

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah, so I don't know. Working at big law, especially my first firm, we got we had shady clients at my firm. Not gonna lie, right? And so it opened my eyes to what happens when you have a lot of money and you have a lot of power and the effects of that. Right, and the kinds of things you'll do like. We had clients that bought up all of the copper in the world so they could adjust the price on the copper future market and then sell the copper back at a high price. Which, by the way, is illegal and does cause the SEC to freeze all your assets and fine you \$100 million. You know, and we were on the wrong side of some other cases too. And so, for me it was a lot of what are you willing to do to engage in your profession and to earn money. And I realized there was a lot I was not willing to. The other piece of it, somewhat similar to what moved me from plaintiff side defense side is that when you practice law, you're kind of stuck with what the law is. You do what you can and can't do for your client. And I remember we had this client. It was a plaintiff who was trying to get out of an employment agreement. They had a non-disclosure and they had a non-compete agreement. And it happened, they signed it and like I don't know some state Minnesota or whatever and then came to California. And California had different rules. And everybody is arguing what the law is on whatever side is favorable to them, and I remember looking at it and saying, "This rule just really doesn't work well." Like it shouldn't be this way for either side. It needs to be changed, but of course you can't really do that in practice. You make novel arguments and the court accepts and or whatever, but it doesn't work though. Well, and so part of the reason being a law professor appealed to me is because you get the chance to think about the law. On a broader scale, and what those changes should be and how they should work, and if nothing else, then you can maybe feed that to people in practice and say you know, this should go this way. Or you should argue it that way, because that would be a better way to solve this problem, or to do this. So yeah, there are things about that that I didn't like and then the hours were a killer. You know, I

worked a lot of hours in both firms. Without a lot of flexibility, so I didn't even have time hardly to spend the money that I was making. And then you get stuck on whatever it is I used to be able to tell you how many billable hours there were per month because you know, August has more days than February does. I thought of hours in 10s of hours because we were billing all the time. And that was just not a fun thing for me to do. I don't like that much structure and I want to be able to do things for clients and spend some time on it and not have to worry about you know can we bill for this and how much can we bill for those? All that kind of stuff. OK, probably more than you ever wanted to know.

Cristina Salazar: No, I appreciate as someone who's thinking about going into Big Law. I appreciate hearing the stories it's on.

Professor Bridgeman: But other people love it and it works well for them.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah it does work well for some people. I think you kind of touched on, you know the law is the law, and it's kind of hard. Because sometimes you realize like this is a stupid law. And how can we change it? How can we argue around it? Have you ever thought maybe you would like to get into the policy making?

Professor Bridgeman: No, because you usually then have to do politics. So I do policy stuff a little bit on all these various committees that I'm on, but I prefer to sit on the committee and tell other people what policies they should fight for, than I have to do it myself. I hate politics. I hate everything having to do with politics. More so this week even than the week before. That said, though, after the week I've had I have I thought more and more that you know, sometimes, maybe you have to suck it up, because if good people don't make good policy bad people do and then we all get stuck with it. Yeah, I think it's really, really important. I prefer to try to help my students learn how to make good policy and have them go to it and run for office. And some of them have. And most of them, I think, are doing pretty well with that. But yeah, I personally, I have no desire to do that if I can avoid it.

Cristina Salazar: That's fair, I think. My parents always told me if you don't like it, you gotta change it yourself or else you can't complain about it so. I know that has gotten me in a couple elected positions in the law school at least, but I think I'm going to avoid actual politics in the real world for a while.

Professor Bridgeman: Although, as I've learned this week, sometimes you just can't avoid those things right and so now. Stuck in the middle of these fights we probably will be having policy - I'm on the phone with people over policy right now, yeah.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, so now I kind of want to transition. We talked about your time in California, your time in Chicago, getting your JD and then you came back to Laramie, WY. And what made you come back to Wyoming?

