

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

Black Student Experience project

OH 2255

Kenneth King

Interviewed by

Tilisia Williams

on

July 7, 2023

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Interviewee: Kenneth King

Interviewer: Tilisia Williams and Cassie Nespor

Subject: YSU History - Black Student Experience

Date: July 7, 2023

TW: This is interview with Kenneth King for the Youngstown State University project on the Black Student Experience. The interview is being conducted at the YSU Archives. Today's date is July 7, 2023, and my name is Tilisa Williams. Hello Mr. Kenneth.

KK: Hello.

TW: We can start off with where did you grow up? And where are you from?

KK: I grew up in Youngstown. I was born in Ravenna, but I grew up in Youngstown for the most part.

TW: What was your childhood like? What do you remember about where you grew up?

KK: Like a lot of the old neighborhoods you hear some of the older folk discuss, the whole block looked out for you. [The] neighborhood was predominantly African American and Puerto Rican. A few White families on the street, but, yeah, [we] pretty much looked out for each other. It was still during the era of the steel mills.

TW: What was it like growing up during the era of the steel mills?

KK: I remember everyone on the street was pretty much working class. You began to see some of the transition, because my grandfather retired from the steel mill one or two years before they began to close down. You began to see the transition slowly, some families moving in who didn't necessarily have the same level of resources, that, you know, families on the street would have. But, for the most part, we all looked out for one another- hung out and played with one another.

TW: Are you a first-generation college student in your family?

KK: No.

TW: How many other people in your family have been to college?

KK: On my mother's side, my mother went to college. [On my] Pop's side, I don't know. I think, maybe his father may have gone, but I really don't know.

TW: What made you want to go to college when you were younger?

KK: (chuckling) I probably didn't have any other choice. Mom at the time, [she] was against armed service, or should I say military service. That was also during the era where rap music was just getting started, so I came to school to study telecommunications, because that's what one of the well-known rap artists at the time suggested to folks who were interested in rap music: study. So, here I was. I had gone to Ohio State first and I flunked out. So, YSU.

TW: What was your first year of school like? What year did you come to YSU?

KK: 85 [1985].

TW: What was that first year like, as a freshman student here?

KK: I don't remember much, but it was okay. I met a few people. I think it was that first year, I met a guy from New York, and you know, we got to know one another. Got cool. And then we met some other folks from New York and we just kind of, created our own rap group at the time. So I mean it was okay. And later on, I met a woman by the name of Teresa Mitchell, who was organizing the African American Student Union. So through her I met some other folks. The dominant fraternities on the yard at that time were Alphas [Alpha Phi Alpha]. There were a couple Kappa's [Kappa Alpha Psi] that I remember. Deltas [Delta Sigma Theta]. The AKAs [Alpha Kappa Alpha]. There were a few Sigma's [Phi Beta Sigma], but not a lot. There was one Que [Omega Psi Phi] who attended school who I knew, or that I eventually met. But Que's weren't allowed on the yard at that time.

TW: Do you have any more experiences with like your mentors and more people you met, like can you name more people?

KK: I mean, Sarah Brown-Clark.

TW: I've heard her name a lot, yeah.

KK: Black studies. She definitely became a mentor. As a matter of fact, if it weren't for her, I probably wouldn't have graduated when I did. But we can get that later on down the line.

But yeah, Sarah Brown-Clark, who was a Director of Black Studies. Michelle Murphy, who was in Kilcawley [Center] I think it was.... was it Multicultural?... I forget what it was called at the time [Minority Services Coordinator], but Michelle Murphy, she looked out for a lot of the students. So those two. Later on, when William Blake came on campus, [loudspeaker interrupts] but I was beginning to leave campus at that time when William Blake came on campus, you know, he looked out.

TW: What was your experience like being in and starting a rap group?

KK: It initially started [because] the dude that I met DJed. And so, we just kind of got together at the apartment he was staying at, we just began to rap, and decided to form a rap group. But since he DJed, you know, we kind of got in. I used to help unload. He kind of got in tight with some of the fraternities, most notably the Alphas, and Deltas, AKAs, so we began to DJ a lot of the jams. So that was good. I guess we were kind of popular, kind of known on campus, you know. And also, I think it was also the way we dressed. We dressed a little differently, you know. I mean, if you're familiar with how hip hoppers dressed, the code that they had... I mean certain styles, certain flavors... So yeah, we kind of stood out because Youngstown's approach was a little different. Although before us, Johnny Owen from Cleveland used to come down and DJ. And its actually New York and Cleveland who served as inspirations for us who in the rap music because Cleveland wore the same stuff we wore in New York, plus the stuff they wore in Cleveland. So yeah, I mean it was okay. We didn't have any problems. We were kind of popular, kind of known, kind of stood out.

