

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

Black Student Experience project

OH 2260

GERALD JARRETT

Interviewed by

TILISIA WILLIAMS

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Interviewee: Gerald Jarrett

Interviewer: Tilisia Williams

Subject: YSU History - Black Student Experience

Date: August 7, 2023

TW: This is an interview with Gerald Jarrett for the Youngstown State University project on the Black Student Experience. This interview will be conducted using Webex. Today's date is August 7th, 2023, and my name is Tilisia Williams.

Hello Mr. Jarrett.

GJ: Hello.

TW: I'm sorry we were late. We were doing another interview right before yours started. So, I apologize for being late.

GJ: No need, no need. I understand.

TW: Let's start off with where'd you grow up? Where are you from?

GJ: I am from—originally? When I went to Youngstown?

TW: Mhm.

GJ: I was from a town called Nutley in New Jersey.

TW: What do you remember about where you grew up?

GJ: What do I remember about where I grew up?

TW: Mhm.

GJ: I grew up in a town of approximately 33,000 people and Blacks made up less than one-half of one percent of the population. When I graduated from high school in 1965, it was a class of twenty-two Blacks, two thousand whites. So, I know what it's like being the "speck." In fact, when I went to Youngstown, there were more students at Youngstown than there were people in my town. There were approximately 37,000 students, if you counted the [recording cuts out], which were mostly the commuters back then. Like I said, there were more students there than there were in my town... and there were more Black students than we had in our town. So, being a minority, in a minority... yeah.

TW: Are you a first-generation college student?

GJ: Yes, I am.

TW: What influenced you, or encouraged you, to come to college?

GJ: To come to where?

TW: What made you decide that you wanted to go to college?

GJ: Oh, I knew in junior high that I wanted to go to college, and that I wanted to be an attorney. That was my goal and that was what I pursued. Whether my counselors wanted me to in high school... Back then, my guidance counselors told me I wasn't college material, and I needed to go get a trade—which they did to *many* of the Black students when I went to high school there. And I told them, no, I was going to college. When I came back after my freshman year [of

college], I was asked about my guidance counselor, well, I asked about my *own* teacher. There was a long line of students. I don't know if you guys still do it. You go back to see your teachers and so forth. I went back. And I stood in line. I listened to my old teacher asking students, "Where are you going to school?" and so forth. And when he got to me, he looked at me and said, "Where are you working?" And I said, "I'm not working. I'm going to college." He said, "Must not be much of a college."

TW: Wow.

GJ: Yeah. Needless to say, I didn't pay much attention to him. I said my goal was to be an attorney. At the time, I was more of a Civil Rights type attorney—not attorney, a Civil Rights person. By the time I got to Youngstown [University], I was a militant. Point blank. Don't fight for words. I was Vice President of the Black Student Union. The person who was with me, who helped start the Black Student Union, was an individual named Gerald Burks [class of 1970, Accounting], who is no longer with us. He died during one of the Galveston, Texas hurricanes. His home got flooded and he didn't get out.

That was the two of us. He went to law school the year before me, and I went the year after him. While at Youngstown, we helped start the Black Student Union. [Alfred] Pugsley was the President [of the University] at the time. We wanted Black Studies. We had no Black Studies, no anything. We were pushing for Black Studies. And we went to President Pugsley's office to sit down with him. He was famous for his cigar. He'd light a cigar, and when he would finish his cigar, he was finished with *whoever* he was meeting with. Well, he lit a cigar, and he met with us. And when he got finished with his cigar he said, "Well, I've listened to you" and we're sitting there. [Jerrett said] "No, we're not leaving." He said, "Well, I've been polite." I said, "Yeah, but you haven't answered our question. We want a Black Studies program." And he said, "Well, I would like for you to meet our demands." Ultimately, the school did, Pugsley did. Al Bright, who was the art professor, was appointed as the head of Black Studies. And we went from there.

In fact, I transferred into Youngstown to be exact. So, when I transferred in 1968—March '68 - it was the same period of time when Martin Luther King was killed. And the thing that was outside of Kilcawley Hall was a stone, was a rock. I don't know if it's still there or not.

TW: Mhm. (Affirming his question)

GJ: And you could paint your slogan. So, we Blacks painted "The shame of it all." White students came back two days later and tried to burn the rock. Someone should've told them you can't burn a rock. It's not going anywhere.

But, hey. And we did a lot of civic activities on campus—very active. Some things I was active in: I was the photographer for Black students in the yearbook. Back in the yearbook in the year 1971 – and I happen to own one – you will find a poem in there that I wrote. So, yeah, I was active. I was very active when we protested the [Vietnam] war and protested the treatment of Blacks on campus. The police were out there taking pictures of us, and I was out there taking pictures of them to memorialize how they were treating us.

I don't know how many Black students you have now at YSU. But I know every year they would take in possibly 900 Black students. After the first quarter, it was down to 600 left. And after the third quarter, it was down to three [300]. And that was the history—from the time I got there until the time I graduated. Nine hundred in, 300 left. But we had a wonderful relationship. You know, I enjoyed it.

