

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

Black Student Experience project

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DOROTHY MACKLIN

Interviewed by

Tilisia Williams

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Interviewee: Dorothy Macklin

Interviewer: Tilisia Williams

Subject: YSU History - Black Student Experience

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TW: This is an interview with Ms. Dorothy Macklin for the Youngstown State University Project on the Black Student Experience. This interview is being conducted at the Youngstown State University Archives. Today's date is September 28th, 2023 and my name is Tilisia Williams. Hello Miss Macklin, how are you?

DM: I'm blessed.

TW: Amen. So, let's start off with, where did you grow up? Where [are] you from?

DM: Youngstown, Ohio!

TW: What was it like growing up here?

DM: Well, I'd say I had wonderful experiences. I actually am number ten in my family, so I'm the baby. Yet, I was adopted. So I had the opportunity to meet my siblings and everything, so come to find out, I literally have eighteen siblings, all together! So, I've had experience because I had the older ones to look at there and all that good stuff like that. So having that community spirit. Our street - we lived in Delason [Avenue]- and [in] that section all the parents kind of looked after all the children on the street. You always had that one little nosy neighbor that always kept a lookout for the kids, or either told on you if you wasn't doing anything you wasn't [supposed to be] doing, right? So, we always had that community-like spirit. So I would say I had a wonderful upbringing and a wonderful time in Youngstown.

TW: Are you a first-generation college student?

DM: That depends... Because my adoptive mom, she was in college and everything so that gave me that experience. Whereas my biological side, I would say yes, I am. But on my biological father's side, they were always in education, so I'm in between.

TW: When did you decide you wanted to pursue a career in education?

DM: Well, that was early in life. My mother was a teacher. So playing on the porch with all your neighborhood friends, you're the teacher. So, it was early in life that, that was important to me to better a situation for any student, any child I came in contact with. Whether I was small— how'd they put it? I was the “mother” of the street.

TW: Why did you decide to come here to YSU?

DM: Well, I would have to say for convenience. I was what they considered a nontraditional student when I first started here because I had my own children. I was working a full-time job. I had a full family that I had to take care of but thank God for a wonderful husband. At that time, he had already graduated and everything. So, he had already took on the role of parenting and everything. So then I was afforded that, to be able to come to school. Being a nontraditional student it was tough, but yet it worked for me.

TW: And what year did you start?

DM: Honey! Let's see, when I first started, I think it was like 2001. Being a nontraditional student, I had to pay out of pocket sometimes because of my husband. The way he worked, we made too much, and it would have took from the family. So, I paid a class at a time and that's what I started out doing. And because I was doing so well, there were some grants and some things they blessed me with. And that's the way I was able to finish. But, yeah it was tight sometimes, but we made it work.

TW: As a nontraditional student, you know, being married and raising kids. How did you balance that personal life with your school life?

DM: I sat at the computer late at night with tears sometimes because you're so tired, cause you're working full time. I think it was...it wasn't when I was doing my associate. It had to be when I was doing my bachelor's, I was pregnant. So that right there was rough because I would leave work, and because it was in the evening it was difficult to find parking. So, I'm trying to find parking. Finally get parking. Now I'm some distance from where I got to go, so I had to waddle to class. Then when I get to class you got to go up all these steps or either on the elevator, then you got to huff and puff to make the class. Then once you get to class you got to sit way in the back 'cause everybody already got all the good seats because you're last minute getting to class. So it was tough, but I would say... I would say having support. Having support is the best thing anybody could have when they're going through something like that. Because life hits and you have to deal with situations outside of being in your home. Things hit and it affects you in a different way. Now I will say I had some wonderful professors up here that understood and were supportive.

TW: So, what was your relationship like with some of the staff members, some of the professors that you met while on campus here?

