

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

Black Student Experience project

OH 2252

Kofee Mostella

Interviewed by

Tilisia Williams

on

July 3, 2023

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Interviewee: Kofee Mostella

Interviewer: Tilisia Williams

[Cassie Nespor present and on record near the end.]

Subject: YSU History - Black Student Experience

Date: July 3, 2023

TW: This is an interview with Kofee Mostella for the Youngstown State University Project on the Black Student Experience. The interview is being conducted in the YSU Archives. Today's date is July 3. My name is Tilisia Williams.

Okay, so Ms. Mostella, where did you grow up? Where are you from?

KM: I grew up in Youngstown, Ohio- Southside. Last graduating class of South High School.

TW: That's really interesting. How did that feel?

KM: There was a protest, but it was a very valuable learning experience.

TW: What was that experience like going to South High School?

KM: South High School, I didn't want to go initially, because of all the rumors of how South was. And my mom said if you go for one semester, see how it is and if you don't like it then we can go to another school. And I went and fell in love. Like, I fell in love. It was the best experience of my life.

TW: What do you remember about the neighborhood you grew up in your childhood?

KM: I grew up in a middle-class neighborhood that if we were poor, we didn't feel like we were poor. We felt like we were middle-class. I grew up in a time where the crack epidemic began and exploded, so I've seen professionals, like my next-door neighbor owned a trucking company and his wife owned a beauty salon. My parents; my mom worked for Children Services, and my dad burning down steel mills. So I seen how the crack epidemic destroyed my community. I have seen how it just, it crippled good people and hard-working families to become a warzone and abandon houses. Like we had neighborhood cleanups, like the kids would get together on Saturdays and clean up neighborhoods. And it went from that to... it was abandoned houses on our street. And that didn't exist on our street, everybody owned their own home. And it went from that to abandoned houses. So, it was very, very difficult to see the transition of Youngstown.

TW: That is a very interesting time to go through. My dad also went through all that and he always tells me about the different changes and stuff that Youngstown went through. Did that affect your outlook on life, like did it cause you to want to help your community more?

KM: Absolutely. Throughout high school I was in the top 10. My senior year I got senioritis and dropped down to the top eleven. And realizing that in the yearbook, which I was the editor of the yearbook, that you don't get a spot for number eleven. You only get a spot for number ten. But my goal was to go get educated, learn as much as I can to bring back to help my community. That was my whole goal initially, coming out of high school.

TW: Were you a first-generation college student?

KM: Not at all.

TW: Did your family have any influence on you going to college?

KM: Absolutely, my uncle- my mother's brother- was the first Black lieutenant for Youngstown Police Department. He had a PhD. My mother's sister had a master's degree. My mother's other sister had a bachelor's degree. My mother had an associate degree and then went to the Police Academy. So, education was a given. My family influenced me to go to a HBCU. So, at my first school, I got a full ride to Central State. And I was like absolutely not. I'm not going to Central cause to me, Central State is what it is now- its...subpar education. But I wanted to go to a HBCU. Because of my grades in high school, I got a full ride to YSU in the University Scholars' program. I did not want to stay in Youngstown. I refused to stay in Youngstown during that time. I had to get out of Youngstown. I had to.

So, out of high school, I went to Delaware State University in Dover, Delaware and spent a semester there that changed my entire life. It was everything that I thought a HBCU was supposed to be. At that time, my parents had separated. So my mom was paying tuition by herself. And to pay out of state tuition, I had been working at least two jobs since my junior year. So to go to Delaware State with no income- I couldn't work my first year and couldn't have my car my first year. So financially it was impossible for me to stay. So I came back home and started YSU in the Fall, which I never wanted to come to YSU. It wasn't because of the educational standards of YSU, it was simply because it was in my backyard, and I didn't respect it. Like YSU didn't get no respect, as university. I didn't know how good of a school it was until I got here. Other people came from all over the world to come here. But I knew I needed to get out of Youngstown.