I was a member of a fraternity. The one and only - Kappa Alpha Psi. I still have fond memories of Youngstown. I don't have poor memories. Youngstown had its problems, but on campus we really didn't have problems. In fact, we were the only fraternity on campus at the time, HBCU [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] or Black fraternity. The Ques [Omega Psi Phi] weren't on campus and the Alphas [Alpha Phi Alpha] weren't on campus – just us. And I pledged. In fact, I pledged and went over in 1968. [I was the] Lone pledge! I was the only pledge on line. [That was an] Interesting experience. When I first came to Youngstown, you only had one men's dorm. That was Kilcawley [House]. (If you hear a dog bark, that's one of mine. It's the oldest one. She's going to bark at anybody moving out in the street. So, she must hear me talk, so she wandered through to see if everything's okay.)

My experiences throughout, from whether it was high school, or whether it was Youngstown. [Tells his dog to lay down.] Whether it was high school, college, you battle. You fought, you persevered, and you succeeded. You know, I had professors that believed in me, and that helped. One of the ones was my chemistry professor. I don't know why he liked me, but he did. He used to give me these little pep talks, and it was Dr. Scribner. He had this real squeaky voice. He'd say "Mr. Jarrett, I don't think your parents sent you here for this," he'd say. And I'd tell him, "No, Dr. Scribner." And he would expect me to do more, expect me to push more. He really liked me because when I pledged and went over, they [fraternity brothers] shaved my head. And before, when I was a pledge, I had an afro. And when I came into class that day, he looked up and said, "Young man, I think you're in the wrong class." I was shaking my head. I didn't want anybody to look. Shaking my head, "no, no, no, no." And he's like, "Yes, you're in the wrong class." Until he recognized me and said, "Oh, come on down front here. This is what an individual's supposed to look like." And from there on, he just said, "Hey, you are an individual." He didn't realize that was part of the fraternity pledge yet, and I wasn't going to wake him up. But yeah, he liked that part.

I also wrote for the school newspaper [the Jambar]. You know, I had a column that I wrote. And I did the Black section of the yearbook. [I was] Just all around having a good experience. I was

instrumental in the hiring of a professor called Dominic Capeci. Dr. Capeci was the first Black Studies professor [hired]. And we got along great. Didn't hurt that I knew all the subjects! All the books he was assigning, I had already read. I knew everything that he was giving us, yeah. I excelled in his class. And he was open-minded. You know, there's a lot of things that we did. The professors, back then, fraternized with the students. And they would meet with us, and you know, we'd go to their homes. I'll never forget when we had Charles Hamilton, and I can't think of the other one—for Black Power [speakers for Black History month, February 1971]. It was winter and we had this after event at Al Bright's home. And it was winter. I mean, it snowed. The snow was up onto our thighs, it was so deep. And afterwards, I drove. It was me, and then my girlfriend, and Dr. Capeci. Dr. Capeci rode with me while I dropped my girlfriend off. We were headed for Al Bright's. Got stuck in the snow, and Dr. Capeci got out and pushed—to get me out of the snow. We strolled across town and went and waded. We couldn't even get to Al Bright's house by car, but we had to wade up the hill to his house. And it was that type of camaraderie, interaction between students and faculty. Good relationships.

TW: And what are you doing now?

GJ: What am I doing now? Let me give you a history of me, so you can know. When I graduated from Youngstown State, I got accepted to law school- contrary to what high school folks thought! Got accepted to law school, Seton Hall, which is in north New Jersey. I came home to go to law school, graduated 1974. [I] Did a clerkship with a Superior Court criminal court judge. And then I practiced private. I had a private practice for a couple of years, then became one of the chief hearing officers for the Department of Labor and Industry in New Jersey. That was fun, but then I ended up on the bench. I became a judge in the state of New Jersey. I was an administrative law judge. I hated it. That was no fun. Three years and I had enough, I quit. I came back to private practice, and uh, then moved on.

I became one of the attorneys with the New Jersey State Assembly. So, they had an office of attorneys handling the courts and banking. Then, went from there to a senator's office. That's where I finished up. I was there for eleven years. Very successful in my practice. I didn't lose too many. I guess they were glad to see me go, but I left there. I moved here to North Carolina in 1997. And I came to teach at Saint Augustine's University [in Raleigh, NC]. It's an HBCU. I left there and went to Shaw [University]. I was at Shaw University when Eastern Carolina University asked me to head up their Criminal Justice Graduate School distance education program. They wanted me to put a program in place, and I designed the program. I did the rules and guidelines and everything together. It was kind of difficult for the professors down there to understand the difference between distance ed[ucation] and face-to-face, brick-and-mortar [teaching]. It didn't quite work, because they wanted to run face-to-face like it were a distance [course]. And they're not quite the same. And I was there for two years. Then I left and went back to Shaw

[University]. I was commuting 100 miles a day, each way [working at Eastern Carolina University]. So, a total of 200 miles a day.

TW: (shocked expression)

GJ: Uh huh. Back and forth to work, five days a week. And it was putting a lot of miles on me, and a lot of miles on my car.