DM: I'll have to say for sure, Dr. [Janice] Elias [Human Ecology]. She was outstanding. Dr. [Donna] Sloan [Philosophy and Religious Studies]— outstanding. Very understanding. I had a situation, matter of fact, I know my husband had, when I was pregnant. There was a professor that he had that helped him out. Now he was a straight A student all the way through – and I was going into labor! So he was taking his finals. He blew up a microwave because he was so stressed. I think he put something with metal in the microwave. I was like, “oh my goodness.” So his professor saw how stressed he was and everything. He [the professor] said “Lewis, just go on to the hospital. Just go be with your wife”. So, I mean having professors like that that understand, and understand what you're going through. But Dr. Elias... I had situation because our family is mixed, I'll say, because I've adopted and fostered multiple children. Some actually from our school [Youngstown Rayen Early College] that we're working at and everything. And I had a situation with one of my fosters [children] and things were just going awry. And at the same time, I had a sister and brother that passed, literally a month apart from each other. And I'm typically an “A”, “B” student. Dr. Elias saw how emotional I was. She actually gave me an opportunity... And what she did was, there were PowerPoints [slides] that she had that was old, and she said “Dorothy, if you can do this, this will cover this paper for you.” So, I took her PowerPoints and literally updated all her PowerPoints for her. So the PowerPoints that she had coming out, it was me. So that right there was a blessing because I was able to handle things at home and handle that plus also get those things done. So having professors with understanding and support – that helps a lot.

TW: And with you working in education and working with students yourself, how would you say that those relationships affected the way you interact with your students?

DM: I would have to say that support... And I grew up like that anyway, it was already in me. But I will have to say that a professor could understand... Most kids think that when they come up to a college and everything, professors [are] just there to sit there, throw out some information to you and they expect you to have this done. That is true. And yet when they can still touch, and work with and support those students that come to them, I think that makes a total difference in how they accept or even decide on if they want to stay in a class because they see the understanding. So yeah, I'd have to say having those areas of support really does help and it shows when I work with my students also. There are times that students will say that “hey, I don't have a ride.” “Hey I'm on my way!” So having that kind of support, and then the parents knowing that that support is there and knowing that we love them enough to make sure that they have that support to get their buns up here.

TW: I know you are non-traditional [student], so you probably couldn't do as much on campus. But for what you could do, what did you enjoy on campus?

DM: Well, one thing for sure I did, I crossed over as a Delta.

TW: \*Chuckles\*

DM: Delta Sigma Theta. So yes, that was one of the things that I did, and it was even nontraditional because I was one of the older ones that crossed with all the young [ones]. And then we had some alumni coming in also. So, we had a mixed group. So that I will say that was one of the things that I did. I was able to walk out of Youngstown State being a part of that.

TW: What was your experience like becoming a Delta, especially being a non-traditional type student crossing over.

DM: I believe the mentoring of the ladies and the support that they gave to make sure that you did what you had to do. I believe we had strong, strong Deltas... like Betty Armstrong. She was outstanding. It was multiple [women] and I think that's why I kind of looked up to 'em. And I think that's why I made the choice to become a Delta. Everybody's usually like AKAs! I love the AKAs, but the support was with the Deltas at that time, and I think that's what I needed because I had so much going on. So I think that's why the choice was to become a Delta.

TW: What kind of outside relationships did you build outside of school that could have helped your career?

DM: Oh my goodness, sweetheart, my husband's a pastor and he's a community leader. So multiple judges, lawyers, multiple relationships. We're on different boards, you know, participate on two boards in the Youngstown area. So yeah, we were able to build strong relationships with a lot of the community leaders.

TW: And how would you say your relationship is with a lot of your students? You are truly a caretaker. You are more than a teacher.

DM: I would have to say I have a couple of them that still contact me or come up to the school and my name for them is Mama Macklin.

CN&TW: \*laughs\*

DM: And I have one now that's a senior and she said, "You know, Miss Macklin, sometimes I forget and I go to call you mom and I know you're not my mom, but you act like mom sometimes".

CN & TW: \*Laughs\*

DM: So yeah, I'm that little angel that sits on their shoulder and reminds them of the positive things they need to be doing. And then when they don't do it, then I have to put my little angry eyebrows on it. But yeah, I love what I do.

TW: And what was your career like for you when you first began teaching? What was that first day like?

DM: It wasn't difficult for me because I'd always been in that that realm, having that heart for the students. So it wasn't difficult for me. Now, I will say that there were times that because I

had the heart for the students, it could actually get me in trouble because I went from teaching little preschoolers and now, I'm all the way up in the high school. So, I've had every ramp, every level of education with these kids except for college, other than we got it at the school, we send them over here. But yeah, I've it's always been there. So, I think it wasn't difficult for me at all.

TW: How do you go about building these relationships with these children who sometimes come from difficult backgrounds? How do you go about becoming that backbone, that support that they need when they never had it?

