

Oral Histories of Tompkins County

Archival Finding Aid

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2017 - Beverly J. Martin Book Project - Oral History Project

The 2017 Beverly J. Martin Book Project was a year long project of the fifth grade classroom at Beverly J. Martin Elementary School during the 2016-2017 school year. The students interviewed eleven community members about their personal memories of the schools namesake Beverly Jane Martin (1935-1991). Some of those interviewed had been students, mentees, and close friends of Ms. Martin. The students used these interviews and additional research to create a 50 page book, 'Journey of a Local Leader - Beverly J. Martin' in honor of Ms. Martin. The project was supervised by teachers Ann Kolodji, Mary Darcey-Martin, and Robert Graham. Kolodji and Graham were contacted in 2023 to donate the materials from the book to The History Center archives.

Martin was an Ithaca native, attending Central Elementary School, the very school that would end up being named after her. She graduated from Ithaca High School as the class president and an honor roll student. Continuing her education, she received both her bachelors and master's degrees from Cornell University. Right after graduating, Martin began a thirty-six year professional career, entirely within the Ithaca school system. She began by teaching 6th grade at Central School, before becoming the reading specialist for the school district. Soon after, she was named principal of Central School, making her the first African American school administrator in all of Ithaca. She served as the principal for nine years and went on to become the director of affirmative action for the Ithaca City School District. Her varied work touched the lives of many, illustrated by the many awards she received for her work, including the National Black Educator Alliance Award for excellence in teaching in 1990.

In 1992, the school board renamed Central School the Beverly J Martin Elementary School in her honor.

*Please note, as of February 2024 only two of the eleven interviews recorded as part of this project have been donated to The History Center in Tompkins County. We are collaborating with the teachers who organized the project to locate copies of the remaining nine interviews. Community members with any knowledge of these files are encouraged to reach out to archives@thehistorycenter.net.

5th Grade Students involved in the book project:

- Rinchen Aaya
- Fatima Abed
- Niko Akrofi
- Suraphael Barton
- Sarah Bayer
- Owen Bowes
- Dionte Bryand
- Aiden Carpenter
- Aaron Chea
- Nicharee Cokic
- Lilliana Combs
- Opal Dietrich
- Lestat Down
- Michael Fan
- Mohamed Fardoussi
- David Gamble
- Natia Gelinas
- Poppy Goodman
- William BJ Harris
- Madison Hill
- Janeiry Holguin
- Jackson Knapp
- Rohan Makepeace
- Nguengeti Ngwen
- Daniel Parker
- Rayshan Phipps
- Aydan Rappa

- Brennan Redd
- Cameron Follins
- Charlie Shanton
- Mila Sheshabarov
- Shakeyna Small
- Elfadinne Smith
- Jaiden Smith
- Aram Steinhagen
- Damian Stewart
- Abey Sullivan-Pomeroy
- Michael Wells
- Avery White

Trigger Warnings:

Interviews with: discussion of racism, death of a beloved family member

Nydia Blas (00:18:10)

Nydia Blas, niece of Beverly J. Martin, answers a series of questions from students at Beverly J. Martin Elementary School about her memories of her aunt. Martin died when Blas was 12 years old. Many of her memories center around family gatherings, and community events. Blas is an accomplished photographer whose work centers on the “black feminine lens”, she shares stories of how she has come to know her aunt after her death through reviewing family photographs.

Trigger warning(s): discussion of racism, death of a beloved family member

- *Recorded: 2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017_Blaas-Nydia*
 - *MP4 & MP3*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2017_Blaas-Nydia_Transcript*
 - *PDF & Doc*
- *Recorded as part of the "Beverly J. Martin Book Project" in 2017*

Michael Thomas (00:08:55)

Michael Thomas was a student at Central Elementary School when Beverly Martin served as principal in the 1970s. Thomas remembers how Martin treated him and the other students, and reflects on her impact and role as the first black woman in multiple Ithaca spaces and positions of leadership.

Trigger warning(s): death of a mentor, discussion of anti-black racism,

- *Recorded: 2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017_Thomas-Michael*
 - *MP4 & MP3*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2017_Thomas-Michael_Transcript*
 - *PDF & Doc*
- *Recorded as part of the "Beverly J. Martin Book Project"*

Other interviewees from this project include:

- **Millicent Clarke Maynard**
- **Jacqueline Scott “Mama Scott”**
- **Denise Gomber**
- **Denise Lee**
- **Deborah Manning**
- **Karen Martin**

- **Janice Nigro**

CITATION FOR THE PROJECT

“2017 – Beverly J. Martin Book Project” Oral History Project, 2 oral histories recorded in 2017 by fifth grade students at Beverly J. Martin Elementary School, The History Center in Tompkins County. Oral Histories of Tompkins County Audio Archives, Ithaca NY, 2024.

RELATED INTERVIEWS IN THE ‘ORAL HISTORIES OF TOMPKINS COUNTY - AUDIO ARCHIVES’ CONNECTED TO BEVERLY J. MARTIN

Millicent Clarke-Maynard (38 minutes)

Millicent “Millie” Clarke-Maynard, who was born and raised in Harlem, NY, spent her career as an educator at the primary level in Ithaca, NY. In this interview, Ms. Clarke-Maynard reflects on her role in the community.

Trigger warning: child abuse

- *Recorded 10/16/2018*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2018-10-16_Clarke-Maynard-Millicent*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2018-10-16_Clarke-Maynard-Millicent_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2018.*

Dr. Nia Nunn (00:47:47)

Dr. Nia Nunn, President of the Board of Directors for Southside Community Center, speaks to the importance of Black spaces in her childhood, the Southside community of Ithaca in particular. She reflects on her foundation in Ithaca, her work in the Ithaca community surrounding education and the Black community, and the people who inspire her.

- *Recorded 10/31/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-31_Nunn-Nia*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2019-10-30_Nunn-Nia_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019.*