It was getting to be a bit much. Both my boys – my two youngest boys – went and graduated from Eastern Carolina. You know, it was good. I came back.

I have, all total, four kids. My oldest now, she'll be 50. Let's see, this is August? Two months, [she'll be] 50. She, at the beginning of this year, kept telling me, "I'm not 50. I'm not 50." She's 50. And, my next oldest son, I guess he's 48. And then I have my two youngest – one is 36, and 34.

I spend my time, I'm retired. I said at my last job, "Don't call me, and believe me, I won't call you." I'm retired, this is too much for me. You'll get there. Retirement is good. I get to travel. I didn't have that opportunity much, and now, I get to travel. [I] just got back from Alaska. I don't know if you saw the news, but the glacier collapsed.

TW: Yes.

GJ: I got pictures of that when I was in Alaska. I was just there two and a half weeks ago, so I have pictures of that glacier before it collapsed. I visited a whole bunch of other glaciers there. And I went to Africa last year.

TW: What was that experience like, going to Africa?

GJ: Oh! Oh.... I was on a missionary trip. A buddy of mine is a bishop in church, down in the British Virgin Islands, Tortola. He was my roommate—or he wasn't. He rented a room from me in my house in New Jersey. We were close through the church, and he had always been after me, "Hey, you need to go to Africa with me. You need to go to Africa." I made all the excuses why I wasn't going. "I gotta work," I'd tell him. "I don't have a passport." My wife made me go for that passport and I wasn't working. As soon as I got my passport, she called him.

She said, "Ivan, he's got his passport." He said, "Put him on the phone." I got on the phone, and he said, "Look, here's what I want you to do. When I get off this phone, I want you to look at the email that's coming to you. No more excuses." The first email was for me to come down to the British Virgin Islands, Tortola—all expenses paid on them. Then, going to Africa, after he was asking me to make this trip, my wife sort of forced it. Next thing I know, I was going to Africa.

You know, you have your trepidations. You know, we hear these rumors like "Well they don't like you over there. They're going to mistreat you," whatever. We went to a church where my buddy, the bishop—I never call him the bishop, I always call him Ivan. The bishop had made many visits there. His church in the Virgin Islands had developed schools and churches [there]. So, we were going down, he took me to one of the churches, and there was a group of us. I sort of laughed, it was me and another male, and all of the rest were female. We get there, and he's introducing those who hadn't been there before, and he gets to me and introduces me to the preacher. The preacher says—the first thing out of his mouth was "Welcome home, my brother." It brings tears to my eyes every time I say it, because it was a warm feeling. It felt like I was home. I had not had any connection with Africa before that happened. I've had students from Africa, but this was the first touch. The first thing he did was welcome me home to Africa, which was our home.

I was supposed to go back this year, but I went to Alaska. We decided we're up going to Alaska this year. Next year, I'm staying home. We're not going on a trip. The following year we're working on. In fact, this trip we went on was a group of 16. Traveling in a group of 16 on a cruise. We'd run into white folks, and they're saying "Is this a church group? Are y'all in a choir?" No, we're just friends. My wife went to school with most of them at UNC [University of North Carolina]. It was that group, and we'd say "Yes, our wives are all graduates from UNC. They all went to school together." They were just amazed—here are these people. We traveled as a group, took excursions as a group, ate as a group, and we all seemed to make it to the cafe line on or about the same time! Just had good times.

Let me jump back. I saw one of the questions, "Why did you come?" It's really easy—the year is 1967, the Vietnam War.

TW: Yes.

GJ: I had dodged [the draft]. I had gone to another school, and said I hated it there. I dropped out and I said, "Ah, I'll go back to work." I had dodged the draft board. Finagled around. I had a friend who worked at the draft board, and she would always shuffle my name to the bottom of the pile. Finally I got this in letter, "You tell him this is it. Either he is getting into school by

March, or he's coming here to Uncle Sam." So, I drew a 600-mile radius [from New Jersey], and said, "Whatever school's in there, I'm applying." And I applied to Youngstown.

Youngstown was the first one [university] that said come. And I said, "I'm coming." I knew nothing about Youngstown, knew nothing about Ohio. But when I got there, I made a lot of friends. My roommate was from eastern Pennsylvania, and he and I are still friends. His wife and my wife—still friends.

I like to golf, and so does he and his wife. We go down to Pinehurst [Golf Resort in North Carolina] four times a year. So, the relationships that I developed in Youngstown are still strong. A lot of the guys I met, mostly fraternity—we stuck together, we contact each other, we see each other. I had two friends of mine, from my hometown, who came after I went there for a couple of years. Youngstown has a comfortable... it has a good feeling. I don't know if you've noticed, let me show you something. I'm still wearing my Youngstown tshirt. This is not just for you. I wear a lot of my Youngstown State hats and so forth. I still have them. I still wear them. My kids even [wear them]. The mother of my two oldest lives in Ohio, and when they go back and see her, they come back and bring me more paraphernalia from Youngstown. Like I've said, I'm proud of going there. A lot of people hadn't heard of it [YSU]. I was all the way down in Texas. I had my Youngstown State hat and it had a "Y" on the front. Guy on the bus I was commuting in said, "How's Pete the Penguin doing? I see the little penguin emblem." I don't know if you all still have Pete.

