

LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview #0642  
RODDEY, Cynthia Harriett Plair

Interviewer: James D. Mackey  
Interviewed: April 29, 1981  
Transcription by: Steve Blankenship  
Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard  
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Abstract: In her interview with James D. Mackey on April 29, 1981, Cynthia Roddey shares her experiences at Winthrop from 1964-1967 as the first African American student admitted to Winthrop College. Roddey details the process of applying to Winthrop, the reaction she received from the Winthrop and Rock Hill community, and her participation in student life. Roddey includes her insight on race relations today and her hopes for the future. This interview was conducted for a student history project.

Keywords: Integration, Segregation, Desegregation, Civil Rights Movement, Racism, Teaching, Arnetta Gladden Mackey, MAT, NAACP, American Dream, Politics, Family, XI Delta chapter of Sigma Beta Sorority

**Interview Session (April 29, 1981)**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
00:00:00	<i>Start of Interview</i> /Interviewer's Introductions
00:00:17	<i>Question:</i> When were you born? <i>Answer:</i> 1940.
00:00:21	<i>Question:</i> What high school? <i>Answer:</i> Immanuel Lutheran High School in Greensboro, North Carolina.
00:00:30	<i>Question:</i> Why Winthrop? <i>Answer:</i> By accident. Trying to get certified – would have had to drive to Columbia. A friend mentioned to her that she should go to Winthrop (before it integrated). Not hard to get accepted. It was a matter of sending in a postcard.
00:01:40	<i>Question:</i> How did Winthrop react? <i>Answer:</i> CR refers to the Indian Caste System. CR didn't have any friends. Was the only black student for a summer.
00:02:20	<i>Question:</i> How did the public react? <i>Answer:</i> CR went to Winthrop in a non-political way. Didn't have all the publicity of others.
00:02:55	<i>Question:</i> Major? <i>Answer:</i> MAT in Library Sciences and English.

- 00:03:00 *Question:* Did being black affect your grades? *Answer:* In one instance. CR talks about this event.
- 00:04:00 *Question:* Racism? *Answer:* CR was ignored. No overt racism. People went out of their way to be nice – especially the professors. Winthrop was concerned about her personal safety. CR did not live on campus – “no social threat.”
- 00:05:15 *Question:* Students give you a hard time? *Answer:* Always nice. One incident.
- 00:05:59 *Question:* Activities? *Answer:* Spent most of her time studying and working. Had a family that needed to be taken care of. CR went to summer night classes. CR says this was an entirely different experience for black students that lived on campus and participated in activities. CR is a Delta.
- 00:08:05 *Question:* Pressure? *Answer:* Pressure working a full time, keeping up family responsibilities, and studying. CR only got one “C”.
- 00:08:40 *Question:* Did it affect your home life? *Answer:* Husband and parents helped. Family support was helpful.
- 00:09:17 *Question:* Easy to get a job? *Answer:* CR tried to get a job in Charlotte. “Who you know, pays off.” A supervisor helped CR get a job. Required black teachers/librarians to get certificates.
- 00:10:27 *Question:* Do you think other blacks have gained from your experience? *Answer:* Yes. Made it a matter of convenience. CR’s grandfather helped build Winthrop. “The only barrier was the fact that my face was black.”
- 00:11:09 *Question:* Friendship? *Answer:* Open but did not have graduate degrees. Atlanta was the closest black library school that was certified.
- 00:11:50 *Question:* Support from black community? *Answer:* Neighbors nice. CR recalls the news coming out of Alabama and Mississippi. Neighbors guarded the house.
- 00:12:28 *Question:* Racial tension? *Answer:* CR refers to newspaper articles. CR says Winthrop took care of problems. Rock Hill did not have the same climate as other cities. There were no vocal, black leaders in Rock Hill.
- 00:14:00 *Question:* Did you participate in sit-ins? *Answer:* Did not. Participated at Johnson Smith. CR talks about non-violent, passive protests.
- 00:15:00 *Question:* Sit-in at Johnson Smith? *Answer:* Trying to integrate a lunch room. The manager did not want that. One of the girls in the protest could pass as white – went inside and ate and got back in line.
- 00:17:00 *Question:* What do you think would help blacks? *Answer:* CR says to stick with education – not necessarily college education. School prepares you. Have to have tools and skills for jobs. “Black people need to be prepared...to do more than one thing.” CR encourages people to be involved – it doesn’t all happen in the classroom. Educated in terms of religion.

00:20:28      ***End of Interview***