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Emmett C. Orr Interview, School for Professional Psychology, Wright State University

Oris Carter Amos

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Emmett C. Orr

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Profiles of African-Americans That Helped Shape Wright State University

Interview with Emmett C. Orr

Date of Interview: [?]

Interviewer: Oris Amos, College of Education and Human Services

Interviewee: Emmett C. Orr, School for Professional Psychology

[Note: Video and audio begin perceptibly going out of sync after 3:00]

Oris Amos: Hello and welcome to another video tape in a series of profiles of African-Americans who have made significant contributions to Wright State University. I thank Professor Alyce Jenkins for inviting me to be the guest interviewer today, and I thank my guest, Mr. Emmett Orr, for agreeing to participate with us today in this interview. Welcome Emmett.

Emmett C. Orr: Thank you, and it's my pleasure.

OA: Emmett, we have found in many of the interviews that the African-Americans who are working at Wright State were often recruited from other places or areas to Wright State University. Would you tell us where you were before Wright State?

EO: Alright, well I basically had one position before I came to Wright State. I graduated from Kent State University in 1970 and then upon graduation was employed in the city of Dayton by the health component of the Model Cities planning council and was hired initially as a buyer and then after about nine months was promoted to assistant director and then director of that facility. And so I was there for seven years prior to coming to Wright State.

OA: Would you give us a sequence or bit of history about how the School of Professional Psychology began?

EO: Yes, as much as I can. First of all, the School of Professional Psychology was created by an act of the Ohio legislature in 1977, and much through the efforts of a group of psychologists headed by Ronald Fox, who was the founding dean of the school, there was an academy of what they called Research and Education that was part of the Ohio Psychological Association, and it was composed of about six to seven psychologists around the state. One from the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland. Jane

[Runyon] was an African-American who was part of that who was chair of the Psychology Department at Central State, and another person who worked with that, what we called the Kitchen Cabinet, was Duke Ellis, and he worked as a consultant with that group. And the school was created, as I said, by an act of the legislature in 1977. The Dean came on in December of 1977 on the staff and faculty of Wright State University. And then I joined the school while there was a dean and a secretary, and then I was a third employee, as his assistant. And I came on in July of 1978.

OA: So Ronald Fox was the person who recruited you.

EO: Yes. During the time that I had worked at the Health Center, part of the whole concept of community health centers and free-standing clinics were designed primarily to reduce the cost of healthcare and to increase the use of preventive health maintenance by and among poor people. And based on the statistics in Dayton, that meant a large number of persons within the African-American community in Dayton. At that time, because we were such an anomaly within the healthcare industry, primarily people used the emergency rooms at hospitals or had private physicians, so the reimbursement mechanisms that were available within the state of Ohio addressed those two avenues. Hospitals could be reimbursed for services to the medically indigent and so could physicians. There was no mechanism for a health center to receive reimbursement under ADC or under the welfare system. Under myself and a lady out of Columbus who ran a similar facility, Betty Willis was her name, we organized the state association of ambulatory healthcare directors. And one of the things that that did was put us in touch with legislators in Columbus. We worked with a new legislator, young legislator out of Columbus whose name was Les Brown. And he had an interest in focus his, if you will, his legislative action around the area of providing improvements in the welfare system. So we worked closely with him to rewrite welfare laws that would render our services, ambulatory care services, eligible for reimbursement under the Welfare Act.

That put me in contact with legislators. When Ron was appointed dean of the school, he expressed an interest and a desire to bring onboard with himself someone who had first a health background and knowledge of the state system, and as I understand—as he later told me—I was recommended to him by several people out of the Ohio Legislature as a person who might be a good right-arm person or a second man to put on his team, in terms of having experience in running a multi-million dollar facility and having a health administrative background. And so that's how I came aboard or how I was identified by him to come aboard.

OA: Now C.J. McLin had a great deal of influence in seeing that the School of Professional Psychology came to Wright State.