TW: Yes, we do.

GJ: Good. Then, you know. There's a lot of people who do recognize Youngstown [State University], who do know that they're ass in football. I don't know what you're all doing now.

Uh oh—that look did not look very good.

You know, when I was there, we played against Roger Staubach. Now, you may not know who Roger Staubach is, or was. He was the [NFL] quarterback for Dallas, Texas (1969-1979). Dallas. Oh, he was a superstar. He ate us up. I mean he could pass that ball. I mean, right on the money. He just ate us up. I guess I sort of laughed, but, whenever I get a chance to see Youngstown, I do. I have to pack it up. Y'all are playing The Ohio State this year. My buddy, who was my roommate, his wife graduated from *The Ohio State*. She likes to remind me. Last time they played together, she got us tickets, and my wife and I came down. She of course said, "Y'all going to make the game this year? I got tickets for you, if you want." "No, I will be at the beach." That's where we're headed in a couple weeks. And we'll lie on the North Carolina beach. Go down there and rest. I need to recuperate. In fact, my wife and I both. She was in Chile a week and a half before we went to Alaska. She's been very busy, I've been very busy—but, back to Youngstown.

Youngstown provided me a very strong sense of myself. Folks ask, and I tell them, “That’s where my Blackness grew.” I had not had (other than self [assigned] reading) any real, in-depth Black experiences. I didn’t come from a Black town; I didn’t have any Black interactions. I got to Youngstown, and woah. Wake up. Ron Daniels running the Black bookstore; he was teaching Political Science courses on campus. It was the first real opportunity to interact with a large number of Blacks. The experience, as I said, was great. It was great. A lot of folks, I’d love to find out what happened to them, where they are. I wish I knew; don’t know how to get in touch with them. It was a lot of people. I don’t get back to Youngstown. The last time I was there, in any real capacity, was when Professor Bright had me come back for Black History week to speak on opportunities for Blacks in the law. I remember in the ‘60s, there were no bunch of opportunities for Blacks in law. You pretty much had to make your own. Either you were going to be a prosecutor or, luckily, you’d be a public defender. Back then, that was not viewed favorably. I would like to say that the State of New Jersey did an excellent job with the Public Defender program for attorneys operating because where a lot of states are cheap on paying public defenders and giving them the support, the State of New Jersey paid well. Whatever expert you needed, wherever that expert was, they would pay for it. So, we had some of the best experts to come in, paid.

I had one case I tried, where one of my witnesses—my client was charged with murder. One of the witnesses was living in the Dominican Republic. He fled the Dominican Republic after the murder. My public defender office paid for me to go down to the Dominican Republic and interview. They put me up. They paid for him to fly up—can you give me one second?

[He takes a phone call.]

TW: Of course.

GJ: When I went to the public defender’s office, it was another experience. There, I was very successful. I won a lot of cases. I was one of the ones that, funny as it is, the sheriff’s officers would recommend to the defendants to the prison. They would recommend, “Hey, if you could get Jarrett, you got a good attorney. That’s the one you want to get.” That’s Youngstown teaching me, “Don’t give up. Don’t give up.”

Y’all have grown, though. Last time I was there, y’all had grown, but y’all have really grown. Doesn’t look like the one [the university] I went to. Kilcawley was only a dorm. It was the only—it was the male dorm; the university had no other dorm. The women had private dorms. That was it. Need I say less. That Kilcawley down in the basement there was food, and fast food, you name it. I was like, “Woah, they didn’t have this when I was here.”

After I stayed at Kilcawley for a quarter, I then moved out to McGuffey Heights. That's where I lived for a year. Then moved to another apartment, but it was good. Even if we didn't have housing, it was good.

Blacks, at that time, made their own entertainment. I mean, we gave parties and so forth. Mainly the fraternities, which was the Kappas. We did dances. I don't think Reed Arena's there anymore. Reed's Arena was a roller-skating rink, sort of downtown. We would lease it out, bring in bands, and have dances. Or we'd rent a small-type restaurant, we'd rent that, and just do little parties. We made our own entertainment; the University wasn't giving us entertainment.

When I was photographer for the newspaper and the yearbook, one of the best artists they brought us was *Sly and the Family Stone*. I would show you—I had some very unique pictures. I don't know what happened to them. I moved so many times that I think I lost all the pictures I took.

TW: At YSU? You lost all the pictures you took during your time here at YSU?

GJ: Yeah. Of the events that they asked me to cover. I don't know where they are. As I said, it probably got thrown out in one of the moves. [He tells his dogs to lay down, talks about one for a bit].

But, what else can I help you with?

TW: Earlier you mentioned a little bit about living on campus; how Kilcawley was a men-only dorm. We interview a lot of non-traditional students who didn't live on campus at that time. What was it like living on campus? What was the atmosphere like?