So in leaving, going to Delaware State, then coming back here, the financial opportunities were no longer there. I no longer had a full ride as a University Scholar. Like that ship had sailed. That was gone. So, it was, ok now how do I go about paying for college? Even though I think at that time school here was \$4500. It was like great! I graduated from YSU with \$10,000 worth of student loans. Like that's it! Like for all four years. I was here for four years! It was great! However, the things at YSU that I was not prepared for in coming back here... Like, South was a predominantly Black high school- Black and Hispanic. We had probably a handful of white students, which we hung out with everybody, like it was like accepting of everybody. In my neighborhood I had white neighbors. We all played the same, it was still the same because socioeconomically we were all on the same level. So I guess I'll say it wasn't the racial disparities between the families because we were all of the same financial level.

Leaving Delaware and coming back here, Youngstown; stayed my first semester here Fall of 94', was a complete and total traumatic experience to me. It was the first time I had been the only Black person in a room ever, like in my entire life. I had never been the only Black person in a room! But I had no idea what that felt like! And I remember I took a history class and my history professor looked at me and expected me to answer for all Black people, "So Kofee, tell us about the Black experience. What's your opinion? You know, tell us from the point of view as a Black person, tell us what you guys think." And I was like, what? I have never in my life had to speak for my culture. It wasn't like I didn't know I was Black, but the first time I experienced racism I was 17. It wasn't like it was an everyday part of my life. I was 17 years old, you know, going to a restaurant and I was discriminated against. I had never had to deal with some of the questions how they were proposed to me, until I got here... and I felt like I was an alien *here*.

I finished my semester at Delaware State with a 3.79. So I took all my basic classes- my Englishs, my maths. I took all the basic stuff, right? At an HBCU, even out of state, they send home deficiencies. Yeah so, if come midterms if you were failing a class, they didn't tell you. Now [today] you have to do the FERPA page and all that stuff to tell your parents what was going on. They didn't do none of that. They sent my grades as of midterms home to my mother, who was paying out of state wages, as a Youngstown police officer working a zillion jobs. So, come midterms at Delaware State, I was failing at least three of my classes, but I was playing spades all day... I was playing spades all day. I was kicking it, like I was having the whole Black college experience. And then when she got my grades and called me and was like, "I'm cutting off everything." Like we didn't have cellphones, we had phone cards. To contact anybody outside of a quarter phone call, you needed a phone card. So she cut off my phone card, so I had no contact with nobody back at home and I had nothing else to do but study, because if I didn't get good grades, she was going to kill me. Like literally she was going to kill me. So I had to study. And I brought my grades up. And coming here my first semester, I don't know... I was looking at my transcripts the other day. If I got a 2.5, it was barely a 2.5. The best semester that I'd done at YSU was my last semester here, and I think it was like a 3.2. My grades went from 2.51, I think one semester I got a 1.8 but my grades never made it to what they were my first semester at Delaware State.

So, I go on to graduate school and life was lifin' and now I own a counseling agency, so I study people for a living. So, and looking at the behaviors, trying to figure out what was going on then in my life and what was the major difference between three months in a state that I knew nobody. I knew nobody in Dover, Delaware, knew nobody in the state of Delaware. How can I go there and thrive and be down the street from my house and fail? What was the difference? And the difference was, I was an alien. I was an alien. I was here at YSU, and I wasn't seen. And how I was seen, if I was seen, was as the Black girl who sits in the second row. I was never known as Kofee Lilly, until I chose a major. When I chose a major, I came in as a psychology student and again not understanding systematic racism because I had never experienced it, like I didn't know what it was. Me and my white classmate sit next to each other. We are taking the same notes. I take the notes, she copied my notes. We take a quiz off the same notes. Our quizzes are almost identical, and she gets a C and I get a D, or she'd get a B and I get a D. So, I didn't understand it and I didn't know who to talk to about that. I didn't learn about the African American Student Affairs, like none of them, until my last quarter here at YSU. When they was like we need to know all the Black students who are graduating because we want to have a separate ceremony for them. I was like, where y'all been the last four months? I needed y'all. I needed the support just to know that I wasn't an alien. I didn't know how to interact with an all-White world, who was not on the same

social economic plane as me. I didn't know how to navigate that. I didn't know the language. I didn't know how to do that. I didn't know what I was supposed to do and not supposed to do without losing me. So, it was like okay, do I assimilate and lose me, or do I say "fight the power" and "f the man" and I'm going to stay over here - but I'm failing either way. I had to try to figure out how to become a part of YSU's culture without losing who I was.