EO: Right. One of the key players in the general assembly was C.J. McLin. Another one was Harry Meshel, Senator Harry Meshel. So those two worked as a team, one on the Senate side and the other on the House side, to cause the creation of the school, or the moving of the legislation through the school or through the House to and through the Senate to cause that to be created. Unlike many other academic programs, this school was created by the legislature and then funded that way and then went through the Ohio Board of Regents process. So it was created through the political prowess of C.J. McLin and Senator Harry Meshel.

OA: Now I know Professor Jenkins has been profiling African-Americans who contributed. Who were the charter African-American faculty who served in the school?

EO: Right. One of the things that the Dean was committed to was to improving and increasing the number of African-Americans in the field of psychology at the doctoral level, and he not only gave lip service to that but wanted to create an environment or create a school or system that would perpetuate that goal, that significant objective of his. Through that process, Dr. Ellis was brought on board as the first Assistant Dean for Student Services and Admissions. His job, his goal was to establish and develop the admissions criteria and the process by which the school would select students, and in so doing he made sure that there were not artificial barriers or real barriers that would reduce or minimize the potential for African-Americans to be successful upon gaining admission into the school.

Additionally, we recruited faculty. Now that was difficult from the standpoint that there were not many black African-Americans with their Ph.D., and particularly who would be willing to leave perhaps a secure position to come to a new or founding school the way we were. We were fortunate in being able to recruit James Dobbins from the University of Pittsburgh. He had recently completed his doctoral studies and a post-doctorate at the University of Pittsburgh, and he came aboard with us. We were not successful at recruiting other, already graduated Ph.D.'s who would come onboard as faculty, so in order to assure that we did not diminish that commitment, the Dean then looked for persons who were ABDs or who were in school and were pretty sure of completing but had not yet done so. And he contracted with them while they were in their last term in their doctoral program, and that was Dr. Giovanni Bonds. She was a...in the very last trimesters of her doctoral degree from the University of Cincinnati in community psychology. We contracted with her and put her on contract with us as an instructor about four months before she completed her requirements for the Ph.D. from the University of Cincinnati. And then once she completed it she started right away as an instructor, and then upon her one year of post-doctoral work under supervision and her licensure, she was immediately appointed an assistant professor in the school.

So, in terms of faculty— [break in the tape] —three out of a total of about eight faculty members. I was onboard as an assistant to the dean as an administrator. Dr. Ellis had employed a young lady as an admissions coordinator to himself, who was Omintha Petrie, and she came onboard in that first year. And then Ron wanted to employ—we needed to hire a secretary; the secretary that had been available to himself at the time that I came, husband took a position out of the city and that opened up his secretarial position. And we contacted the Dayton Urban League to recruit for an African-American to come onto Wright State's campus as a secretary to the dean, which was another first, I believe, for Wright State in terms of employing an African-American at that level under the classified service pool. And that person was Shirley Bonner, currently is her name.

OA: It's interesting, it seems to me the School of Professional Psychology has always been involved with the community. Is that still—I know at the beginning there seemed to have been a good deal of involvement with the African-American community. Is that involvement still true?

EO: Yes it is.

OA: In what way?

EO: From the beginning, we had what was called a Community Advisory Council to the school, and that council still exists. One of the things that we thought, since we were preparing persons to be practitioners of psychology, professional practitioners, we felt that, while we were doing the academic thing, we needed to make sure that we did not disjoin ourselves from the community and what the needs of the community might be. So the Community Advisory Council helped to keep us focused and to keep us current and to keep us active and involved within the community, and we've always had African-American representation there. Additionally, we have a facility, as you are aware, that's currently located in the Innerwest in Downtown Dayton and the West End of Dayton. Part of that—I'll talk more about that later—but part of that involvement, because we're there in the community, the Dean wanted to make sure that we had representation on the Priority Board or the Planning Council, as it was called, that represents that Innerwest area. And I serve as a representative from the university, from the school, on the Innerwest Priority Board, it's called, not as an elected member but as a consumer who's interested with a group of other businesses that are located in that area in an advisory capacity.

OA: You mentioned Duke Ellis as you talked about faculty, and I knew him and it seemed like he was so well respected by students, faculty, other members of the community. Would you talk a little bit about Duke? What made him such a personable leader, and the students seemed to really like him. Talk a little bit about Duke.

