

Oral Histories of Tompkins County

Archival Finding Aid

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Black Voices in Tompkins County: Oral History Collection

The *Black Voices in Tompkins County Oral History Collection* was established in 2021 to highlight interviews and stories in our archives that explore the experiences of Black, African-American, African diaspora, and African people living in Tompkins County. The topics of these interviews explore a wide range of experiences, community, and culture, and the stories shared may have been guided by the specific project the interview was recorded for. This collection will continue to expand as our Oral History archives continue to grow.

Trigger warning(s): systemic racism, antisemitism, sexism, descriptions of state sanctioned violence, child abuse, child sexual abuse, anti-Black sentiment, white supremacy.

We are still processing this collection, and are creating accompanying transcripts and listing details for each interview.

Interviews with:

Akua Akyea (00:14:52)

Akua Akyea reflects on her childhood spent in Africa, Western Europe, and Canada and the lifelong connection with food that led her to opening Mama Loye's Cafe in Dryden. She also discusses her personal philosophy of the importance of growth and trying things outside of her comfort zone.

Trigger warning(s): war, descriptions of state sanctioned violence

- *Recorded 4/27/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-27_Akyea-Akua*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2019-4-27_Akyea-Akua_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Generation to Generation: Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Millicent Clarke-Maynard (38 minutes)

Millicent 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.*

Audrey Cooper (00:48:23)

Audrey Cooper speaks about her work in the community since moving to Ithaca in 1967 at the age of seventeen. Having worked with the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC), the Southside Community Center, and the Multicultural Resource Center, she has organized events serving marginalized members of the community, including the West End Breakfast Club, GIAC's annual M.L.K. Jr. commemorative breakfast, and Sister Friends.

Trigger warnings: anti-Black sentiment, domestic abuse, death.

- *Recorded 10/29/2019*
- *Name of Interviewer:*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-29_Cooper-Audrey*
 - *Digital Format:*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2019-10-29_Cooper-Audrey_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the 2019 Local Sisters of Change project.*

Kirby Edmonds (44 minutes)

Kirby Edmonds discusses his ideas about humanity, violence, and peace, and his work in the Ithaca community addressing those topics.

Trigger warning: descriptions of state sanctioned violence

- *Recorded 10/16/2018*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2018-10-16_Edmonds-Kirby*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2018-10-16_Edmonds-Kirby_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2018.*

Candace Edwards (00:40:47)

Candace Edwards, creator of Qinfock, an Ithaca-based festival that celebrates art made by the QTPOC (Queer and Trans People of Color) community, reflects on her childhood, time in college, and organization of the Qinfock Festival. She speaks about her work with the People's Hurricane Relief Fund in New Orleans during college and her future hopes for Qinfock, which started in 2019.

- *Recorded 10/31/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-31_Edwards-Candace*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2019-10-31_Edwards-Candace_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019.*

Marcia Fort Baum (00:47:41)

Marcia Fort Baum reflects on the experiences that have informed her work in the community empowering young people with the Ithaca Youth Bureau and the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC). She emphasizes the importance of encouraging others and pointing out their strengths, which put her on the path of serving the community as a long-time leader of GIAC.

Trigger warning: anti-Black sentiment

- *Recorded 10/22/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-22_Fort-Baum-Marcia*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2019-10-22_Fort-Baum-Marcia_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019.*

Addisu Gebre (00:58:53)

Addisu Gebre discusses opening Enat Ethiopian Cuisine, a business that sells at the Ithaca Farmers Market and caters in Ithaca, with his wife. He also speaks on his education in Ethiopia and at Cornell University and his work in both countries as an engineer.

- *Recorded 4/20/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-20_Gebre-Addisu*
- *Transcript: OHTC_2019-4-20_Gebre-Addisu_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Generation to Generation: Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Jennifer “Jenny” Graham

Jenny Graham discusses her experience working at a segregated school in Georgia while studying elementary education at Fort Valley State College. She reflects on moving to Ithaca in 1965, working at Cornell, and belonging to Club Essence, a social group that promoted unity among Black women, as one of its first members.

**As of August 2022 Jenny Graham’s audio file was not saved in The History Center archives. A final essay on the interview by student interviewer Mason Leist was saved in our records and a rough transcript of the interview. The essay and transcript are available to researchers.*

Trigger warning(s): systemic racism, child sexual abuse, anti-Black sentiment, sexism

- *Recorded 12/3/2017*
- *Audio File: N/A (See above)*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2017-12-3_Graham-Jenny_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2017.*

James “Jim” Gibbs, Jr. (01:15:16)

Jim Gibbs reflects on growing up in Syracuse and Ithaca, attending Ithaca High School, and studying at Cornell University, where he worked on a study on ethnic relations in Elmira, New York. Gibbs was the first Black man to graduate from Ithaca High School and Cornell University and the first Black student to get a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Harvard.