DM: For one, being supportive and having that trust and building those relationships at the beginning. One of the things that we do at our school is that we have our Summer Bridge. And I've always enjoyed working Summer Bridge with the students that come in because that's the first time they get to see a portion of the staff. And I've always asked, "Can I do Summer Bridge?" Because I want to know the students that are coming in. I want them to get to know what, as a coach, what we do for them and how we can help them and the support that we have for them. And so that, like, begins the relationship right there. And then also having that relationship with the parents. So I think that right there encompasses the whole household, not just, you know that one little part with it with the student, but being able to have the parents involved also. And I think that's the one thing I love about it.

TW: What have been some of your best experiences teaching?

DM: Watching you all graduate. Not only one, two babies. So that that to me, I mean I cry every year! Every year because I'm excited, because to see you from your beginnings – us chasing you around the building, "Now get back here!" You know, "What are you doing out of class?" You know one of those numbers going from that to "Oh, you're headed to YSU? What class you taking?" "How are you doing in that class?" Having those conversations and have it built from that to that and to see you walk the stage and see the careers you all step into. I mean, yeah, I get emotional.

TW: You said there are some students who reach out to you after they graduate, how do you go about maintaining those relationships?

DM: I talked about the trust. My students have my phone number. As a matter of fact, one of the families, her grandmother, and this was her heart, just passed. Well, because of the relationship and because of my husband's career, sometimes we run into families outside of just being in school. So, I was an ear and a heart for her at that time and even other family members. So I think the students know that besides just me being there in that school, I'm still your support outside if needed.

TW: How did you get started working at the Early College?

DM: That's funny because the way it started was, I was up at a parent meeting. At that time, my daughter Jasmine, who's also now working in Youngstown City Schools as a coach, she was in, I

think, a paint and sip or something like that? I can't think. And Ms. Jones had mentioned how she wanted to start not only just working with the students on the college side. Because she noticed that there was a gap and she wanted to fill that gap, which was that from high school to the college. So, she wanted to now create a position for high school coaches. And I was like, what does that entail?

TW&DM: \*laughs\*

DM: She began, I was like, "oh, my goodness," I just said that's my heart. That's what I want to do! I said because you're saying it involved the parents, it involves the students, it involves the staff! I would love to do something! She was like, "you wanna?..." She said, "well, fill out an application!" So it literally started as that – as a parent and seeing the need that was there. And I was like, "Oh my goodness, this is my dream job. I love it," you know? So that's how it literally all started. So I was one of the very first high school coaches.

TW: And what was that experience like, just watching the school grow? From when we was in that little "L" in Fedor Hall to what it is now?

DM: Now that was amazing, just to see the growth and I mean...we were on one floor, one floor literally when you say "L", that's exactly what it was. And for us then to move over to the building that we're in now [Youngstown Board of Education building on Wick Avenue] - three floors, students bustling all through. And we actually continually to grow because they added even more of the 9th graders coming over. So it's been a great experience. Now we went from having 15 students to having 31 and 32 students, But it's wonderful, though.

TW: What has the experience been like working with kids, not just in high school setting, but also training them for the mindset of college? Because like for me, I wouldn't necessarily say it was difficult, but it was because I was so young, taking so much responsibility.

DM: That's one of the things I talk about when they first come in, because I like to speak with the parents also and let them know. You have to understand as adults when we were doing this – as I told you, sitting at the computer crying at night trying to get papers done and everything else – I said we're putting this responsibility now on such a young age. I said so we have to have multiple tiers of support for each of these children, not just one or two. So I thank God that Ms. Jones actually made it so that every student coming in gets a coach. So that helps, as well as having a supportive staff. Because the teachers, they're reaching out, they're supporting the students because they know how much the responsibility is when they step over into these doors [at YSU]. So yeah, it can be difficult, but it can be done because we've seen it over and over again. And look at you. [Tilisia is a graduate of the Early College and former student with Mrs. Macklin.]

TW&DM: \*laughs\*

TW: While you were YSU student here do you feel like the things that you've learned and the things that you may have participated in help to prepare you for what you do now as far as academically?

DM: I can say a lot of the things that was presented to me here at YSU, yes, it prepared me. Because you know, even though I may have been a Sunday school teacher, that's a different realm from when you know the mindset of the student. Knowing the different parts of like, they [education classes] talked about how the mind changes from age to age with the student. So that caused me to look at, "okay, this child is acting this way because of this." So yeah, a lot of the things that were brought to my attention and I was able to learn here. It does help when you step back in and you look, I'm like, wait a minute, I remember this from class. Or I said I can understand why. I mean [learning] the philosophical sides of it and all that, yes, it does help.