GJ: It was okay. I mean, there weren't that many Blacks. I would like to say it was me, Chris [Prime, class of 1972, Business Management], Gerrell Holmes, and Roosevelt Blackwell [class of 1972, Psychology]. That was it in the dorm. Now, I don't know if you've interviewed Roosevelt Blackwell at all...

TW: Mm-mm. (shaking her head no)

GJ: He was one of your football stars back then—from Cleveland, Ohio. He would be a good one to contact. He is now living in Twin Brooks. I want to say it's down around Columbus. Or no—Charlotte. He's in Charlotte, North Carolina. If you look at some of the awards for outstanding athletes back in the [19]70s, he should be there. He would be excellent. His life will be different from mine, but we as a group, Blacks pretty much stuck together. Not that we didn't get along with Whites there on campus, we did. There wasn't a whole bunch of animosity between us. But we had no real relations other than if you were an athlete. He would have a whole different perspective. He started out in the dorm, and maybe probably finished up in the dorm. Like I said, our interactions were fraternities and sororities. The Deltas [Delta Sigma Theta sorority] and AKA's [Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority] were strong on campus. And only the Kappas [Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity] were on campus. And there were good relations between us all. [We] shared our pledges and made good moments and memories.

One of the younger frat brothers, who came after me, who I helped, was named Francis Curry. He's a dentist. I don't know if he's still there in town or not, but he's a dentist. We're spread out now, Texas and so forth.

Staying on campus, there was nothing to do for us. Other than the student lounge, which was in Kilcawley at the time. Bid whist [card game] started at 8 o'clock in the morning and ended somewhere around 6:00 or 7:00 at night. We used to say, "Some students just bided their way right on out of college," because they'd be there in the morning, and all-day long, playing Bid whist. I don't if y'all still play Bid whist, but that was the thing back then. That was our entertainment.

I stop and think, I can't think of any movie theater.

TW: Can you describe more about that game? I've never heard of that game before. Nowadays, with all this technology and everything, campus is closed at 5. No one's here later than 5 o'clock.

GJ: That's the students coming *on* campus, it was a commuter school mostly. Blacks mainly came on during the day, and Whites mainly came on during the evening. [Explains about his dogs who are barking to go out.]

TW: You have some big dogs.

GJ: Big dogs. Big dogs, I like them.

The only thing they were doing there was housing people. They didn't have any entertainment for us. Other than eating the cafeteria-type food there, that was it. Mainly, none of us has food plans. I was only on campus for one quarter, and then come fall, I moved off campus. My roommate then was a guy named Henry Baker. And most of my friends on campus centered around the fraternity. Either you were in a fraternity, or you were on the peripheral, and no one to really hang with. Everything I did was just strange, when I look back now.

TW: How do you feel about there being no Black male fraternities now?

GJ: Black fraternities now? I'm still very active in mine.

TW: Yeah, but here at YSU, we don't have any more fraternities.

GJ: You did, and we tried several times [to bring them back]. Those who graduated from Youngstown, and were still active in our [alumni] chapters, we came back several times. We gave financial support to the fraternity. It just didn't have the same flavor anymore of back then. I'm active in my grad chapter [in North Carolina], and we do a lot of social events.

Your grad chapter, Youngstown State Alumni, I still see emails from them. So, the alumni are doing their thing, but the undergrads lost interest and the need. Their need for fraternities really doesn't exist. They don't think fraternities are relevant. I guess, if they look back at our ex-president, they'll find out how relevant they are.

He tried to take away everything we accomplished. Push you back into Reconstruction days; we're still fighting now to get voting back in. [We are] still trying to get Affirmative [Action] back. All the rights that we fought for, had reasons to fight for—that young folks don't. "That's just politics." That's your life, not just politics. It's your life. They don't get it. I know you're in that group, but hopefully, you vote and participate in the political process. It's like playing the lottery. If you don't put any money into the lottery, you aren't getting nothing out of it. You've got to be in it to win it. That's the same thing [as voting]. Our fraternity was very active in it. My church is very active in it.

I don't know what goes on, there at Youngstown at this point. Every time I say to the brothers, that I made—I don't know any who were around back in the area when I went over. I've been in a frat for 55 years, so yeah, it's a long time. There's not many. So, the new ones don't see the urgency or the need of a fraternity. They'll look back. We'll all look back at what we could have done, should've done, and didn't do.

As I said, I was very active. I became Black, learning my history.

TW: How did you help hire the first Black faculty here at YSU?

GJ: I raised enough cane when I was there before we started to get the Black Studies [program] and the Black Student Union that Pugsley made me part of the committee to hire Black Studies faculty. I had the yay-or-nay vote on the committee. I said, "No, that one won't do." Rather than create a ruckus, they went along with what I had to say. I don't know why. I did have a good following; I had a good group of people around me. They took what we had and what we needed seriously. I think Cheryl Patterson [class of 1970, Education] came afterwards. Sherry was very active in the Black Student Union. I don't know where she is now, but she was a great poet. She got me interested in writing poetry. I've lost the desire.