Professor Bridgeman: My family is here and I am missed home. So California was fine but I've always been really close to my family, especially my parents and they were still here. And so I wanted to come back to be closer to them. Uhm and then around that same time I met my husband and he's from here and all of his family's here, so it's like him as well. Cost of living was better here too. You know, I was making all that money in a law firm and still could hardly afford a house that wasn't like falling down in California. And then I, the day I knew for sure I was late. Thing is, I was stuck in traffic on the 405 freeway in Los Angeles and I started calculating, I don't know why, how many hours I spent a week in traffic going to and from work 'cause I didn't like as much living in the city so I lived out where I could

kind of see a mountain where I lived. And I realized it was the equivalent of 32 24-hour days that I spent A year sitting in traffic. Not going anywhere. I was like I'm wasting a month of my life, just sitting in traffic and I decided I don't want to do that anymore. This job came up. Even though it was funny 'cause when I was in law school I thought the worst job you could ever have would be being a law professor and I had no desire to do it. But when I decided I wanted to come home, I needed a job that paid enough that I can make the transition even though I took a huge pay cut when I came back and being a professor was one of those is like, well, I might as well, apply and see how it goes. And apparently it worked out.

Cristina Salazar: That's understandable, I guess. During your undergrad, it sounded like you kind of were more of an academic. You liked writing papers you like doing research. Did you continue to do that while you were working, or is that something that came back up once you became a professor?

Professor Bridgeman: I continued to write and then of course I had to write for work all the time, but I didn't do academic writing OK, unlike that quite as much. I did some fiction writing and then. You know, I still read quite a bit. Quite a bit, and then I wrote for work all the time, but.

Cristina Salazar: OK, can you talk a little bit about the transition from practicing law to becoming a professor?

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah, it wasn't that hard, right? Uhm, it took me a little while. Well, I had done a lot of training, so even the teaching piece wasn't all that hard. The harder part was the scholarship piece and just finding like what you want to write about and how you put that out and getting published. But I had some really good friends during that time. That helped me do that quite a bit and there's a group of. Well there are a couple people on campus, one of whom has actually passed away now. The other one is actually at a different university. And then there was a group of us that got together, was probably about the, second year I started teaching, in Chicago, because we were all new at that time, there weren't that many Black lab professors, especially female black lab professors, was like 20 years ago. So like when I came to the University of Wyoming I think there are maybe 3 professors of color in this whole university. Only one of whom had tenure. I was the first one, the law school ever hired. And so we all found ourselves at universities in similar positions. So we got together. The six of us at that time and created like a scholarship group, so we helped each other like learn how to write and share our scholarship and all of that. And one of the cool things is that group has actually grown so. And we have helped other people get jobs in all schools. I've hired more people here. And I think that group is well over 100 members. Now across campus we have conferences or across the nation. We have conferences and now they even have a men's at equivalent. So that was the hardest piece for me and I had to get a lot of help on getting that done. The rest of it, like being back home, was easy, right? I'd grown up here, had a lot of friends here, knew a lot of people at the university before I got here so. All that was easy. Teaching, especially after that first year, was fine. And I there's a lot of teachers in my family, so that wasn't really hard and I have to like teaching workshops and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, but not having to work the hours being home, I didn't have to commute anymore. That was great. So all of that was good and the cost of living was better. You know, I was able to buy a house here so it's good too.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, it sounds like you've been able to build a really good group to provide mentorship for other professors, and that sounds like a really great experience. What kind of classes did you teach your first couple years here? Did you get to choose anything that you wanted to teach?

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah, I've always, I've never had to teach something I didn't want to teach, so they've always been good about that. So that first year I taught employment on torts and legal writing. And then the next year we added family law and I taught those for quite a bit and then later on. And I also early on taught in the African American Studies Department too. So I taught classes for them from about the second or third year. I was here on and then they morph over time, but they've pretty much let me teach what I want, you know? They don't ask you to teach stuff that you have no experience with or whatever.

Cristina Salazar: OK, and you've been able to teach some kind of cross-listed classes. Did you get to come up with those classes yourself, like social justice and law?

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah, because by that time I was the department had in the department that primarily runs that class, and basically the law school wanted classes, and so I was like, well, if you want me to teach for you, it's going to be these or nothing. That was pretty easy.

Cristina Salazar: OK, and then can you talk about kind of how you became interim Dean and how that experience was?