TW: How do you deal with the overwhelming times? It seems like being a teacher, especially for what you do being a coach, there's never any ease because you're the psychologist, you're the social worker, you're the everything. How do you deal with it?

DM: Honey, when it gets overwhelming, I will say well for one, I know the Lord. And prayers. And I would say having the principal that we have at the school, she's a praying woman. And sometimes we have to step off to the side without anybody knowing and go to office and have prayers sometimes. Sometimes we have to have those cry sessions. And I appreciate now that they're putting more of the SEL [socio-emotional learning] into the into the building [curriculum]. They're doing the yoga and things like that to assist with those times. And it's not just for the students, but it's also for the staff members when they need that. So that SEL helps.

TW: The environment that we live in here in Youngstown, sometimes the way we are viewed by like outside communities, it can be a deterrence even now as a college student. Sometimes it feels like where we come from isn't good enough, because of where we are. How do you break that mindset in young children?

DM: Well, for one, I've always had a strong thing that even as growing up. I graduated from South High and everybody was like, "oh, that's a tough school" and all that and everything. But I've always said that it's not the school, it's the people in it. So, if you act like this, this is how they're going to perceive us. So I've always made sure that the way I was perceived was in a positive way. And anybody that was around me, typically those are the things that I would always preach. So, I was always on the soapbox saying "No, we're not going to do this. Y'all need to do this", you know one of those. So it's getting that mindset of you are stronger than what you think you are. Don't let anybody deter you from your goals. So just pushing those things and letting the kids know that they have that support and they can be successful. Just keeping that in their minds and showing it to them. I think that helps a lot.



TW: Yeah, because sometimes I don't think that young, you don't understand, especially being in an Early College, what you're doing. Like you're gonna graduate with a college degree at 18 [years old]. It's like that had not hit me when it happened.

DM: A lot of them were scared because we asked them. Usually that's one of the questions that I ask, "How do you feel as you get ready to walk that stage?" And a lot of the students are scared. And I said, I understand. I said because as an adult, we were actually scared. So don't think this is just you, I said. But you have to understand you have the skills and don't let nobody ever tell you that you don't.

TW: How long have you been teaching?

DM: Honey!

DM&TW: \*laughs\*

DM: I told you we started on the porch! I'll say getting paid to do it? Let me see, I started in high school because I went to Choffin Career Center and I worked in education. It was so funny. I had a wonderful teacher, Ms. Smith, and Ms. Jane. What's it called? (Singing) "Mary Jane..." I always picked with her. As a matter of fact, I have a picture of her because we were at a dinner and I ran into her. And she reminded me that we were her first class of students that she had. And I was lucky to be one of the first ones as a junior to be able to go out and get my job. Typically you have to wait until your senior year to do the job, but there was two of us that kind of stuck out and she allowed us to go and do our observations and get a job early on. So I started early at McGuffey Center. That was my first job. So I had finished all my courses, so literally, I would only have one period that I would go to school. Then I would go catch the bus and go out to the East side, to McGuffey Center and that was my very first job. I started early.

TW: Wow! So that's a long time. What would you say are some of your success stories from teaching?

DM: I'll say some of my success stories are each year when you guys walk that stage. Another success story is some of the students that felt that they couldn't [graduate]. I have one that we had we adopted...no, I actually had two. She is now adopted as an adult. She wanted to be adopted, and we and we went to court last year and then we adopted her. Then my other one, we just foster her pretty much, but she's on campus but she's still trying to find herself. She's all over the place. But yeah I kept her from the streets. So, I'd say those are success stories that I can say that we've accomplished and we're continuing because my husband actually told me I can't bring none of my work home with me no more.

TW: And like I said, where we live is a hard place to grow up and a lot of times you find a lot of kids in the streets rather than being in school. What is your approach when it comes to kids like that? Like kids who just their mindset is not school. Their personal life is just like too much. What is your approach?

DM: My approach is first respect. And that's what they're looking for – somebody that's going to respect them and actually demand respect also. So, I've always been one [who] never looking at your background, never looking at where you came from and everything. I'm looking at where you're going. So just having that respect for you. Speaking positive. And seeing what your need is at that time, because sometimes you got to meet them where their need is at. Because they may not see that, that may not be their future and where they're headed, but I can direct them into a safe space to be able to listen. And sometimes that's all they need, somebody is going to listen.