TW: Besides your rap group, you talk a lot about hanging out with a lot of the fraternities and different groups on campus. Did you ever join one while going to school?

KK: No, I didn't. No.

TW: Were you a traditional student or non-traditional student?

KK: Traditional is, non-traditional is off-campus, or is it traditional is, no non-traditional—

CN: Its more about your age. If you were kind of out of high school, or did you wait a couple years?

KK: Yeah, I was probably 20 years old or so.

CN: Yeah, you're right in there.

KK: Pretty much traditional.

CN: Yeah.

TW: Because most people like, they have families, and they have full time jobs outside of school and that's normally considered non-traditional.

KK: No.

CN: Did you live on campus?

KK: I didn't. My mother lived not too far away. But then eventually the dude from New York and I, we got a spot together because his stepsister's friends owned a house and they rented out the lower part to us.

TW: Where were the meeting spots on campus, for like you and all your folks, all the people you knew?

KK: Always in Kilcawley [Center]. I haven't been in Kilcawley in a minute, but there used to be a place, a room, that was right across from the pub, a little section called the TV room, and that's where all of us would gather. Or there was an open space that was next door to the TV room where we would gather. Some folks would play cards. Also the little square that sits in front of the candy counter if it's still there. That was also a spot that we hung out at. Yeah, those were the hanging out spots for the most part, but it was always Kilcawley.

CN: I was telling Tilisia that there used to be a pub there.

KK: (laughing)

CN: There used to be a pub in Kilcawley. There's not anymore. You can get a Dunkin' Donuts, or... what's next to it?

TW: Now its Dunkin' Donuts and a sushi bar.

CN: The sushi bar, yeah. (laughing)

KK: We only had the pub, the candy counter, and there might have been an Arby's back there.

CN: Yeah...

KK: I think there was an Arby's back there.

CN: I think so too.

KK: And the pub had good pizza. They were the only place that we knew of that had pizza with wheat crust.

CN: You'll see ads for that in the Jambar. (laughing) The wheat crust pizza.

KK: Okay. We didn't know. We just went in there and saw, man they got wheat crust.

CN: (laughing)

TW: Do you remember any of the specific events that you and your rap group used to do around campus for the different fraternities and sororities?

KK: Well, it was mostly DJ parties or there were some events that were sponsored not necessarily by the fraternities but by other groups where we performed. But also we were kind of linked in. We were mostly community-based, because at the time Ray [Ron] Daniels was local and had a TV show and he brought in a lot of local politicians. Like when Jessie Jackson was running for President, he came through the Youngstown airport. We went out there and performed for Jessie Jackson. He had a TV show. We performed on a TV show. We did a commercial for Don't Do Drugs. So all of our stuff was mostly community, but, I mean, stuff on the campus was mostly DJing. We didn't really perform at the parties or anything like that. We just kind of hung out.

TW: So, performing in the Youngstown community, like outside of school, did you build a community, a network outside of school?

KK: Yeah. Actually there were a few of us. Because the outside meeting spots... There used to be, across from where the dorm is now- the dorm on, is it Rayen? Where's Enterprise?

CN: The Enclave?

KK: Yeah.

CN: Oh, and Enterprise, yeah, is on—

KK: Actually right next door, that building right next door to Enterprise.

CN: Yeah, is that the Lofts? On Fifth Avenue.

KK: Yeah, well, its not on that. I think that's, is that Wick Ave or is that Rayen?

CN: I think it is.

KK: Yeah, its Rayen. Anyway, the building that's right next door, I mean the little building right next door that used to be a union hall [348 Rayen Ave], and we used to throw parties there. And then right around the corner – its still there – is a covenant hall, which is a much smaller space. It's right across from – literally right across from – the jail. So those were the

meeting spots off campus. Yeah, all the local rappers would gather at some of these spots on the weekends, and we would too. So yeah, we had a little community. We did some battles, got into some conflicts. You know, we just leave that alone.

TW: What was the rap atmosphere like at that time?

KK: Oh, it was still early. You know, a lot of Youngstown was at the time was influenced largely by I would have to say West Coast music. And was largely the music piece, because West Coast concentrates on a lot of funk- Ohio Players, Zap, stuff like that. At the time, folks was rocking (I never did) but folks was wearing jerry curls and things like that, so that was largely West Coast. And also southern, too, you know. So, a lot of Youngstown was into that. We were New York all the way. So we kind of stood out fashion wise, rap wise, and so on and so forth. It was okay. It was competitive. But we had a few groups- Recreation, Candy Rain, so there were a few groups. Lady C.