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah. So that was, I wouldn't say an accident... So let's see after I got tenure 'cause I was a little bored of teaching, I thought, and they needed someone to be the associate Dean for academic affairs, and I thought, you know, I'm going to probably be at this university forever. There's some things that I think we could do a lot better that I could help with. So, I'll go ahead and put my name in and see if I get selected to be associate Dean, which I did. And so, I did that for almost three years, realized I didn't really like administration at all, especially that kind of administration. And was in the process of stepping down, so those are 12 month positions. I was trying to go back to largely a faculty position, but we needed, we had certain programs in the work, so at that time that's when we developed like the international human rights program and the Legal writing center and the natural resource program. So those, state planning clinic, those were all fairly new and we were ramping up and doing some stuff with academic support. And so I said, OK, let me go back to the faculty to nine months, but I'll still work on these projects for you. So we created the position of associate Dean for program development. And we were going through accreditation, so I was in the process of doing all of our sabbatical accreditation stuff and getting ready for the site visit and doing our self study and all of that. And I hadn't quite finished it up. And so I was in that new position we created maybe two months, maybe 3. And then there was all the mess with the then President Sternberg and the Board of Trustees and the Dean of Law School at that time. Got in the middle of that mess up and ended up, so I went with him when he because he asked me to or I got volun-told to go to that meeting. And so the meeting he had with the president when they had a big old fight. So that was the first time I met Sternberg when he was President. It was when I went with our Dean to have a fight over any number of things they were fighting about. In that meeting, which might be one of the most you know, you always say you want, to be the fly in the wall. But you really don't, you know, and I'm sitting there looking over here. Like you know that you know, trying to be like this has nothing to do with me. I don't know why I'm here. In fact, when we went to walk into the meeting, President Sternberg actually looked at me and was like, why are you here? And I was like, I don't know, and our Dean was like, because I've asked her to be here as a witness. So we went into that meeting. And our Dean quit in protest, stormed out the door and left me sitting there with the president. And the president turns around to me, he's like what was your name again? And then he goes and get Dick McGinity, who at that time was a Provost and brings him in and

says we don't have a Dean at the law school and then Provost turns means like, well, would you consider being Dean? I was like well? I don't know. Let me think about it probably yes. You know you put me on the spot. This was not what I was planning on doing today. And so, in the span of a couple days, the trustees fired the president. McGinity became the president, and then he appointed me Dean of law school like and all that happened within, I don't know, a week or something. Or something like that was crazy. So yeah, that's how I became Dean of the law school.

Cristina Salazar: Well, that sounds like quite the incredible experience. I think a happy accident maybe, but I think also it's important to emphasize how qualified you were. And it wasn't just next person in the room, you're the Dean.

Professor Bridgeman: And he did so, uhm, there was another person who was actually our, what do you call him, associate Dean for academic affairs at that time, right? And he did choose between the two of us, and that person went on to be a Dean someplace else, and a president of a couple other universities after he didn't get the job here. So yeah, it wasn't like the last resort. But I did get it back there. Yeah, my husband and I laughed because we were so ill prepared for that eventuality. My kids were still pretty young. The like Wednesday, I think it was, after I became Dean we had to go to a dinner at the governor's mansion for this, they were having that energy landscape discussion thing, so we had to run down to Denver over the weekend because my husband didn't own a suit that he could wear the dinner. That how ill prepared we were to take on that job. So yeah it was crazy. It was not my choice. I had not, I didn't want to be Dean. Like I said, I want to go back to the faculty and then I got stuck in that job for two years. Before I could get out of it.

Cristina Salazar: Sounds like it was an interesting experience and correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe you're the first African American female Dean at a law school. Or just at this law school?

Professor Bridgeman: No, there were a couple others before me ...

Cristina Salazar: But just at this law school, yes.

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah, I was the first female Dean and the first African American Dean.

Cristina Salazar: Which is an incredible accomplishment and can you just kind of, I know you didn't love the experience 'cause I think it was. It was just a lot of work, but can you kind of touch on some of the positive things in role?

Professor Bridgeman: So I think there were a number of positives, one although it may not matter now, we repaired a lot of relationships I think during that time. So the first year that I was Dean, I went pretty much every corner of the state. And talked to like, oh, whoever was there, I happen to be in Leadership Wyoming at the same time, so we would be in places, and so wherever we would go for Leadership Wyoming. I would talk to whomever was there I did. I don't know seven or eight CLE presentations around the state and because there was a lot of bad blood between the legislature and law school and whomever else. And so I thought we repaired a lot of that. One of the things we did too because all of that happened during that downturn in legal education, where enrollments dropped by like 50% and so for the first time we actually started actively recruiting students. And marketing and figuring out like what we were actually selling that was a value, you know. And so we ramped up all of those clinic programs you know at that time I think we were in the top five in the country for legal writing. We were in the top 10 or so for experiential learning. And when everybody else's enrollments dropped, ours

