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Interview with Arnetta Gladden Mackey

Arnetta Gladden Mackey

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Interview #017
MACKEY, Arnetta Gladden**

MACKEY, Arnetta Gladden

Interviewed: August 1975, April 30, 1981
Interviewer: Martha Williams, Steve McKnight
Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellricahrd
Length: 1 hour, 2 minutes

Abstract: In her two interviews with Martha Williams in August 1975 and Steve McKnight in April 30, 1981, Arnetta Gladden Mackey shares her experience coming to Winthrop as one of the first black students after the school integrated. Mackey recalls the reaction she received from students, faculty, and members of the Rock Hill community. Mackey finally lends her answer to the question of whether or not she would do it all over again. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: First black student, biology, dorm life, sit-ins, church, blue line

Interview Session I (August 1975): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview*/Interviewer's Introduction

00:00:22 *Question:* Tell me about your childhood? *Answer:* Raised in Rock Hill as sharecroppers. Stayed on the farm until the age of 12 before moving to the city. Father a painter, mother a maid. Had three brothers.

00:01:15 *Question:* Were your brothers in college? *Answer:* No. There was a lack of funds. AM not the oldest, middle child. AM talks about the family's opinion on AM going to college. Only able to come to Winthrop because of a scholarship – associated with Civil Rights. AM speculates that she wouldn't have gone to college without scholarship. A reverend helped AM get scholarship. School was looking for a person that could handle academic pressures.

00:04:15 *Question:* did you always want to go to college? *Answer:* Everybody does. If you were able to go to college, then you would go. AM knew that if she had to depend on her parents, then she wouldn't be able to go.

- 00:05:50 *Question:* Reaction to scholarship? *Answer:* AM was shocked. Reverend explained that she would have a full ride and not have to pay. The scholarship came from people all over Rock Hill. The community entrusted in AM the opportunity to go to Winthrop.
- 00:07:14 *Question:* Reaction to attending an all-white college? *Answer:* This would be the only opportunity AM had to go to school. It didn't bother AM that it was an all-white school. Another girl from Columbia would also attend. That made AM feel better.
- 00:09:40 *Question:* Any problems getting into Winthrop? *Answer:* Most things were taken care of before AM arrived. Nothing that AM knew of.
- 00:10:17 *Question:* When did you start? *Answer:* August of 1964. AM doesn't remember the exact date. AM talks about Clemson.
- 00:12:58 *Question:* What was registration like? *Answer:* At that time, students pre-registered. Most of it was taken care of by the time AM came to Winthrop. Interviewer tells a story about a black student before AM.
- 00:14:54 *Question:* You lived on campus? *Answer:* Lived all four years. Didn't have a choice for a roommate – automatically assigned a black roommate. Dolores Johnson had a room to herself.
- 00:16:30 *Question:* How did the girls in the hall treat you? *Answer:* Very nice. There were no unkind words between people.
- 00:17:08 *Question:* Did any of the parents of the girls in your hall have problems? *Answer:* Not sure.
- 00:18:00 *Question:* Rat week? *Answer:* Had to wear the beanies. At the end of the week there was a big dance. AM did not attend the dance.
- 00:19:04 *Question:* Social life? *Answer:* First year, just focused on school. AM could always go home on the weekends or call home. AM had a boyfriend who was a Marine. There were no places to go, nothing to do.
- 00:20:45 *Question:* Reaction to black men on campus? *Answer:* Refers to a “void of communication.” If something was said, it was not said to AM. When black men came on campus they would talk about run ins with campus police.
- 00:22:07 *Question:* First impressions of Winthrop? *Answer:* Did not like it. Hard to say, though. Didn't like it as much as she would a black college. Absence of fellow black faces. Didn't dislike to the point of leaving.