So, after fighting to keep my grades up, trying to figure out what I wanted to do: if I wanted to stay in Psychology or if I wanted to do Religious Studies. Because I was getting D's in Psychology and I was getting A's in Religious Studies. So I was like, okay, but what am I supposed to do with a Religious Studies degree? Like this is stupid. So undergrad is just going to be for fun? I'm going to graduate with a... What are you doin' with this? Nothing! Like I can't do nothing with this. So after that battle, and working on my grades sincerely, I moved back on campus. I became an RA and moved on campus. So that helped with the assimilation for me because I was one of the first RA's when Cafaro House opened. Cafaro House opened. This was in '95- almost 30 years ago. That is so sick. So anyway, I am the RA for a group of Honors students. I have a wing of pre-med students. I have a wing of engineering students. And I don't remember having any Black students in my dorm- like at all. And if I did have any Black students, they were African. Africans and African Americans are not the same thing, at all.

I was on an island, but at the same time they were too. So it felt a little bit easier because I have a bunch of nerds who, I'm used to rocking with the nerds because I was one until I came to YSU. I have a group of nerds who were trying to navigate life on campus, life outside of their parents' house, and their education. So that became good for me because I was able to help. I've been a helper my whole life. In becoming an RA, I was like "Okay Kofee, you gotta become a part of campus life. Like you gotta do something. You can't just be mad because everybody's white and you ain't. You can't. So what are you going to do to do to claim this school as yours?" I joined the cheerleading squad as the mascot. I've never been athletic in my life, but a friend of mine was like, "You know what? We're looking for another mascot. Do you want to be a mascot?" And I was like, "No!" He said to just come to tryouts. So I went to tryouts and of course nobody else was there but me, so I got the job! So for two years I was the mascot. And we had a very good winning football season those last two years. So I got to travel with the football team all over the country and it brought a sense of school pride. Being Pete or Penny brought a sense of, "This is my school" versus "I'm just here, just trying to finish school." It became, "Ok, I'm a Penguin." Literally, but I am a penguin. It became more tolerable to be here. I won't say that I was proud to be a Penguin, but it became something that was tolerable. My Religious Studies department is what saved me and allowed me to graduate from YSU. Because, I don't know... Have you graduated yet?

TW: No, I graduate next spring.

KM: YSU had been notorious forever to wait until people get to their last year of school- like they're still doing it- to be like, "Oh, you're graduating? Oh, you know you need like two sciences." And you already have a full load. I'm like, I've been here like four years! Y'all couldn't have said, you're taking that astronomy class again for the third time. Instead of taking that, you know you're still going to need another science. But no, they wait until the end. And I was like, I hate it here. So, my last quarter at YSU, I think I took 20 hours. I was going along, getting my little 12, 16 [hours]... Just give me a full-time status. Until it was like, yeah if you don't do this, you aren't graduating. And I was like yeah, I've got to get out of here on time. Like I cannot be back here, because the next year... I graduated '98, so Fall of '98 they