CN: What was your rap group called?

KK: We were first called Take 2. And then, there were twins who went to the university, Wes and Pres Gillespie. They were actually a part of our group. And when they joined, we became Posse 4. And then there was some other things we did with some of the people in the fraternities. There was a guy who passed not too long ago. His name was Pete [James Peterson]. He owned a store down where (it's never open) the pizza spot is, and where Jimmy Johns used to be in that little--

CN: Oh, on Lincoln, yeah.

KK: Yeah, he owned a store called Creative Concepts [137 Lincoln Ave]. And he was a student here- sold T-shirts, CDs, tapes, whatever, made T-shirts. I worked in that store and there was another guy. His name is Clarence McElrath. We all called him "grandpa." He's an Alpha, so if you talk to any [Alpha Phi] Alphas, ask them about "grandpa." We both worked in that store, so we used that as a spot whenever celebrities would come in, we'd have them right there. Both of them worked in Cleveland, so he had a lot of connections. He even opened up a club downtown for a short period.

TW: What was your experience like on campus as a student like, being surrounded by students? Did the other students and professors kind of look at you differently or treat you differently because of what you were doing at the time?

KK: Not really. I remember Dr. Homer Warren [Marketing] used to come through the center and pass out little things that he had written. He would come on to wherever the Black students would gather and pass out something. Just kind of keep it moving. But Sarah Brown-Clark and some of the students who we all pretty much took her classes for the most part, but, I mean, not too much. I don't even think they were really concerned. There was a student government election, and this was when the campus began to notice a lot of our presence. I can't speak to the time before me. But there was a student government election, and there were no black candidates at the time. So Teresa Mitchell and the Greeks and fraternities at the time- I definitely remember the Alphas and the Kappa's. There were certainly AKAs and Deltas were definitely involved- organized all the Black students and said, you know, these candidates are going to have to speak to our issues. And whoever speaks our issues the most, that's who were going to vote for. So, when these candidates ran, the white vote on campus was split. And so the candidate who spoke to our issues the most were the ones that got our voting. You can see, once we decided who to vote for, all the Black students were lined up through Kilcawley, down through the stairs, all the way outside. And so that was actually the beginning of what would become the African American Student Union- which we credit, at least, many of us- Teresa Mitchell with organizing. And we were definitely supported by the Greeks. But, you know, we began to realize that we had to get an organized force on campus to represent our interest. The African American Student Union was that, because there wasn't any Black student unions outside of the Black Greeks that were representing our interests.

TW: What do you do now? What is your current career?

KK: I work in the Youngstown Municipal Clerk of Court office downtown.

TW: Do you feel like YSU provided all the materials you need to be successful?

KK: No.



TW: It didn't? Why do you feel that way?

KK: I can only speak about me, but a lot of us [Black students] became, what we call "long term" students. I didn't graduate until [19]92. And I flunked out of YSU twice. But a lot of it was I just didn't understand what the heck was going on, you know. And we didn't have a lot of Black faculty. Sarah Brown-Clark was definitely supportive. Number one, like I said in the student center, we really didn't have Black representation outside of the organized student unions. Michelle Murphy [Minority Services Coordinator] had moved on. I think [William] Blake had come on campus. He was one of the few who was supportive. Actually for a short time, there was a guy by the name of Mohan Subramanian, an Indian guy, who was supportive. He was in student government, but he was supportive of some of our interests. But, you know, the campus just wasn't "open" necessarily. Matter of fact, I think this is how you can really tell. When the Pan-African Student [Union]- because we had changed from African American Student to Pan-African Student Union because it wasn't an ideological change. It was a geographic thing, because we began to get students from Africa, then from the Caribbean who joined us. So we had to change the name in order to reflect that. So it wasn't an ideological thing. But when the Pan-African Student Union painted that rock right outside of Kilcawley red, black, and green, you could feel the tension. It was thick on campus, because we had to guard that rock. We had to have a guard in front of that rock to make sure it didn't get repainted over. We had to have a guard out there, because we were allowed to keep it for a week. We had to have somebody sit out there every night to watch it, you know, because the tension was thick and we were making waves in student government.