actually went up in a couple of those years. We were like one of only three schools in the country that didn't lose enrollment during that time. And then our minority numbers went up, so the last year is Dean we had the biggest, we had the most diverse class they've ever had at the law school. I think it was like 15% or something like that. Which was why we had started creating pipeline programs from like some HBCUs in places that had higher minority populations, right. We thought Wyoming might be a good fit for kids coming from like rural places in the South and we had some traction, like with some students in Florida where they hadn't thought about Wyoming, but they'd been in a school with like 40,000 students and really liked the idea of being in a smaller place and not just being a number and so. All of those things were in place. We had started doing certain kinds of fund raising that were good. So there are a lot of good things that I think that we did. We went up in rankings. And we addressed a lot of our bar passage issues that we had at that time because we had revamped how we did some academic support and bar prep like we created the bar prep class, which is not what it looks like now. It was very different back then and we started because we realized that everybody passed the bar eventually and so we tried to upfront the kinds of things that caused you to pass on the 2nd or third try. Before you took it the first time and so we did things to identify people when they came in to try to get him help and support in the first semester of their first year. So they weren't, so they could get those skills better. By the time they were third years and how to take the bar so there are a lot of things like that that we did. Yeah, it was hard. And we were hiring 5 faculty, we're in the middle of accreditation when I got that job and due to budget cuts we had lost a bunch of staff. So at one point in time there were like two of us doing almost every single administrative job there was at the law school. They said you can, like I've done everything around here, including taking out the trash. And that's actually not an exaggeration, so.

Cristina Salazar: Well, that's that sounds amazing. I don't think many people can say *that*, so would you say what was better or worse, I don't know, your big law job in California sitting in traffic or this one?

Professor Bridgeman: Neither of them were a great fit for me. I still think the Dean job was better, right? I still like the university. I still care about the people that were here in ways that I never liked the Big Law job.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, no billable hours and no traffic still so that.

Professor Bridgeman: Yes, and still some flexibility over my time, right? I still coached my kids basketball teams during that time. I just had to have a lot of assistant coaches to help me.

Cristina Salazar: So yeah, that's understandable. Can you talk a little bit about your transition back into a faculty position then?

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah, it never really happened, right? So I went back to the faculty for about a year. I was still running the academic support program when I did that, went on sabbatical, so that was good. I went, moved in Hawaii for like six months and did my research out there to recover. Uhm, took the whole family, but then a year later I they asked me to be the inaugural director of school of culture, gender and social justice. So, it was maybe 18 months that I wasn't doing - I don't even think it was two full years before I ended up doing Administrative work again, and then I've been in that position ever since. So 'cause that was supposed to just be interim too. And then it just didn't work out that way. So I

think I'm in my fifth year of doing that job now so. Yeah, so there's really not been a transition. I keep hoping that day will come. It might be soon now.

Cristina Salazar: Do you want to talk a little bit about your work over at the School of Culture, Gender and social justice?

Professor Bridgeman: Sure, like that has actually been some of the most rewarding work I do. But it's not easy. Uhm, so that school was formed when they did budget cuts out of the African American diaspora studies program, Latino studies program, Native American and indigenous studies, and gender studies, and actually with the latest restructure, were about to include American studies as well. And so without American studies, we run, what is it about 12 degrees I think with major and minors, and then they're going to add a couple more plus a graduate program when they come in. And it's completely interdisciplinary, so we've got people from all over campus, and we do all kinds of different things. But I work with a lot of really great people over there that are really dedicated to what they do and we just have some addition in the classes. We just have a lot of community based initiatives and events. And things that we do all the time. Through our various centers and whatever else it is so it's a ton of work. A lot of its controversial a lot of it's difficult. It's hard to herd that many cats, so we had to create from scratch ways to govern a program that doesn't fit any of the university rules, right? We've got people with all kinds of affiliations. Some people have full faculty lines some have partial, some have none, but they're affiliated in 10 different ways. So how do you vote? Who gets to vote? Who makes decisions? I have several Co-directors that run each of the individual programs because I don't have the expertise to run native studies. Although right now we have a director so we're running that as a Council actually. Uhm, until we hopefully find a director - which may never happen, given what last week. But so then you have to coordinate all that. And how do you build a cohesive school when everybody still has their own identities and for the longest time have their own budgets? And we've found a way to do it. Well, we'll see, but our social justice degree should be completed and available within the next year, right? So you could now get a degree in social justice and we've got a lot of other cool things going on. But yeah, it is a ton of work and a lot of cat herding, but in good ways, right? And I like it.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, it sounds like it, but it does sound like this is rewarding work. And do you teach many classes over there? Are you still teaching mostly at the law school?