TW: How do you deal with the students who are having a sort of like early identity crisis? When they are maybe kind of like realizing that they're about to graduate with a college diploma and they're not sure if they want to go to college or they're not sure what they want to do with their lives yet? How do you direct and lead those students?

DM: Now with that, we've had a lot of that starting to happen now. I think COVID [Corona Virus Disease] kind of shook a lot of our students, their families, and everyone to the core. So, we did have some—because we did jump to that online [instruction]— that was like “I don't wanna do this. I just can't.” So, there was times we had to go knock on doors, to sit in their living rooms, have those conversations with the parents, have those conversations with the child. And then sometimes, yes, college is not always for everyone. So yes, then sometimes we have to pause, look back. What do you want? What do you need in your life at this time? Where are you headed? So we have to look at that. And sometimes you just need to listen.

TW: You've most definitely had an impact on people. How does your impact and all the things that you've done, how does that affect you as a person? When you see like every year when you see us walk across that stage twice and you crying and you thinking about all that stuff?

DM: It's emotional because I'm looking at 'okay, where are they going in a few years? Where am I going to see you at?' So those are the things I think about as you're walking across those stages and I'm like, “Look! Look where He [God] brought you from.” So yes, I get super emotional because of those things. And I want to make sure that you're safe. I had a student that just came up the other day and the first thing I said, “Are you okay? Where you at?” You know, because I wanted to make sure she's okay.

TW: And I feel like that's something we all need, even now, about to graduate, just turned 20. I'm just now realizing that I need that support and I don't think I realized how much I had it while I was in high school. It's just... you're trying to get through it, but you don't realize until you actually get here [college] how much support you need and then you look back on that and I was like, 'dang...' you know, I really did need that. I feel like every school need a Ms. Macklin.

DM: Well, I will say, I would suggest you stop by the school so you can have that same conversation with the students so they can realize what they have.

TW: Yeah.

DM: That's what I say, reach back, each one.

TW: Is there any advice that you would like to give to the youth in 20 years when they're reading Miss Macklin's [interview]? When they look through the oral histories and they come across Miss Macklin. What imprint, what message would you like to leave for them?

DM: I would probably say if anything, love yourself. Support others. And just go do that thing. That's what I would say.

TW: Because it can be done. It's hard, but it can be done. Did you have any questions?

CN: I do. What was your full-time job that you were doing while you were going to school?

DM: Preschool teacher.

CN: Where?

DM: Well, let me see. When I first started, I was at Potential Development and then I was at CCE [Center for Community Empowerment].

CN: Okay. I feel like the name of the school we've had, like the Early College... and there have been several iterations of, I think, kind of the same thing. What is it? What are you referring to when you guys are talking about starting in the L of Fedor Hall? What is that school [name]?

DM: Youngstown Rayen Early College High School.

CN: Okay, I'm going to write it down because the transcriber is gonna wanna know – the Youngstown Rayen Early College. And it started in Fedor [Hall].

DM: Yes, it did.

CN: And you were there in the first class of students?

DM: No.

CN: Okay.

DM: No, actually my children, well, my oldest one, she missed it by a year because she was too old. Because at that time I think they were only taking...was it 9th and 10th at that time that they were taking?

TW: I feel like they just started taking upper classes.

DM: And my daughter had just went into her senior year, no— her junior year. So she was unable to participate. But my son did. Oh Lord, my son acted a total stone bowl fool and got kicked out. And we can laugh because Mr. Kincaid... My grandson is now at the school, and one of my husband's cousins is there. So when he said the young lady's name, he goes, "Are you

Kendall Donnell Macklin?" And my grandson looks over and said "That's my uncle." I said, "Oh no!"

TW: Mr. Kincaid still teach there?

DM: Yes!

TW: He was my favorite teacher. He's so cool!

DM: Analytical [speaking of Mr. Kincaid]. Straightforward with the kids. The kids are straightforward with him.

TW: Straight theorists. [He] had a flip phone up until the year before I graduated. He did not believe in smart phones. No, he's too paranoid. This is why she made him get one. I was so mad. I was like, 'How could she do that?' I was so mad for some reason. Oh, my gosh. I miss high school so much.

DM: I tried to explain to them [that] you're going to miss this.

CN: That was it. I just wanted to clarify those two things.

DM: All right, all right. I enjoyed.

END OF INTERVIEW