For a while the African American Student Union got the largest budget of any organization on campus because we did the most with it. We put on the most programs, and we put on the most substantial programs, too. When South High School closed [1993], we invited South High students to come up to YSU and we did a talk show in Kilcawley to let the South High students speak their peace about their high school closing. When Rodney King got beat [1991], we did a protest on campus. Mike Powers (he was an Alpha) and Clarence McElrath and the other Alphas and people from the community- the Nation of Islam, Ron

Daniels and others, Pastor Lonnie A. Simon- all came down to YSU to participate. And we did a march around campus. I mean it was kind of thick. We were on the cutting edge on doing things on campus. You know the African marketplace that you see in February? That was started by us. We started it in May because Malcom X was born in May- May 19. So we did a whole week called it "Malcom X Week." And it was during that week that we started the marketplace and we had it outside. Right now, outside has changed so much, but in the area between Kilcawley and Beeghly [Center], that's where we had the African Marketplace. And Sarah Brown-Clark came down and said "I like this, maybe I'll do it in February." And that's exactly what she did. And she just expanded it, because she had the resources. But we also did a massive libation ceremony on the yard. The yard is right in the center of YSU. And we invited Native Americans to participate, and they came down. It was members of the American Indian Movement came down and joined us. You know, if you go through some of the Jambars, you'll actually see some of that.

And then, you know, when violence at the parties became an issue, me, Pete (who owned the store) "grandpa," or Clarence McElrath and some of the other guys, we formed a... I can't remember the name of the organization, but there was an interview in the Jambar that we talked about it. We formed an organization where we were committed to breaking up fights at these parties, so that, people can enjoy themselves. And that's exactly what we did- we broke up a few fights. We wouldn't allow it. And we also wouldn't leave the law enforcement to do. We took that on ourselves.

So yeah, I mean, we were definitely a potential force on campus, that's the best way that I can answer that question in terms of campus life was through our organized efforts, because we definitely made an imprint.

I also did some intern work at WUGS [student radio station] at the time. And WUGS was classified as album-oriented rock. I didn't know too much album-oriented rock at the time, so I was going through some of the we had records then and I said, "Bob Marley ain't album-oriented rock. What's Bob Marley doing over here?" Bob Marley to me was reggae. That ain't album-oriented rock. I said, okay and I'm going through... I found some other

stuff that just didn't fit with, at least what I thought "album-oriented rock" was. So I started playing more Bob Marley because that's what I identified [with]. I didn't really identify with album-oriented rock so much. But reggae I did, and so, it got to the point WUGS gave me a warning, or whatever. There was some discussions, and so I said, okay. I had the support of Mohan from Student Government and some other students in the Senate. I went in that day and brought my own record which is Public Enemy "Fight the Power." I played that on the air. You know, at the time WUGS broadcast all through Kilcawley, and I said my peace and I signed off. And from what I understand, WUGS closed down for like a couple years.

CN: That was the end of your internship! (laughing)

KK: No doubt, no doubt.

TW: Why do you feel like there was so much tension at the time? Do you feel like it was jealousy because you guys were getting more funding for your events?

KK: I think that there was just a misunderstanding. I can't speak for generations before me, but at the time—[Sound cuts out 25:50 - 26:41] --it does, in a lot of imaginations. It represents, depending on what your perspective is, it can represent a whole range of things. And so, the tension... and, we were very expressive. We didn't hold our opinions. We pretty much demanded- I mean, we went to student government meetings in a force. We all had presentations and we all talked about the programs we did. There wasn't anything else outside of Black History Month and Sarah Brown-Clark, or whatever she was doing, and some of the other months. There wasn't any other Black activities on campus, quite frankly, outside of Greeks parties, or whatever the Greeks did. The university would do events, but they weren't the kind of events that would really attract at that time Black students. I think there's a difference in generations, too. Black students at that time, we were that generation after those who had been on campus who were involved in Civil Rights. We had a kind of perspective. And also in the media you had debates over Afrocentricity. You know, Veronica [Webb] was a huge speaker and so that had an impact. Public Enemy, X-clan- those were the rap. Beat-Boogie Down productions. Those were the

conscious parties that we had. We had something going on. This is what we were listening to. All of that stuff had an impact in terms of how we were as students, you know. We were kind of different. There's issues now, but you also see a few more relations amongst/ across races, across even gender. Even the gender question is more accepted in this generation than it would have been in ours, you know. There was some gay folks around. As long as they didn't say anything, they was cool. That's just how it was. And so, that's why I think that there was some tension. I think that it was just the timing. Like anything, we were impacted by society, the campus was, and I think that also the university leadership. I don't know...