changed from quarters to semesters. And I was like yeah, I'm going to be here forever. This is going to take forever. Whatever I need to do, let's go now. But at that time, everything felt like a racial slap. At that time, I couldn't figure out what was the system for everybody, and what was the system for me. You know what I mean? Because I felt as if this whole little world just hated me and I'm trying to figure out how to navigate my way through this little world that is completely and totally brand new for me. And I was angry. So I'm like, It's just me. They just hate me. And it's like, no, they do every *single* person like this. Like they don't care what color you are. It's just the YSU way. It's like, oh yeah, we forgot to tell you. You need an extra math class. And it's always the class you don't ever want to take. At that time, I was like, I don't care. I'm going to do whatever I need to do to just to graduate. I'll take a zillion classes and figure it out. At that time, I had moved back off campus, had an apartment. I had just started working for Sojourner House, the domestic violence shelter. I was working there, seeing all kinds of stuff, doing my internship and trying to figure out where I was going for grad school because I had a Religious Studies degree that meant absolutely nothing. It meant that I graduated- yay! Could not get a job. So grad school was a must. So the Religious Studies department pushed me to figure out what it was that I want to do and helped me navigate to get there. They became the advisors. I met with my advisor once, twice a year because I had to, but the Religious Studies department was like alright, this and this is what you need to take. My professor's like, "Alright, I'm teaching this in fall quarter, I'm teaching this winter quarter, I'm teaching this spring quarter, and I need you to be in all of my classes because you being in my classes is going to bring your GPA up, so you can be able to apply to graduate school. Because right now, looking at your grades, there is no graduate school that's going to take you." So that extra support was needed, and my Religious Studies professors were awesome. I think one is just retired, Dr. Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez.

TW: He is an awesome man.

KM: He is! I had him, and I had his wife [Sarah Lown], but she wasn't Palmer-Fernandez. She didn't take his name. I had Dr. Wan-Tatah. I had Dr. Tessier, who taught Women's Studies and Religious Studies. It was Dr. Thomas Shipka. He was the dean of the department, and I remember going to his office and just bawling my eyes out. I'm like, "I don't get it," and he was like, "You have to make a choice: if you want to stay a psychology student or if you're going just become a Religious Studies student. Whichever way you go, you get a degree. You'll make your decision in grad school. You'll figure out what you're going to do with your life in grad school." It was because of professors like that here that turned the institution of YSU into, "alright these are my people". You know what I mean? Even though it was very uncomfortable, YSU taught me how to navigate life. It did! It taught me how to navigate life because in reality I'm going to be the only Black person in the room, so I've got to get used to it now.

I am on my second counseling agency owning. The last agency that I owned was substance abuse and mental health. We had offices throughout the state of Ohio, and as the owner my position was the Senior Vice President. So, I went around the state of Ohio and did the statistics on different communities and seeing who needed our services in that community. We had offices in Chillicothe, Lima, Dayton, Columbus, Cincinnati, St Clairsville, Steubenville, Warren... I'm missing some places...anyway. Most of the places that we set up shop at was all white. And this was no different than YSU. So I had to be confident enough in myself to not loose who I am, because in the helping field, if you go to help somebody and you're not your authentic self, the person who you are trying to help smells that a mile away. So, I had to be me and still be open enough for people to want me to help them. If you know anything about Saint Clairsville, Ohio. Saint Clairsville is 20 miles from Wheeling, West Virginia. It is a

very affluent neighborhood. They have oil and gas subsidiaries down there that get a check for \$350,000 every quarter. They've got unbelievably mad money. And I'm like, ok why would these rich white people want my help? I'm just a little Black girl from Youngstown. Why would ya'll want my help? I was able to go down there and do very well by simply just being me. By not being intimidated because of their socioeconomic status, but looking at the problem and just helping with the problem. As the same way as going to Steubenville. Our office was literally located on the worst part of Steubenville, where we have prostitutes walking up and down in front of our offices all day long. And how do I help them? To coming back home, starting the agency I have now which helps intercity kids. So it was the finding my voice and figuring out who I was despite where I was that I learnt here. I didn't want to learn it, but it was needed and necessary because the path that life has taken me on. I needed to be able to be faced with the question of, "So Koffee what is your opinion for the Black experience?" I can now say, "I can't speak for the billions of Black people, but I can tell you mine. I can tell you my experience. I can tell you my opinion." And that's all I could do. I don't have to carry the weight, or feel the pressure of having to speak for a whole culture of people. I know you just asked me one question and I gave you this whole thing.