But I stop and think about the different people and what they've contributed to our experiences. It was just the group, the comradery, the need to be together to protect and grow. It's not like today. Today is sort of disjointed, you go your own way. You fit in, do this, that, and the other—that wasn't available then.

There used to be a downtown in Youngstown. [Gerald shakes his head] Steel mills came and left, and so did all of the jobs. Downtown used to be very vibrant in Youngstown.

TW: Not as much anymore.

GJ: No. The only thing down there, last I was there, were strip joints and dives. Nothing substantial like before.

TW: Who was the president at the time when you guys started the Black Studies program?

GJ: Who was the president of the university?

TW: Yes.

GJ: [Alfred] Pugsley.

TW: And you said you guys went in there and demanded a Black Studies program, and I find that fascinating. Your sense of community, and how you guys come together to make change. What was the atmosphere like after the Black Studies program began?

GJ: It was good, you know. It was useful. In fact, the Black Student Union got the University to pay for a tutorial program for students. Gerald Burks was the head of the tutorial program. When he graduated, I took over the tutorial program. We paid students to tutor those who needed assistance. We got the university to start doing things for its Black students to prevent this 300 [student] loss every semester.

[He talks to his dogs for a moment to calm them down.]

They're [the dogs] my two buddies when I'm not golfing, when I'm here. I like to play a lot of golf. That's what my friends say, "What am I going to do with myself now?" Golfing. I would be out there today, but I had you. Now tomorrow, pedicure-manicure right in the middle of the day. There goes my golf. I love a pedicure and a manicure. My wife talked me into it. Wednesday is golf day; nobody interferes with my golfing on Wednesday. Don't schedule nothing, don't do nothing. I got a group of guys who go out and play.

It's not much different when I look back at Youngstown and what went on. It's not much different there than it is now. Our entertainment centers around our Black organizations, our Black churches. It's not a whole bunch of individuals doing their thing; it's organizations doing their thing. Putting together stuff—same thing back in Youngstown. Putting together events that are beneficial to the community. Something we lost. We'll slowly get it back.

I think we thought that the Civil Rights movement won—nuh uh. We have to learn all over again. It's not won. We're just in another chapter.

TW: Earlier, you stated, when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated and you guys painted the rock, that there were students who tried to burn the rock. Was there a lot of tension on campus around that time?

GJ: Yeah, they rioted in Youngstown. Like when that happened, they rioted. I wouldn't really call it a riot; I've never seen someone make a Molotov cocktail out of a hard Coke bottle. Coke's the real thing. People talk about Coke bottles—those big glasses people used to have. People had Coke bottles for glasses. Well, they were making them out of Coke bottles. They're not breaking, but they would try. They did their little semi-battle, up on the South side. That protest didn't last too long, but you had to get the hurt out. You had to have a release. We didn't get

much of a response from the white community, but we did get it from the Black community on Martin Luther King's death. The rock said "The shame of it all." The man was nonviolent, he was working for everybody... and they took him away. So, on campus, it was fine.

Off campus, you still had your white groups that weren't going to let you advance, didn't want you to advance, fought against your advance. I hope it has changed there.

TW: Yeah. I feel like there has been a lot of change as far as the opportunities that we have, but I feel as though there could be more change. There could be more attention put into minority students and get more minority students to come here. Still, to this day, there's a lot of times where I go in classes and I'm the only Black student- maybe me and two other black students.

GJ: Well, it was the same way back then. We didn't have a whole bunch of black students. When I was in the classes of Black Studies, the classes that I took, maybe one or two... three [Black students].

One thing I remember, I took a course in Black Studies with Dominic Capeci. It was towards my last semester, or last year. He had us write a paper, and I wrote the paper, and the girl I was dating at the time was going to type it for me. She was a good typer. Then she fell out with me. When it came time to get it typed, she wouldn't type it. I couldn't type. I'm a "hunt and peck" [two-finger] typer—I couldn't type. So, I had Sherry Patterson. She typed. So, she said she would type. So she typed. But whenever she made an error, instead of whitening it out, she would put X's through it and keep on going. That didn't go over too good with the professor.

He got it and looked at it, and he said, "What the--" I said, "Hey, I don't type. The girl who was going to type, she quit. She said she wasn't going to type it for me. So, Sherry typed it for me. And this is what I got." He gave me a C, and that hurt me.

I said to him, "What do I have to do to get an A?" He said, "Gerald, you can't get an A from a C." I said, "I got to at least have a chance, doctor. What do I have to do to get an A?"

He said, "I'll tell you what, if you get a 92 or better." This is a written exam, I don't know if you all still use blue books, we used blue books. So, he said, "If you can get a 92 or better, I'll give you an A." I got a 98. And he wrote in the book, "This is more like you. Why didn't you do this on that other paper?" He knew the answer to that.

I ended up marrying my girlfriend from Youngstown, and he [Dr. Capeci] came to the wedding. He showed up. She and I are not married anymore. We both moved our separate ways.

TW: Did you work while you were here at YSU?

GJ: Nah, there weren't any jobs—other than tutoring students, there were no jobs.

TW: How did you make a living while you were in school? I know you lived on campus, but didn't you need money for extra stuff, like food and clothes?