TW: Do you feel like there's a difference in the togetherness and, I don't know how to say it... Do you think the Black community, in the sense of how we support each other is different now than it was when you went to college?

KK: Yes and no. Yes and no. What the generations now have the advantage of is social media. So, on some things, yeah. Because, you remember, a lot of what we did, we did it without social media, you know. My only connection with computers, we had to go over to Jones Hall in order to use computers, you know.

CN: So, you had to go talk to people if you wanted them to show up some place. You had to go to Kilcawley and meet them or something.

KK: Exactly.

CN: Hand them a flyer.

KK: I think the advantage that generations now have is social media. In that sense, you know, the communication that takes place over social media networks, we had to do that in person. Generations now, they make money online. We had to go out and work. I remember I was working a couple jobs, particularly after I flunked out once. So, I think yes and no. Being that we were organized and attempting to build something. I think now, it's a little different. I think generations now organize and build but I don't know if it means the same thing to this generation as what it meant to us. I mean, to us it was a big deal,

you know. I mean, we were prepared to go to the mat with YSU if we had to. That's the kind of generation we had. We were prepared to go to the mat, you know. If they wanted to start conflict over the rock being painted a certain way, we were ready. We had a group of us who would walk up into the office. We were that unified. And it was unified across social groups, you know- African American Student Union, Black Greeks, was unified.

TW: Did you find difficulty finding a job after college, like finding a full-time career?

KK: I didn't because we knew people. I think it just depends on who you are connected with. Certainly if you're a part of a fraternity, probably not. Because fraternity folks, that's what they do- they look out for their people, you know. You're a Kappa, you're an Alpha, a Delta, whatever... They'll talk to such and such. She's a member. Might be a job available here, whatever. And then me, I just happened to know people. At that time, the first Black radio station in the city was getting started- 102 Jams. And they only had one person working and that was Frankie Halfacre. My mother knew one of the owners, who was a former judge, Robert Douglas. He was a partial owner. Douglas said "Hey, yeah, we only got one employee." So, I ended up being... Actually, Frank wasn't really the first employee. He was also part-owner. So technically I was the first employee for 102 Jams. Once that station went under, Sarah Brown-Clark, my former adviser at YSU and mentor, she was the Clerk of Courts. She said do you want to come work for me? So I've been fortunate in that I've known people. But that's not for everybody. I mean, Wesley and Presley Gillespie [class of 1992] were in Business, and so they moved from management in fast food straight into the banking business. And they've been successful ever since, you know. So it just kind of depends. It's a hard question to answer because it kind of depends.

TW: Do you have any more questions?

CN: Yeah, I have lots of questions. So, you said you flunked out twice, but you kept coming back until you finished.

KK: Yeah, because I flunked out of Ohio State. Ohio State was a little bit beyond my comprehension at the time.

CN: Were you there for just a semester?

KK: A couple. Two. Actually I think, YSU is on what now?

CN: We're on semesters now but we used to be on quarters.

KK: Okay, so OSU was on semesters then because OSU was always different than YSU. So I was there for two semesters then I was out. So, I just stayed out and then I think I started in the Fall of [19]85 at YSU. I believe it was like that.

CN: And you found a little bit more support here, is that you could—

KK: No, I mean. What students do sometimes, we jack around. But eventually, I flunked out. But they give you a probationary period so you can come back. And when I flunked out again, I had to go to the Dean of my school. Part of the agreement of him allowing me to reenroll was I had to take two of the classes I that I had flunked because I think that last semester, I got all F's. So, I had to take two of the classes that I had flunked previously and not get anything lower than a C in any of my other classes, which I did. You know, after the second flunk at YSU (and the third flunk overall) I think I finally got my head together. But I still did not understand everything. Because the way that the Dean (at the time at Bliss Hall, because of Telecommunication studies) was talking to me- it just wouldn't register. So, I went to see Sarah [Brown Clarke], and I said "Look, I have no idea what the dude was talking about." I put my stuff down and said, "Tell me what I need to do to get up out of here." She said, take this, this, this, that, and you could be out. That was that. And I think that sometimes, when you don't have someone that you can relate to in positions... different people hear things differently. And so, Sarah said it in a way that I understood. Take this class, take that class and this class, and you'll be done.

CN: Other people have been saying the same thing too. It took them a long time. They felt like the rules were changing, and nobody would tell you for sure.

KK: Indeed. And like I said, the Dean, he was talking a language I didn't understand. I would sit there and listen to him, and I came out of there and I still didn't know what I needed to do to graduate. So, Sarah talked in a way that I understood, and I said, okay, I got it. And so,

when I went to enroll in a class, I took what she told me to do. I did exactly what she told me to do, and I graduated. So yeah.