Trigger warning(s): systemic racism, antisemitism

- *Recorded 8/28/2015*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2015-8-28_Gibbs-Jim*

- *Transcript File: OHTC_2015-8-28_Transcript*

Jo-Louis Hallback (Part One) (00:47:39)

Amy Heffron interviews Jo-Louis Hallback, who participated as an actor in the Civic Ensemble’s Re-Entry Theatre Program. Originally hailing from Lakeland, Florida, Jo-Louis moved to Ithaca in 2017. Taken away from his mother as an infant by Child Protection Services, Jo-Louis was raised by his aunt alongside two cousins. He reflects on his experiences of insitutionalized racism, including being stopped and searched by police along with his cousins as a young man, and how ingrained assumptions of what Black men are ‘supposed’ to be limited his confidence when it came to future ambitions. He also talks about his love of music and a newfound interest in foreign languages.

Trigger Warnings: Descriptions of gun violence and incarceration. Occassional strong language.

- *Recorded: 10/22/2020*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-10-29_Hallback-Jo-Louis*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-10-29_Hallback-Jo-Louis_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the ‘Voices That Must Be Heard’ oral history project in 2020*

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (00:45:56)

Leslyn McBean Clairborne discusses how her passion for teaching and equity took her from working in the Ithaca City School District to working as a case worker and trainer to working with the Southside Community Center and Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC). She also speaks to her personal philosophy of equity and justice.

Trigger warning: white supremacy

- *Recorded 10/24/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-24_McBean-Clairborne-Leslyn*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2019-10-24_McBean-Clairborne-Leslyn_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019.*

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (54 minutes) - Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC), Tompkins County Legislature

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne explains how she managed being a chair of the Tompkins County Legislature and GIAC throughout the pandemic, and the challenges she faced. McBean-Clairborne expands on efforts to alleviate the effects of covid and closures on the community, including food insecurity, testing, quarantining, and vaccinations. She also explains new projects developed to help families, and what she hopes these will accomplish after the pandemic as well.

- *Recording Date: 4/16/2021*
- *Name of Interviewer: Thomas Petluck*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2021-04-16_McBean-Clairborne-Leslyn*
 - *Digital Format: MP3 & MP4*

- *Transcript File: OHTC_2021-04-16_McBean-Clairborne-Leslyn_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: Word Doc & PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the “2020-2021 Community Responses to COVID”*

Laurie Meeks (Carrington-Meeks) (00:21:55)

Laurie Carrington-Meeks is asked about her childhood growing up in the Southside community in Ithaca. She recalls the block parties on Plain Street that she would organize with her friends (with the support of Southside Community Center), the odd-jobs she would perform for neighbors for pocket-money, and the shared responsibility of parenting that helped define the community.

- *Interviewer: Jessica Winter*
- *Interview took place at: Greater Ithaca Activities Center, 301 W. Court St, Ithaca NY 14850*
- *Recorded 8/10/2006*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2006-8-10_Meeks-Laurie*
- *File Format(s): MP4 & MP3*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2006-8-10_Meeks-Laurie_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the ‘2006 Interviewing Our Elders’ oral history project*

Jacqueline “Jackie” Melton Scott a.k.a. “Mama Scott” (01:26:54)

Jackie Melton Scott (aka Mama Scott) reflects on her life-long passion for equity and justice, from her organizing efforts in junior high to establishing the Cambridge Montessori School. Before her death in 2019, Jackie Melton Scott worked as the Family Literacy Facilitator at Beverly J. Martin Elementary School.

Trigger warning(s): systemic racism, sexism

- *Recorded 11/4/2008*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2008-11-4_Scott-Melton-Jackie*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2008-11-4_Scott-Melton-Jackie_Transcript*

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.*

Karen Yearwood (37 minutes)

Karen Yearwood discusses the mission of the Village at Ithaca and her work in the organization, from volunteering upon moving to Ithaca in 2005 to becoming the Executive Director in 2014. She discusses the tactics the Village uses to help

students succeed and the limitations on their work and the advancement of equity in the Ithaca City School District.

- *Recorded 10/18/2018*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2018-10-18_Yearwood-Karen*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2018-10-18_Yearwood-Karen_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2018.*

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