GJ: According to my parents, I was living high on the hog from the \$15 they gave me every two weeks. That's what I got- \$15 every two weeks. I had to pay for gas in my car, and if I wanted to go on a date. For the date, I would have \$15 every two weeks. Thank goodness for Banquet food. When I was living on campus, I could get Banquet TV dinners, and they were 25 cents each. The entrees like flapjacks, pancakes, breakfast syrup, and a little sauce—at 25 cents, I could get a whole week's supply of them. Plus the fact that I had a big appetite back then. At Thanksgiving, parents would ask their daughters to bring me home with them to eat. One year, I had three Thanksgiving dinners to go to.

My buddy I mentioned, Gerald Burks- our last year there, he was very active in Black Student Union and so forth. He would never get home for dinner. So, she [his mother] asked me, "Gerald, could you come home with Gerald for dinner every day? Because if you come to eat, he'll come." And that's what I did. She fed me and she was on assistance—yet found enough to do that.

I mean, we were very resourceful people. And we looked after each other. We took care to help and assist everybody. It wasn't dog-eat-dog like it turned out to be. "I got mine, and you need to get it." No. We helped. At Thanksgiving, when I couldn't go home, they fed me really well. I was stuffed at the third one. I was barely moving. And I was a skinny kid. When I graduated from Youngstown, I was weighing maybe 105 [pounds].

TW: Wow, that's small.

GJ: I had a 19-inch waist.

TW: Oh wow, you were really small.

GJ: Yes. I've blossomed since then. I weigh 170. I got bigger. You know, I look at my oldest son, he's not big and he'll eat you out of house and home. But it doesn't show on him. I keep telling him, "It's going to catch you." Hasn't caught him. It's caught me.

TW: Earlier you said something interesting, you said YSU taught you how to be Black. Can you elaborate more on that? That's really interesting.

GJ: Sure. I went to graduate from high school and spent two years at another university in New Mexico—that was another experience. Mexicans didn't like you. Indians didn't like you. White folks didn't like you. Can't we all just get along? Like Rodney King, "can't we just get along?" They had one Black family in the town- mother, father, daughter, son, and an uncle. The white folks there had castrated him [the uncle] and locked him in the refrigerator. But he was a little off (assuming this was sarcasm).

In school, we had 22 Black students; 21 male, 1 female. She was gay. So, there was no activity there. It was just us. Yeah. When I left there, I drove from New Mexico to New Jersey nonstop. For years, I would not take a flight across country that traveled over New Mexico, for fear that they would land in New Mexico, and I would have to spend more time there. I didn't want to. Then I came home, and I started reading books. *Aboard the Mayflower*, *Black Protest 1619*, *Spook*, *Who's That by the Door*—I just kept reading and taking a lot of interest.

When I got to Youngstown, they had a Black bookstore downtown. Blacks were thriving in terms of interest in their history, their background, and so forth. That's what I meant by "it grew my Blackness," because I had more available to learn about myself and other people. We didn't have it in my hometown. There weren't enough of us. I didn't have it at my first college. Then I come to a college that, not only do we have some Black folks here, we got Black folks in the community: North side, South side, you're surrounded. You got plenty of them to interact with. That's where I learned more about being Black.

When the Civil Rights movement was going on, I was very active in Civil Rights. I wanted to go on the Freedom Rides. My mama said, "You ain't going nowhere near there." My mother was from North Carolina; my dad was from Kansas. My mother said, "No, I know what goes on in the South, and you've got a big mouth. You will not last five minutes down there before you open your mouth and say the wrong thing. The next thing I know, I'll be burying you." But I still got a chance coming to Youngstown.

[He answers the phone briefly and mentioned it was his wife checking in.]

But yeah, that's what I meant by growing. Not only could I express myself, but there were others I could express it with, interact with, develop it with. Get to know the rest of the world. I

just can't remember what the name of the Black bookstore was downtown. But we'd be down there, in and out. The Black world was growing. It was being exposed.

In 1968, when I was in Youngstown that first year and I went back home, we had the Newark [New Jersey] Riots. [The riots] Destroyed the Black community. And you started learning, you got to protect what's yours. Can't do the stupid things like burning neighborhood stores.

Your day will come. Get yourself to Africa. If you've never been—go! After I went, then my wife's best friend and her husband went to Africa. His big thing was, "I'm going, and I'm not going on a missionary trip. I'm going sightseeing. That was something good." I'm like, "You need to learn the country. Don't be going over there like an ugly American. They see enough of those."

If you go, yes there's poverty. I was in Kenya, it's got its good spots, it's got its bad. When you go through, you see how they share. These people have nothing and make something out of nothing. They grow their food, when they have surplus, they sell it in roadside stands. They got to carry their water in buckets back to their homes. I don't know if you're familiar with outhouses?

TW: Yeah.

GJ: They got a bunch of them—that's basically it. They have outhouses. They like to call them "stoop houses." And why they call them stoop houses, is there's no toilet seat. You've got the stoop to go to the bathroom. There's a hole there and a spot where you put your feet. So you can position your feet so your butt is over that hole. You're out in the country.