EO: I think that the way to capsule Duke is to say that he was a person who was genuinely concerned and loved people, and I think that that aspect of his personality was demonstrated to everybody who came into contact with him and who knew him. His entire professional career had been community-oriented and particularly working with young people. I, in fact, met Duke during my junior year in high school as a member of the Urban League Youth Forum. I was a student at Chaminade High School and at that time, I was a distinct minority there, and to make sure that I kept myself involved with my community, I joined the Dayton Urban League Youth Forum. Duke was the advisor for that; he was the director for the Urban League Youth Forum at that time. And took us to campuses, to Wilberforce and Central State campus, to increase and to pique our interest in terms of going on to school and then to look at historically black colleges.

I later became again introduced to Duke about six years later, when I had finished—maybe six or seven years later—when I had finished college and was working in health administration and had been asked to serve on the board of a new organization and become involved with a new organization called Daymont West. We were recruiting for a director, an executive director of that facility, and Duke had just completed his doctoral studies by then at the University of Cincinnati. And he was one of the candidates that we had selected or identified for that position. Unfortunately, we were not able to offer the kind of salary he would need to take that position, but that was the second time I had come into contact with him.

Not only was he a person who loved people, he also...he always talked about his background, from the standpoint that he grew up on a farm in Indiana, and he often talked about how being a person of the earth, he was a very basic person in that way. So many times when we would have problems, or when issues would arise that would compound or profound everybody else, he would always find a way to break it down to its basic level and show us that there would be a way to accomplish something when it seemed as though there was no way. So one of the things that I appreciated most about him was that he very rarely said, "We can't do something," or, "It's not possible to accomplish something." He always said, "Well let's look at it and see how we can do it given those constraints or those barriers that we might think are before us right now."

OA: Now the center, the Duke Ellis Center, is in West Dayton. It's interesting to me that that was not placed on Wright State's campus. Would you talk about the politics, the rationale for placing that center in Dayton rather than on Wright State's campus?

EO: Well, the history of that now goes back to the Drew Health Center days and the days of my administration at that facility and the creation of the Medical School here at Wright State. One of the things that C.J. was instrumental in doing with the creation of the Medical School, with the creation of the School of Professional Psychology, was to make sure that a role was provided for African-Americans in the creation and in those

organizations once they became ongoing. As you know, Wright State does not have a teaching hospital. This county does not. The way that was handled with the creation of this medical school is that all of the existing hospitals— [audio cuts out] —I met weekly with the contractors to make sure that the construction was on target and to make sure that changes did not happen that were not approved, you know, prior to an approval process. And, after the facility was ready, I had the primary responsibility for furnishing it and decorating it and equipping it and that kind of thing. So it's been an evolving responsibility and role that I played with the school. In the early days I, as assistant to the dean, I functioned in many, many capacities while we were developing the curriculum, while we were putting together our philosophy statement and our mission statement. I played an integral part in that process as well. And over time it became clear that my role and my skill would be best used in the areas that I'm currently involved with the school: to manage the administrative direction of the school and to handle the fiscal operations at the school.

OA: See I'm very impressed that you're in charge of the budget. That's always significant to me. I don't know what that means but being in charge of the budget really says something. I know you've received many honors. One is the President's Award for Excellence and Service.

EO: Yes, I was pleasantly surprised and pleased with that recognition from President Mulhollan. I had been nominated by one of my peers at the school and then the process that one goes through to have that designation made was one that flattered me. So that was a recognition that came from a selection that was made by a committee of my peers here at Wright State, the professional staff at Wright State. So I was very pleased to receive that recognition and that honor. In fact I was told yesterday—that happened in 1988—but I was told yesterday that I was the first African-American to receive that award, and so I am again pleased with that, under that category, so I'm again pleased with that.

OA: That's great! And you received another award for your work on the Ellis Center, did you not?