TW: That was wonderful. I enjoyed listening to you. I have an important question, something you said I really related to. As a young Black woman going to a predominantly white school, where it's still like that when I go to my classes and it's only me and like two other Black people. What advice would you give those kids that are having difficulty finding themselves in those kinds of environments and they're not used to them.

KM: Yeah, college is a very interesting time. It is a time where you are trying to figure out who you are as [you're] going from adolescence to young adulthood. You're having more responsibilities. You don't have to answer to your parents anymore. So it's a time that is interesting for everybody and understanding that now that is a time that's interesting for everybody, it's not just for a particular culture of people. I think the hardest thing that you have to do is figure out who you are, and what you believe in, and what you don't believe in, what you're willing to fight for, and what ain't worth your time. I spent so much time being angry that I didn't take the time to enjoy the fact that I was in college. You know, I had some friends who were in prison. I didn't take the time to fully understand that college is a snapshot of the real world. So if you can't handle it in a classroom, you can't expect to handle it in the boardroom. Being a woman business owner, some things that I would normally fuss and fight and get upset about, now I smile and figure out a strategy for. Looking at the big scheme of things, you're not going to be in that class no more than what, 12 weeks max? In the big scheme of things those people don't matter. Learn what you need to learn. Get the grade that you need to get, and get out of there.

Looking at the big scheme of things, the end goal is to graduate, period. And you can't allow you or a professor or anybody else to stop you from that end goal. It's just an obstacle and that obstacle is always there to help you learn something about you. So if you are in a classroom and you feel uncomfortable, good. I now get scared when I'm *comfortable* in rooms. Okay, if I'm comfortable in this room, what am I learning? I don't have to learn anything when I'm just comfortable. But when I'm uncomfortable, it causes me to shift. It causes me to be more aware. It causes me to actually try. Because for me, without the pressure, I ain't doing nothing. I am just telling you, honest to God. Like, I don't got nothing to do today! But I know I have a challenge, that this professor doesn't like me for whatever reason. And I've had professors who didn't like me that had nothing to do with me. I've had colleagues who didn't like

me that didn't have nothing to do with me. But now I am in a point where I can ask, did I do something to you to offend you, is it me? Like if I did something to you to offend you, please let me know what I done because I need to apologize. But if I didn't, please tell me why every time I ask a question you huff, or every time that I raise my hand you roll your eyes, because I am taking it offensively and I don't want to do that. You know, you could be going through something else and it might not have anything to do with me. Or it may have something to do to with me, and I need to know how adjust my life to either avoid you or try to figure out how to heal this. You know? But the biggest thing is figuring out how much energy you want to put into it. If any professor is going to make a difference in your grade, go ahead buddy. I don't care if you roll your eyes. I don't care. Every question I know the answer to- [raises hand]. Oh, I know the answer to that too. [raises hand]. So, it doesn't matter.

There was this girl when I was cheering here at YSU. She was the captain of the cheerleaders, and because they didn't know what else to do with me, I went with the cheerleaders. Who knew the mascot went with the cheerleaders? Like I don't do none of what ya'll doing, and I don't want to do none of that. But the captain hated me. Like just because they would be working their butt off and I'll just be sitting there eating chips. I just got to make sure that I can carry this suit around. So she could not stand me. We would be going on trips, and she had a weird look on her face. I was like, I didn't do anything to you. So I left, moved around a minute, and when I came back to Youngstown in 2006, we worked at the same place. And I was like "Oh, here we go. This is going to be good." First, she came with a snark and I'm like, "I ain't 19 no more. I ain't 20-nothing no more! Like, listen, this isn't what we're about to do." So I called her to my office, and I'm like "What's the matter? Is it just me, or do you just hate everybody?" And she was like, "I don't hate anybody." And after we started talking, she just had a resting bitch face that was just her. It was just her. It had nothing to do with me, it was just her. And by the time she left, we were pretty cool. We could have decent conversations, not just about clients but we could have decent conversations about life. And I'm like, "You hated me since YSU" and she was like, "No I didn't. Actually, I was a little jealous of you because you could still look how you looked and eat chips, and we were working our butts off and still had flabby arms." I was working at FedEx loading stuff all night long, that's why my arms looked like that! Because I had worked all night long! I've done the workout already. It was just that we didn't have the conversation then because I was coming from my point of view, my skewed point of view of the world at that time and she was coming from her's, you know what I mean? So, it stopped us from actually communicating then, but luckily throughout our career we got the chance to have a conversation.