- 00:23:30 *Question:* How did your parents react to you going to Winthrop? *Answer:* Speculates they may have been concerned. They did not discourage her. It was AM's decision to go to Winthrop. AM's friends were encouraging. They knew it was a good decision to make, considering her home situation.
- 00:25:40 *Question:* Problems first year? *Answer:* Academic. AM talks about the difference between high school and college. AM did not feel comfortable going to any of the church services in the area. Blue Lines on Sunday. AM and other black students were advised to not go to First Baptist. It was decided she would go to Oakland Baptist. Did not participate in the church line – driven in a car and there were police everywhere. One Sunday, the doors to a church were closed in her face. AM and others just stopped going.
- 0:30:35 *Question:* Did you go to the DSU? *Answer:* Sometimes. AM felt more comfortable in a black church.
- 00:31:20 *Question:* Black students who came after you? *Answer:* No one came during AM's sophomore year. The "big search" started the beginning of AM's senior year. AM speculates that fellow black students had the same reaction as she did.
- 00:33:24 *Question:* How were you treated by President Davis? *Answer:* Cordial. Never met him before she came to Winthrop. Met the President at the President's house.
- 00:34:30 *Question:* Did anyone tell you about rules? *Answer:* No.
- 00:35:10 *Question:* How were you treated by your professors? *Answer:* Just fine. Biology – Dr. Hines. Chemistry – Dr. Tutwiler. Music – Dr. Murdy, French – Mr. Sheely, Math – Mrs. Bates, P.E. – can't remember.
- 00:37:00 *Question:* Major? *Answer:* Biology. Didn't change major.
- 00:37:20 *Question:* Student's reactions in class? *Answer:* Students were cautious or hesitant. Freshman classes were large, so it was hard to get to know too many students. It was nice.
- 00:38:38 *Question:* Special privileges? *Answer:* No.
- 00:39:02 *Question:* Newspapers? *Answer:* Not pestered by reporters. Remembers a small article in the city paper. "Nothing was blown out of proportion."
- 00:39:45 *Question:* Any other unpleasant events? *Answer:* No. The church incident took place outside of school.

- 00:40:15 *Question:* If you had to do it over again, would you come to Winthrop? *Answer:* If the conditions were the same (financially), AM would not attend. If it was coed, she would go to Winthrop. "All-girl schools are kind of outdated." AM would love to attend an all-black college – that was not the deciding factor for AM. Coeducation was key to her reasoning.
- 00:42:17 *Question:* What things did the white students do that were different to what you did? *Answer:* "They are individuals just like blacks are."
- 00:43:05 *Question:* Benefits of going to Winthrop? *Answer:* Prepared AM for the job market. A black school is a closed world. You need experience and contact with the "white world." AM developed that skill while she was there.
- 00:44:33 *Question:* What do you do now? *Answer:* Work as a lab assistant. Winthrop did get her placed there.
- 00:44:58 *Question:* Would you want your daughter to go to Winthrop? *Answer:* AM would not advise her against going to Winthrop. AM hopes her daughter would do her research.
- 00:45:55 *Question:* Go to any class reunions? *Answer:* No, because a class reunion is a time to show off to everyone what you've done. If you have established basic friendships, then you don't need to go to class reunions. AM doesn't like the idea of class reunions.
- 00:47:15 *Question:* Friendship? *Answer:* People who had the same major as AM. Jane Cato (Jane West OH 274). Terry Smith. AM says she drifted apart from Delores Johnson.
- 00:50:40 *Question:* Any professor who stood out? *Answer:* Not really. There was no particular one to advise. They were all fair.
- 0:51:30 *Question:* Anyone who made a lasting impression? *Answer:* No.
- 00:52:10 *Question:* Do you know any of the black girls attending now? *Answer:* There are so many now.
- 00:52:32 *Question:* What has changed? *Answer:* After AM graduated, she was not in close contact with Winthrop.
- 00:54:03 *End of interview.*

Interview Session II (April 30, 1981): Digital File

- 00:00:00 ***Start of Interview***/Interviewer's Introduction
- 00:00:18 *Question:* Tell me about your childhood? *Answer:* Born and raised in South Carolina. Went to the public schools in Rock Hill. Come from a family of four. Went to Sunset Park. Went to Emmett Scott High. College at Winthrop.
- 00:01:06 *Question:* Do you remember the sit-ins? *Answer:* Aware of them. Still young at the time to protest.
- 00:01:48 *Question:* Cecil ? *Answer:* Yes. Died in her Junior or Senior year of high school. He was active in the civil rights movement.
- 00:02:25 *Question:* Scholarship? *Answer:* First year free. Selected a candidate who could handle the pressure of going to a previously segregated student.
- 00:03:15 *Question:* What was the first day at Winthrop like? *Answer:* AM doesn't remember being afraid. There was a little bit of hesitation. AM was not afraid, because she was not by herself.
- 00:04:50 *Question:* Did you participate in activities? *Answer:* Yes. Want to make the transition from high school to college as smooth as possible – you do that by participating in activities.
- 00:05:25 *Question:* How did the community feel about you attending Winthrop? *Answer:* AM doesn't know how the white community felt, but the black community was very supportive. AM's attendance at Winthrop opened the doors for other minorities to attend Winthrop. AM talks about Clemson's integration.
- 00:06:30 *Question:* Were there police and dogs at Winthrop when you arrived? *Answer:* No. Black students received no special privileges.
- 00:07:15 *Question:* Dances? *Answer:* Yes. "Who was going to miss out on those?" Those were rare events. Students could invite outside guests.
- 00:07:55 *Question:* Professors? *Answer:* "They gave us failing grades and passing grades." AM had no problems with professors.
- 00:08:54 ***End of interview.***