CN: But you had enough of a desire that you really wanted to finish this degree.

KK: Oh yeah. It was time, it was time. I was done messing around. I mean the two classes I had to take over, I got A's in them so that'll tell you.

CN: Yeah, I'm thinking that it wasn't that you didn't understand the material.

KK: It was motivation. It was serious. Some students come in with it. Some students, and matter of fact, Wes and Pres Gillespie [class of 1992], they were like that. Even though they hung out with us, they were getting their studies, you know. And so, they were like that. They were motivated. I just wasn't motivated. It took me a little while to get motivated, but when I got motivated, I got it together, and got out. I think with a lot of students, its like that.

CN: It seems like you were pretty involved with the Black Student Union and pretty easy sell for Teresa Mitchell to get you to join the group. Did you do things in high school? Were you conscious of some of these issues?

KK: No, it was coming on campus that they really... Well, yeah, I mean, it was mostly on campus. Now, I have to admit, I do have parents who were involved in the Civil Rights movement. Both my mother and father. And even though they were separated, well they were divorced, my father was also involved. My father was an academic. He taught at the University of Colorado, Ethnic Studies. So, I have a background. I eventually came back to the background, but it was in college where I came back. Although it began in the rap lyrics. Because somewhere along the way, I met up with some folks in Cleveland who were connected with X-Clan, which was one of the more conscious groups at the time. And I ended up becoming a part of X-Clan. Well, not a part of X-Clan, but the organization called Black Watch. I was a part of the Cleveland chapter. We did some things in the community there. And, you know, we brought X-Clan though Youngstown and did a performance at YSU. Folks came in, matter of fact, at the time—[LOUDSPEAKER INTERRUPTS]

CN: So the X-clan came here? Where on campus?

KK: Yeah. Well, in Kilcawley but we took them over into, at the time it was still Westlake. It wasn't Arlington heights. It was still Westlake. We took them through Westlake. Did a walk through. Did some organizing, handing out flyers, you know. Folks were like, X-Clan! X-Clan! Because everyone knew who X-Clan was. They all came down to YSU. Some students came. And so yeah, I mean, a lot of those things helped.

CN: Where did your mother go to school? College, you said.

KK: She attended Youngstown State.

CN: Okay, and did she graduate?

KK: Oh yeah.

CN: Okay.

KK: She's a mathematician.

CN: Some Hidden Figures.

KK: She was working at GM at the time, so yeah.

CN: Oh wow.

KK: Engineer.

CN: So, what's her maiden name? What would she have graduated under?

KK: Probably King, because she had been divorced by then. So it was Cain.

CN: And her first name?

KK: Mercedes.

CN: Mercedes King. [class of 1976, Mathematics]

KK: She probably ain't going to do an interview. I can tell you that.



CN: Oh, no, but just like to see if she comes up anywhere. You said you were ready to go the mat with YSU on issues, and I'm just wondering, so you would be a part of this larger Black Student Union in Kilcawley, what was the classroom like? Did you have a different feeling there? Were you outspoken in class about things that you saw differently or felt differently?

KK: It depends on the class. I mean I can't speak for others, because like I said, we had folks in business and folks in..., so I can't speak for any of them. For me, I just took a lot of Black Studies, because Black Studies was my minor. So, I was in Sarah's classes a lot. William Carter taught up here. I took some of his classes. Dee Smith- she was leaving the campus when I got up here- but I did get in one of her classes. I took a lot of those classes. I can't remember his name. He was, at the time, the only Black professor at Bliss [Hall].

CN: Oh, Al Bright?

KK: No.

CN: No.

KK: This was after Al Bright.

CN: Oh, he was [in] Art. But anyways, he was still in Bliss [Hall]. You mean in Telecom?

KK: In Telecom, yes. He was the only Black professor, and I used to go and sit with him. I can't think of his name off-hand but he might still be here. [Dr. Walter Mathews] He didn't live locally. I think he lived up around Cleveland, but he was the only Black professor in Telecom at the time, and I would go and sit with him. I took classes with him. So, I kind of put myself in situations, and the other classes... I have latent interests, like geology. I'm like an amateur geologist if you will. Amateur, like I'm into nature and stuff like that, so I took a lot of those classes. So a lot of that stuff wasn't any rebellion because I kind of just went along. I knew a lot of that stuff. So, I didn't take any Western Civ[ics] classes that I can remember. I kind of just put myself in classes where I could learn. Like Amos Beyan, one of the classes that I had failed. He taught African history, so I took it again, and I passed that one with an A. I was looking for information. So I kind of put myself in those situations to

fulfill my minor and a major, so no. I didn't really start anything in class necessarily but, it was more or less just with campus politics.