TW: Now, what advice would you give to someone like me? I have a hard time controlling my temper when it comes to people. I don't tolerate people. Like if a girl was making a face at me, I would have been said something to her a long time ago.

KM: Yeah, from elementary to high school I went from that- I was angry. I was fighting. I fought a lot. Even though my grades were great, I was the one who was in the office for fighting. I realized that: 1. I can't fight the world. 2. choose your battles. 3. are they worth my time and energy? When I got here, I was intimidated. I was completely and totally intimidated. I didn't know how to cuss somebody out without using cuss words. I didn't know how to be assertive. It was either passive or aggressive. I had no idea what assertive meant or how you do that. So I had to learn. And being a counselor- actually when you teach other people how to do stuff you actually get some of it back. So, I had to learn how to start practicing some of the things that I was teaching other people. Because I didn't want to be the angry Black woman. I wanted people to hear what I was actually saying, not think, "every time she comes in



the room it's going to be an argument". So, I had to learn how to be assertive and be heard without being threatening. You know what I mean? Are they worth it? There is a way to say it to everybody without being an angry Black woman.

TW: Yeah, that's my biggest fear right now.

KM: You don't got to fight the world. You don't. Because you are going to lose. And in the process, what you will lose is going to lose you. You know? My whole goal was to come back to help my community, so it doesn't matter. In the process of my life over these last 25 years, I've learnt what my community actually entails. My community doesn't just only make up Black people. My community doesn't just make up poor people. It doesn't just make up the City of Youngstown. Because its like I'm from Youngstown. I don't care. It's not just that. It has to encompass every aspect of me. So I can't be so closed to people. I now extend grace. So you're having a bad day. Tell me about your bad day because you are getting mighty fly at the mouth and that doesn't have anything to do with me, because I just walked in the room. And you don't even know me, so it's not towards me and I can't take this personal. Tell me what the problem is. Because it's a problem, and it is coming towards me, so I think I have a right to help you with this problem. You don't have to cuss them out. Doing it with grace and love, and that's real hard when you're used to punching people in the mouth. It is.

TW: You pretty much answered everything. You told your story beautifully. I didn't have to ask for anything. You answered every question every time you talked. Is there anything else that you would like to add, any other advice that you'd like to give for the young Black students here?

KM: I think for young Black students, not just here but for everywhere, I am the biological mother of one. I have two bonus sons and I have seven children who I'm responsible for, who call me mom. So I have a total of ten kids. And they range from ages 16 to 31, so it's a whole bunch of them. Four of them are currently in college. Five have graduated, and I have one that's in high school. I have one that's White, two that's Hispanic, and the rest are African American. I'm learning a lot about college now, that I did not realize when I was in college. It's a *process*. It's a process designed to help you grow into adulthood. People turn 18 and think they get to college and now I'm grown. You're not, and you're not expected to be. Because grown-ups don't have a dorm. Grown-ups don't have a meal plan. I keep having this conversation like, you're not a grown-up, you don't even pay the phone bill, and you don't even know how much the water bill is. Until you know how much the water bill is, you're not an adult. You're just not, and it's okay. Take this time and use it as what it's supposed to be: a time to figure out who you are and what you like and what you don't like, what you stand for and what you don't stand for. College is a *great* place to figure out *all* that stuff, all of it, but you have an adult that's around you to help you.