Professor Bridgeman: So, everything I teach at the law school, so I was supposed to have two-Course course load. So in law, you teach four courses a year. I supposed to only teach two, but I teach 3, so I teach one course that's just law, so it's either employment law or sports and entertainment law. And then I teach the other two that are cross-listed 'cause everybody needed teaching, 'cause nobody had enough teachers. So, not sure how I teach.

Cristina Salazar: OK, I think we're going to move a little bit into kind of some of your some of your academic pieces. You published a piece in the Wyoming lawyer called Equality in the equality state, talking about how Wyoming is the equality state but still has room to grow and I think this piece was published in about 2015. Uhm, do you feel that still rings true today?

Professor Bridgeman: Absolutely, unequivocally. Uhm, because as we sit here right last week, our state Senate just voted to defund gender studies across the university, right? And that was one of several bills that were up, that were contemplated that I think could very easily without much work, be construed as anti women. And certainly anti LGBTIQ community. And if you look too we're called the equality state

because we were the first state to give women the right to vote. But if you look at opportunities for women since then, we are nobody's poster child for that in any way shape or form. And that still continues today. The majority of the people in our state legislature are men. You know, since the one woman, we haven't had a female - finally in the last few years we have a majority of women on our state Supreme Court, but that has only been very recently. You know, for the longest time we didn't have any. And then we had one. So yeah, absolutely, that is still a problem and I think in a lot of ways we're going backwards, not forwards. In spectacular fashion.

Cristina Salazar: From your perspective, how does Wyoming and the College of Law continue to diversify and hold young lawyers and especially females?

Professor Bridgeman: Now I don't know, right? After what the state did and the university's non response. I don't know. That is a good question that over the last few days we've been trying to answer. Especially because if I'm being totally honest the last couple of years I and others have really tried to push this university to do more things that are inclusive. And for the most part they will not do them. They do them in name only, they don't do them in reality. They tweak around the margins, but when it gets to the point where you're really talking transformational change that would make a difference, and doing business differently than we have so that you actually do include people and give them a place here where they're valued - we aren't willing to do any of those things. And I know this 'cause I sit in almost every single one of those committee meetings and push and push and push. And it hasn't happened. You know, if you look at what happened with the gender studies program, the university as a university, not me in my individual capacity, they have yet to make a statement that they actually support gender studies here or anything related to that, right. So I don't know how you do it. And I have recruited all kinds of people to this school. Student, staff, faculty. And right now I don't know how in good faith I can actually do that. Given what's happened and the lack of response. So yeah, that's my long winded way of saying I have no clue at this point you do. That I know how you can do it generally. know how you can do it well. We did it really well when I was Dean of the Law School. We do it well in pockets here. We have a lot of people on this campus that are very committed to that and would do the things they need to do. But if the people who are in power are not really behind that, in a meaningful way, it doesn't really matter. And I don't see that.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, I appreciate you sharing your perspective on that, and I think you kind of mentioned how when you were Dean of the law school, you guys increased numbers of minority students who came in. It was the most diverse class you had. I just kind of want to hear from your perspective. How do we keep those minority students to stay? I mean, as a minority student, I came to Wyoming because I did my undergrad here. I came here for soccer. It wasn't my first choice or anything. I came back to do law school because it just made sense, but at the end of the day I always look back too: Am I always going to feel like an outsider here? And that pushes me back to going to Colorado and I think a lot of minority students feel that way. So I just wanted to hear if you have any ideas on how to change that or if it's just something that we don't know if it's ever going to change - if Wyoming is always going to be the way it is?