I stayed in a hotel that turned the electricity off at 10 o'clock at night and turned it back on in the morning. So, you had no electricity during that period of time. Like for me, I have to use a CPAP [breathing machine] I couldn't use the CPAP unless I had an extension cord running out into the hall and plug it into the socket by the nightlights outside. Or, you just didn't use your CPAP. Another trip, you'd plug your cell phone down in the lobby with an extension cord. So, everyone had to take turns charging up their equipment.

The food was good. Go into the villages, they fed you what they had. The main meal, a part of it there was a thing that looked like grits, but it wasn't. Looked like rice, but it wasn't. That was the main staple along with fish. A lot of tilapia. And maybe stew, beef stew. And you ate with your fingers if you wanted to be like them. You don't want to make the people feel bad, so, when in Rome, do as the Romans. You ate with your fingers. They'd say, "You don't mind it?" No, not at all. It was a very good feeling.

Kids had nothing. We brought clothing, you know, our old kids' [clothing], and whether they fit or not, they wanted it. A little girl, she couldn't have been more than six. Little bitty thing. We

were passing out shoes, nobody had any shoes that small. So, somebody just said, “Hey, have some clogs,” she took hers off and gave them to the kid. To see that little girl shuffle her feet across that yard to go where she wanted to go. She was so proud of her shoes. People in the mission, in the end they were taking the clothes off their backs and giving it to people. They left having one outfit, empty suitcases, giving stuff away. What I give away, I can get back or got at home already. It’s no big deal.

So, it was a good trip. The missionary trip was fun. It brings you right down to the basics. You get to really experience the people, and they demonstrate their feelings toward you. That couple went on vacation, I mean, he did the typical ugly American thing. He went around, I think he bought half a dozen outfits; slacks and shirts and so forth. He still wears them, which is good, but he never got to know the people. He got to know what the people do; he didn’t get to know the people. Bad experience. He went to Ghana and stood in the port where we came from. They call it “Port of No Return.” They tell me that it’s very touching, to stand there and realize this is where you came from. We left this port, we never went back, making that voyage across to the Americas. Or the Islands. This was it.

I have pictures of Kenya’s National Animal Preserve. The animals ran wild, no fences. They got their food from what was on that preserve. We were looking for the lions, “We haven’t seen any lions today. Where are the lions?” Then finally we spot lions all the way over [there]. Well, they had captured a gazelle. They took it back and were feeding the young. That’s how they provide; that’s how it is really in nature.

They told you, “Do not roll your windows down, and don’t get out of your car. Or you’ll be the next meal.” They meant it, too... once you saw where they bring them down (he chuckles). But, you would enjoy it. It would be an awakening. There’s an emotional side to it.

I know my wife went to South Africa a couple of years ago. My wife’s an educator on the municipal school level and the state sponsors [trips]. There’s a number of teachers who go. I think this year was 20 who went to Chile. But before that, about the same [number] went to South Africa. And she’s one of their leaders. She went over and cried. The feeling of just being there.

TW: Well, thank you for sharing your story with us. Thank you so much for spending time with us today and telling your story.

GJ: If you want any more stories, I got them. I’m sure I could think of some more about Youngstown. In fact, when I started talking about rooming with Chris Prime, until he joined the fraternity, he associated more with the whites. He got along fine because he came from a predominantly white town as well. Where you come from, especially for Black folks, dictates your interaction with people. For me, I gravitated to the Black folks.

When I got there, I knew nothing about fraternities, and the first people I met were Kappas. They talked to me and said, "Hey, have you ever thought about joining a fraternity?" I said, "Yeah, uh..." And they said, "Which one?" The only one I knew was Omega Psi Phi. I didn't know there was Kappas or Alphas. They said, "You want to join Omegas? Okay, we'll introduce you." And they went out of their way to introduce me. Needless to say, I didn't like them. They weren't my cup of tea. I gravitated back to the Kappas, and that's who I associated with. That's who I pledged with. That's who I sort of grew up with.

We went out to dances in other towns, we just drifted. We'd go places, go to Cleveland. In fact, I saw Jackson Five in Cleveland while I was working for the Model [Cities program]. I just graduated from college; I was working for the Model Cities Program in Youngstown. We took a group of students to Cleveland to see Jackson Five. That was one my last real concerts. I wonder what happened to some of those kids. But yeah, Youngstown helped me.

I used to be a very shy introvert.

TW: Oh yeah?

GJ: I think I've come out of my shell slightly.

TW: Yeah.

GJ: Very talkative. As an attorney, you've got to be talkative. If you're shy, that's not the job for you. We could put you in the closet over there, you'd be okay. If you want to really be an attorney, you have to be active. You have to interact. You have to be able to verbalize. I guess Youngstown helped me to verbalize. It helped me find self, you know, not to be an introverted person. I'm thankful for it. Now I'm retired and don't have to do any of those things. Actually, I miss work.

TW: Well, thank you so much for sharing your story with us, Mr. Jarrett. Have a good day.

GJ: You too.

END OF INTERVIEW