CN: Yeah, and what were some of those campus issues that you remember?

KK: Black student retention was definitely one. And I would imagine it's still a major issue, or it's still an issue. I don't know how significant of one it is, but Black student retention. And then just the social atmosphere on the campus wasn't geared towards Black students, it was geared more towards the majority of students, which were predominantly white. So that, and access to information. Some Black students would come on campus, and they just didn't... Black faculty. That was definitely an issue. More Black faculty. We probably have a few more now than what we did. What's his name who's in Economics was still here when I was here. African professor in Economics [Dr. Ebenge Usip]. I can't think of his name off-hand. But, other than Black Studies... Sherri Lovelace-Cameron wasn't on campus then. She came on campus as Sarah [Brown-Clarke] was leaving. We didn't have Blacks in science, that I can remember. So, there were not a lot of faculty. We had one Black Dean who was here for a short time- a very short time- a Black woman. I think her name was Clara Jennings [Dean of the College of Education, 1994 – 2000]. I might be wrong on that one. She was here for a short time and that was another issue; Where are the Black Deans at? And I think that's still an issue.

CN: Yeah, I can't think of one on campus right now.

KK: Like I said there may have been two, but they were short. And I know Clara Jennings was real short. If that's her name, and she was here, and there was another one. I think. It might have been a man can't remember. But anyway, those were the main issues. Just general information the Black students didn't know when they came on campus. We attempted to as an organized entity- the unions and the frats attempted to- provide those kinds of resources. This is where you can go for this. This is where you can go for that. That just wasn't readily available. When William Blake came on campus, he attempted to make a dent in that. Like I said the support just wasn't there. At least we didn't feel it and that's the reason we went to the extent that we did. Willing to go even further if we had to.

CN: Those were my questions.

TW: You say that you mostly took Black African Studies classes, and you stayed in places where you knew there wouldn't be any conflict.

KK: Mostly for classes, yeah.

TW: We interviewed a lady, I can't remember what her last name was, but her first name was Kofee.

CN: Mostella. Kofee Mostella.

TW: Yeah, she was a Psychology major going here and she mentioned that a lot of the time in classes she would be faced with, especially by the White professors and White students, that she would be faced with having to represent the entire Black community all around the world. They would always ask her, what is your opinion on this situation and that. And she always felt like "I don't feel like every Black person." Did you ever encounter that?

KK: No I didn't, but I can appreciate that. I can definitely see that happening. And also given there weren't a lot of Black students in Psychology at the time either. And I don't know what she came here, but I took one Psychology class and it just kind of blew my mind. I don't understand nothing he's saying.

TW: Yeah, she said that.

KK: I had, I can't remember his name, probably one of the most celebrated Psychology professors on campus.

CN: She remembers resonating with Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez. That was somebody who she liked in the department.

KK: I know him. I know of him, I've seen him. My Psychology class was way before that.

CN: Oh, yeah, I think he did only come in [19]95 because we also just interviewed him. He retired, but he's going to be teaching part time.

KK: Yeah, he came in [19]95. I was an advisor to African American students by then. I wasn't really on campus like that. I forgot his name. He was a White guy, wore glasses. I do remember that. But he was a celebrated faculty member in Psychology. If you ran off some names, I'd probably recognize it, but he was celebrated. Because I know when he retired, he may have something named after him down here. But when he retired it was kind of like a big thing.

CN: And you didn't really enjoy his class.

KK: I didn't understand nothing he was talking about. I said maybe Psychology ain't it for me. Or maybe his approach wasn't my approach. I didn't come to that understanding until later. That's one thing that I've learned over the years from knowing a lot of professors and seeing their approaches. Approaches matter in terms of how you teach the material, and some teach differently than others. It may take you a while to grasp how they're coming at the subject. I had—his name started with a K – my geology teacher was good. [Dr. Ikram Khawaja] I didn't have any problem with him. It just depends.

I can appreciate that that still happens. And the interesting part is that a lot of Black folks don't like that. They don't like being put into a position to have to represent the race, because Black folks are diverse. We're not a monologue. You can probably see that politically nowadays. I think a lot of Black folks resent that. At this point I say, I speak for me and if you happen to agree with me then so be it, but I don't speak for Black folk, because I'm me. I always make that clear. I've never had that situation but, I will say I imagine folks kind of embrace that. When maybe I say something or when maybe the African American Student Union says something or issues a statement, or took a position on something, then they have thought like, well this is how the Black folk are thinking. I've never been conscious of being put in that position. I can appreciate that. I can definitely appreciate that.