Professor Bridgeman: So it's two parts: one, you gotta make it a place where people feel welcome, right? Like you're saying and it's not that hard to do. Right, like it doesn't cost money hardly at all, but it does cost a change in mindset and it does cost a commitment right? And then you've got the same problem with minority students that you have with everyone else, and it's lack of opportunities to do

the kinds of things that You want to do, right. And so the kinds of things you need to do to drive the economic engine of the state to keep everybody here work the same for minorities, right? But when you're doing things like the legislature did this last week, you're driving people out of the state, and you sure aren't going to make an environment, you know the business that would bring people here, that would open those opportunities to hire people too. And with the changing demographics of the United States, they've got to be able to recruit people to a place where the people they recruit are going to be comfortable, and so to the extent the state as a whole does not do that, you're not going to get those industries here. And you're not going to get those businesses here, and so there won't be the opportunities economically for the people who want to stay. In addition to the fact that they also don't feel comfortable being here so.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, I agree, and I think Shelby and I kind of talked about this before. Is that you know every once in a while we're like, we can make a home in Wyoming; it's a nice place people for the most part are friendly. But then you go back to things that the legislator does or you know politically, it's just so hard to overlook something like that. Even if I did feel like Cheyenne is a great place to settle down. It's just things like that that really can't be overlooked. I appreciate you sharing all those thoughts. I kind of want to talk about your work as a magistrate. How did that come to be?

Professor Bridgeman: Uhm, they needed Magistrate Judge and they bugged me for a long time. And promised me it wouldn't take me more than like an hour or two in a week. And I said I would try it. Wasn't looking for it, I had done none – a little of stuff with juveniles, like I worked at cathedral home for a while and I was in our juvenile justice clinic when I was in law school, but certainly was not a criminal lawyer - as we talked about. But I said I'd try it and then over time, 'cause I guess I'm finished up the second year, headed towards the third year doing that, I have to go back and look. I started really realizing how important I think that work is and having those alternatives to just straight adjudication, especially for juveniles. Certainly for drug offenders, regardless of age and just kind of rethinking how we do punishment and justice in certain areas. So, most weeks it's still about an hour and a half, two hours. But a lot of times - you know I've started going to national conferences and now I sit on these access to justice and court reform committees and things like that. Because I do just think that's kind of important work and very useful work. And I like it because it's like real world work. So as much as I like the academic stuff I find over time that academic scholarship that sits out in the ether that does nobody any good in real life. I am not as big a fan of and so. I like the fact that we actually in that court and we're doing a lot of court reforms in our own, just local court, we take a lot of that scholarship and research and implement it in real life, right? And use the best practices that come out of that work. And it informs a lot of what we do in the Court, and so it's kind of nice to see all that ivory tower stuff actually implemented in a way that's useful to somebody's actual life, so that's been good and rewarding.

Cristina Salazar: You know you're kind of making it sound like if people bug you enough to do something, you'll say yes.

Professor Bridgeman: It depends on what it is so people bug me for a lot of things and get a lot of 'No's. As much stuff as I do, you'd be amazed how many things I do say no to on a pretty regular basis. I'm half of myself in the school 'cause we asked to do stuff all the time, so. No, and in fact I have a set of rules for when I will even consider a request and when I will say yes. And if you don't fit those rules, it's a 'No' across the board. That quite a bit, actually.

Cristina Salazar: I'm going to have to see that checklist before I come to you asking for another favor. Did you always think you wanted to be a judge? Or was it just people bothered you enough?

Professor Bridgeman: Yeah, never thought I wanted to be a judge. Yeah it was... And certainly never, yeah, never crossed my mind.

Cristina Salazar: There are professors, Professor Duff for example, who's always thought he was going to be a litigator. Never thought he was going to be the litigator, actually, but everyone knew that man was always going to be a litigator. Did you always think you were going to do litigation and then you know? Maybe if you hadn't been in California and these other factors had happened, do you think you could still be doing litigation today, or do you think you always kind of would have gone through another path?

Professor Bridgeman: I didn't think I was going to be a litigator. I thought I would probably go to court, but then I actually, because I was all about options, I've started out doing, although I switched, economics and international law as a major. And then realized I had just sort of fundamental issues with economics. And so I thought I'd get a law degree to do stuff like Foreign Service and travel and that kind of government work. And then it just ended up working out that way. And then as time went on, I never really like so I did clinics in law school or whatever. And realized a lot of the court stuff I didn't like all that much. I like the intellectual stuff. I liked more of the transactional stuff. So, there were whole points of time when I was in law firms that I was in the corporate department. I wasn't in the litigation department and our employment departments were always a little bit of litigation and a lot of advice and counsel. And so I never did that much litigation, really. I'm looking back on it. And I didn't do a lot of trial work 'cause I just wasn't at that kind of firm and I realized early I didn't really want to do that, right? Like criminal law was not for me. And that sort of thing so. Yeah, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer 'cause I thought that would be valuable for a whole host of reasons and it would open up options to do other things. But, yeah, I wasn't gonna do that kind of law.