Something else I learned in my 40s: Adults are there to guide you. They're not there to parent you and tell you no you can't do that. That's stupid. No, we are actually here like the library. We're there as references that you can go look up. Okay, tell me about this, this, and this. You go, you ask some adult-any of us! Somebody will know something- more than you know, or can tell you who to go to that knows more than they know. Use adults. Like, we are not there to just tell you you're stupid and we don't listen. No! We are there to help guide you to the next level, just like my parents are there to guide me to the next level. I hit this certain age and I have hot flashes all day long and I call my mother like, "Tell me when it's going to stop. I'm dying!" and she's like, "Yeah, it does like you're dying. Just go do this and this. You'll be fine." The next age group is designed to help you with the stage that you're at. Y'all get out here and think you don't need nobody. Y'all just out here free, and I just got to prove that I'm an

adult. Prove it to who? Like, adults want to go back and be like “Can I get some help with this? I just need some help.” And it’s okay. It’s okay to ask for help. It’s okay to not know. The older kids, the over 25’s now call us and ask me and my husband for advice. That 19 to 23, not so much. We got to look at Instagram to figure out where they’ve been. Now you don’t have to say where you’re going, or what time you’re going to be back, but I’m just saying if your car is over in a ditch or you’re gone, I don’t even know what you had on when you left the house. If you just come up missing... It’s just a courtesy. I’m the second oldest person in the house. When I leave the say, I say “Hey, I’m about to run to the store. I’ll be back.” I don’t have to tell y’all because I’m grown. So now somebody kidnaps you and I don’t know if you’re at work or if you’re next door. It’s the digging in to be an adult. It sucks here. Don’t rush the process. It sucks. It sucks beyond your phone bill and all the other little stuff you all got to deal with. Not to trivialize that because your age group deals with a lot of stuff that my age group never dealt with. However, we are still a reference. We might not know specifically, this and this and this because I never been through none of that. But maybe you can go talk to this person, because they might know. So, if I would say anything to the students of YSU it would be utilize your resources. Find a professor. Find a cafeteria worker. Find a janitor. Find somebody that you can talk to that ain’t your age. Y’all just sharing stupidity amongst yourselves.

CN: I was wondering, who was your uncle that was a police lieutenant?

KM: His name was Leonard Williams.

CN: I’m also wondering, it seems like you had a small group before you really got into the Religious Studies program. How did you find that small group? Who are these friends, like the one who told you about the mascot?

KM: [In] High school, I was part of everything. Like you name it, I was a part of it. And coming back here for college I was like I ain’t acting like I know nobody. Just because I was on YSU campus, I felt like I was an alien by myself, but I wasn’t. It was still people who I knew. It wasn’t a part of my original high school crew. It wasn’t a part of the people I would ever hang out with, but it still was people who I knew. So I had to [say], “Alright I know two people at that table. It’s lunchtime and I’m going to sit with them,” or we have this class together so I’m going to talk to them about whatever. I had to intentionally make myself vulnerable enough to get out of my comfort zone and be friends with people I knew but didn’t know.

CN: Looking back, my college experience was the same where you got to keep doing it over and over again, eventually it’s not as scary. And you’re just like “it’s what I gotta do today.”

KM: I kept saying to myself, you went away to a whole other college in a whole other state, and you knew nobody, and somehow you made friends there. So there’s no reason why you can’t make friends at YSU. You’re at YSU. You’re down the street from your house so it’s not like you don’t know anybody, so just step out and say hi.

CN: So you were never a part of the Black Student Union or never did things with the Black Studies Department or anything like that?

KM: No. No Greek orgs. None of that.

CN: And you didn’t even know they were on campus?

KM: No! I knew they had Black Greeks but Black Student Union, no.

TW: I'm finally going to join Black Student Union this year.

KM: Good! That would be good! Actually, one of my daughters who is a senior at Westminster [College], she joined the Black Student Union there three times and quit four times. The one we have in high school, she is starting a Black Student Union at her high school. And I was like, "Okay that's pretty cool. Tell me why you want to do this." She said "Because we are in a PWI. So being there, its certain things we need to relate to one another. And there's more things that we can do as one voice versus a whole bunch of voices." I was like, "Alright, cool. Talk to your friends at school and get it done."

CN: Well, thank you so much for coming in today.

KM: Thank you guys for having me.