CN: So, you were an advisor to the Black Student Union even after you left, after you graduated?

KK: The Pan-African Student Union. Yep.

CN: How long did you do that?

KK: For a few years they would call me- Sharif Ali (who's in the military now) and a few others- when they wanted to have a discussion about something that was previously done. Or when they had particular issues that they wanted to discuss. Or "this is what's going to happen. What do you think?", "How would you approach it" and they would have that in their discussion of how they would go about it. We would come. I think there were a couple faculty advisors too. I think Sherri Lovelace advised, but I don't want to say that and be wrong, because I know her.

[LIBRARY ANNOUNCEMENT INTERRUPTS]

KK: But, yeah, I did it for a few years. And I don't know what the status is, but whenever they call, I'll come back.

TW: Do you have anything else that you'd like to say?

KK: I'd probably just say, I probably wouldn't ask for anything different in terms of my own experience. Because experiences that we had certainly helped me develop perspectives that I have. It was important. Obviously, there are others who have been interested in tapping into some of the things left, some of the materials that we have, sweatshirts that we have.

CN: Now I am very interested.

KK: Oh yeah. I still got a lot of that stuff. Other may have even more. I think Teresa Mitchell would probably be the one, if you can find her. She's in Cleveland somewhere.

CN: I'll find her.

KK: Teresa Mitchell I would definitely recommend to interview. I mean I can put some names in there and whether they respond or not —Keith Vukasinovich.

CN: I just emailed him today.

KK: Good. I'll let him know, because we are actually really good friends. He was the first "Que" to cross at YSU in a long time.

CN: I don't know what a "Que" is.

KK: Omega Si Phi [fraternity]. Matter of fact, he was the only one on line. If you're familiar with the reputation of Omega Si Phi, you can understand why they were banned from campus for a minute. They had a very rugged reputation. And he was the only one on line, so I would definitely recommend him. He was also a part of African American Student Union/ Pan African Student Union. He could probably answer that Psychology question quite well. Then there's [Clarence] McElrath. He's in Cleveland. If you can ask any Alpha Phi Alpha on campus, ask them about "grandpa." They'll tell you who that is and you can probably reach out to him.

CN: I don't think there are any more Black fraternities on campus.

TW: They're all suspended.

KK: All of them, even the sororities?

CN: No, there's two sororities, the AKAs and Delta's are left.

KK: Those have always been the two that have been on campus. There weren't any others. There weren't any others that I remember.

CN: And we talked to a founder of another one, Sherry Cox Calloway.

KK: I know Sherry Cox Calloway.

CN: She brought another sorority down from Akron.

KK: I know what you are talking about, but back in my day, there was just the AKAs and Deltas. That was it.

CN: I don't know if they are still around and just not official or what.

KK: I met a couple Kappa Alpha Psi students who said they were working. I thought they were on campus. I know that I was told that Alpha Phi Alpha was looking to reestablish a presence on campus.

TW: Because they were suspended for a long time.

KK: Yeah. I knew that they were off campus, but I was told by credible authorities in Alpha themselves that they are looking to reestablish. If you know some Alphas can get in touch with Clarence McElrath—or grandpa. He’s known as “grandpa.” That’s his line name. But Kappa Alpha Psi- I don’t know how to contact them, Dwayne and Malcolm were old line Kappa Alpha Psi members who were apart. I can’t remember their last names but they were important. They’re still around. Because we do now a Black alumni tailgate that’s mostly organized by the Black Greeks. I know the first one was a couple years ago when Howard [University] came here to play. That was the first one. And I know COVID jumped in, then we had one last year. It was the same week—big Homecoming week. We had it then. And that one was handled by Alpha Phi Alpha. A lot of old line Alphas who were on the campus at the time. It was organized by “grandpa.” I don’t know who’s doing it this year, but there’s going to be one. We’re pretty much committed to having it. That could be another opportunity, because you get a lot of YSU students from all classes coming back—those who are older than me. A lot of the Black Greeks are older than me because Black Greeks were a major force on campus. There are a lot of African American students like me who were members of the [Black Student] Union who come back too. Yeah Keith Vukasinovich would be a good interview if you can get him.

CN: I’m hoping...

KK: I know that you sent him an email.

CN: Well, thank you so much for coming in today and talking to us.

END OF INTERVIEW