Cristina Salazar: If you had found a job in like Colorado, for example at a firm that you thought would have fit, do you think you would have stayed doing actually practicing law, or do you still think you would have decided to be a professor?

Professor Bridgeman: I would have left the practice of law. I don't know if I would have become a professor per say. Because I think had the law had the professor thing not happened I was probably going to be... I was headed more towards I think the in-house counsel route. We had a partner at our firm who had some clients that they did a lot of work for and he was about to go in house and he was going to turn all that work over to me. Uhm, as their like liaison person and that was all corporate work, but I was like, yeah, you missed it by a day. 'Cause I just took this other job, right. And I thought so uhm, 'cause big law was just never a good fit for me. I'm finding I'm not really good at doing things that compromise my values and I had to do that a lot and I just was not good at it. And I don't do structure that well either. Like I can work gazillion hours, I still do that all the time. But I just have trouble doing it in a confined box. So in office between 9:00 and 5:00 or 9:00 and 6:00 or 8 or whatever it is. I don't do well in that even when I was in the law firm I would go out and like walk at lunch just to be outside. And some days I'd take all my stuff to library 'cause we had like a view of the beach 'cause I do not do well in boxes for extended periods of time, so yeah, it was just not a good fit for me.

Cristina Salazar: It must spend quite the change going from California, where you could look out and see the beach while you were working to your office where you have one of the few windows, but it's still just the view of another building.

Professor Bridgeman: There's reason why I have windows. And I picked that office, but I don't have to be in that office that much, right? So I come in for office hours or whatever, and then I largely worked at home in my house for that reason. So that makes it better.

Cristina Salazar: Yeah, we've kind of talked about your experience as a judge and practicing law and a professor and I just kind of want to know how all of those experiences have changed your perspective of the legal system generally, and then maybe the legal system in Wyoming.

Professor Bridgeman: So over time, you know 'cause some of it's just been a professor or some of it's being a professor for 20 years, and then, especially when I moved into the school and did a lot more interdisciplinary work. One: as I have found, I appreciate much more just how important that profession is and that kind of knowledge to sort of the integrity of society. And I'm a big time, you know, believer in democracy and freedom and the need to have people that can help ensure that. And then just sort of an understanding of culturally and socially, what an impact that has and what a difference it makes and how, what your laws say and how they're enforced affect everybody's lives in the day to day. In ways you don't even realize or don't even hardly notice. So I think that's probably been the biggest thing for me, you know before I was like I want to be a lawyer 'cause I want a job I like and I want to make money or whatever. And now I think it's a lot more important than that, if that makes. In a sense and what you do and don't do is a lot more important than that. If that makes sense.

Cristina Salazar:

Yeah, I think it does make sense. I think professors look at things so broadly and they see the whole impact of law is something that I really appreciate that, you know, coming into law school, I thought it was going to be super straightforward practicing. Well, I thought I was going to do prosecution work and you know, criminal law is straightforward and it's easy, but you know, as I've started law school. And I've taken a step back and I've seen how much everything does intersect and how nothing is in a vacuum and you kind of do have to take all of these perspectives and your perspectives really just change the way you look at the law and the legal system. I think it's fascinating that I came in thinking prosecution the whole way and finally being able to sit down and speak with someone who wanted to be a public defender and understand that whole side of it. What are some of the biggest challenges you have faced being a woman of color throughout your law career?

Professor Bridgeman: Oh, and you just face being a woman of color, right? So it's a number of things. It's the marginalization in class when you're in class. It's the fact that, at least at my last school, we would have professors that would invite certain students over to their house for whatever it is, and then give them largely answers to the finals. And of course you don't get invited to those things. And then some of it social Class, too. Right, like I went to elite schools in both places and so. What kind of access do you have to certain jobs? You've got to know, somebody. You got to be friends with somebody. And you're not going to necessarily run in those circles, or at least I wasn't willing to do the things I probably had to do to run in some of those circles. And then it's just, you know, one of the things I found, 'cause I've sat on somebody hiring committees and I've been able to look at sort of comments that people make and things like that when they don't realize or don't think about who going to be. And one of the

things I see is we attribute value and competency quite frankly to white men. And we discount the same for women and people of color on a regular basis. And most the time people don't realize they're doing it. So I would see folks, you know I used to do our tenure and promotion stuff and look across the board, and I'd see one of our faculty members and they'd be like, oh, they're great. I'd see a female faculty member or faculty member of color who was doing probably much better and they would question every single thing that they did right, and the same people writing in the same evals. Supposedly on the same kind of criteria so. Uhm, I see that quite a lot, right? And then I see people of color and women a lot of times that don't realize that kind of power they have or the stuff they can ask for and, nobody tells them, and so they end up - You get paid less, yeah, 'cause people pay you less. But a lot of times, for example, you'll get paid less 'cause you don't even know you can ask, or you don't know how to ask or you don't know how to negotiate. So yeah, I think it has all those kinds of impacts that I've seen and for me and for us in the school, right? It's just a lot more work. Because you never get to just come do your job right. Like was telling someone the other day, I'd give nothing this week if I but to just grade papers right? But I gotta do all this other stuff, and that's because I'm a woman and a woman of color. And I teach the things we do right? My colleagues don't have to do that. They don't teach controversial stuff or whatever. And that's all choices I've made, but. Yeah, there's a tax on everything you do, that makes it all harder.

Cristina Salazar: I really appreciate you sharing that kind of stuff and I think you definitely have a very special perspective in that you were the one who went through all of this and climbed all the ranks. And then while you were Dean, while you're a director, you were in essentially the room where it happens, and so you got to really see kind of first line the thoughts behind those decisions you know, and that's a really different place to be. So I really appreciate you sharing. I think we're just going to finish up the interview with a couple kind of fun questions. What would you be doing if you weren't a law professor or if you hadn't done law school?

Professor Bridgeman: Today I would be a bum on the beach in Hawaii like a bum living off the land. Probably in my tent maybe? I don't know. And I'm really only half joking about that. I don't know. I probably did something creative, right? I'd be writing or, you know, I don't know. Working on shows or something for like, no money and whatever. Love movies, love things like that so.

Cristina Salazar: OK, well we we can let you direct our Law Ball video next year if you'd like.

Professor Bridgeman: No you guys did a great job this year.

Cristina Salazar: Good, OK. And then finally, who's your favorite US Supreme Court justice and why?

Professor Bridgeman: Oh goodness, uhm. You know the obvious answer, right, it's going to be Thurgood Marshall, and all those kinds of things. I don't have a favorite. It depends on what issue you're talking about, right? Some of them were good on some things, some of them were not good on others, right? Like Justice Kennedy, for example, there's some really great work when it comes to like LGBTQ rights, right? That I think, is great. And then in other places I was like not so much, right? It really depends on the issue, although I will have to say that I think Chief Justice Earl Warren would be up there just because and especially these days, I kind of like people with integrity and principles. You know, and when he was appointed, 'cause if you don't know he was the Chief Justice when they did the *Brown v. Board of Education* case and a lot of those civil rights cases. And I believe I could be lying about this that he was appointed by Eisenhower, and they assumed he'd be conservative and do all these things. He

was probably on the wrong side of the Korematsu cases. And over time, because of that independent judiciary, I like to think he really shifted and did a lot of what I think is really good work. And so having that ability to like sort of do the right thing. And change over time and help there be integrity in that system I think is really good so. I don't know if he's my favorite, but I kind of like him in what he did. I probably have ones I dislike more so than the ones I particularly like.

Cristina Salazar: I can definitely appreciate that and I think after coming to law school and becoming more aware of Supreme Court justices, I understand that. I listened to Supreme Court Justices Sotomayor's autobiography on audiobook and Rita Moreno narrated it, so that's the only voice I have in my head and I'm sure that's not correct. But thank you so much Professor Bridgeman for sharing your story for Wyoming oral history project. We are deeply grateful for this and all the work you've done helping Wyoming come closer to the equality state dream. You are a great source of inspiration for law students and the people of Wyoming. Thank you.

Professor Bridgeman: Thanks for having me.