EO: Yes. That was the constru— As you can imagine, anytime you get ready to build something and again you're using state money with all of the controls and requirements that are placed on using public dollars—not to complain but to acknowledge—and having had that as a primary responsibilities or being assigned that as a primary responsibility, my other responsibilities were not diminished in any way when I took on that additional charge. And several things happened in my personal life that helped to compound that even. One is that we had a fire at our home and it was completely destroyed. We were all okay but we lost everything we owned. And then my secretary was involved in a serious automobile accident shortly thereafter, about four weeks—

[break in the tape] —the Parity 2000, which is the black or the African-American arm of the regional planning process that's happening within this region for the year 2000. That we have been doing since the creation of the school. Secondly, the Ellis Institute's meeting rooms and facilities are available to community groups. So from time to time the Priority Board has met there, the Wolf Creek Progressive Council has met there, and a group of businessmen in the Innerwest area hold their meetings there on occasion. So we are available to the community in that way. And then finally, as a deliverer and a provider of psychological services, we are also available to the community and have been since the beginning on a sliding fee scale basis. Particularly, our gifted children's program and several of the other programs that we offer are administered and are operated out of that facility. And so the community does have the opportunity to take advantage of that location.

OA: I was thinking, since it is the Duke Ellis Center, and Duke was so involved with African-American health, that it would certainly be appropriate that the African-American community have access to its facility and training and service.

EO: Right. In fact we're very pleased that the Board of Trustees at Wright State saw fit to accept our recommendation to name that facility for Dr. Ellis.

OA: That's a wonderful honor for him, isn't it?

EO: Yes it is.

OA: You talked about the charter faculty members who were African-American. Would you talk a bit about the charter class?

EO: Yes.

OA: Who were the students who were in the charter class?

EO: There were, in the char—the school was created and set up to have about twenty-five students per class. And in the charter class, there were twenty-seven students, six of whom were African-American members. And all of them are doing well now and are practicing and are delivering service in this community and in the country. We're very proud of the accomplishments of our students. And, if I can refer to my notes for a minute because I was able to maintain contact with the students, I know a little bit about what some of them are doing. One student, first student I'll mention is Donna Mills. She had come to us from Georgia as a—first of all, I should mention that in the charter class, all of those students already had a master's degree and it was designed to be a two-year program. And if you're familiar with how accreditation of programs go, you actually receive your final accreditation once you have graduated your first class of students. So it was designed that originally we would admit what we called mastered-level students.

Within the second year, we admitted post-baccalaureate students, and so primarily that's continued since then. But the first charter class of students already had their master's degree. One or two instances, the students were already licensed in the state because at one time, you could be licensed as a psychologist with just a master's degree.

But Donna Mills was a member of the charter class who later came back to come onto the faculty as an assistant professor with the program, with the School of Professional Psychology. And she is currently with the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and is Director of Psychology at the Timber Creek Facility that's located in Huber Heights I believe. So she's still in the area because one of the goals was to increase the number of Ohio-licensed African-American psychologists. Another student was Ruth Davis. Ruth is currently in the Washington D.C. area. She had, prior to coming into the program been a school psychologist with the Dayton school system. And she is currently with the Washington D.C. public school system as Chief of Psychology for that school district. So she's doing quite well, and what happened, she did her pre-doctoral internship at Howard University and stayed in the area after she finished, in that area. Another student was Victor McCarley. Victor is a practicing psychologist here in the Dayton area, in private practice, and has his own company here and building. So he's involved in quite a few things in addition to being on the adjunct faculty with the school. So he still keeps his hands in the School of Psychology and he provides one of the valuable role models for our students as they matriculate through our program.

Another student who finished our program in that charter class was Timothy Moragne, and he is currently at Nova University in Florida and is a professor there, and is very—and heads up their internship program, I believe, with Nova University. So he's been very active, and he's also past president of ABPsi, which is the American Black Psychological Association. So he's doing quite well. I should mention first off that there were seven students in that charter class—or six students I believe I said earlier in the charter class—and all of them are doing quite well. Josephine Lewis is another member of the charter class and she is with the Georgia State Department of Mental Health in Atlanta—or just outside of Atlanta is where she's living—and she's doing quite well, and she has been since she completed.

And two other of our graduates who were not part of the charter class but who graduated in the second, third, and fourth classes that we graduated in the early 1980s is Jimmy Johnson is one, who is still in the Dayton area. He is currently a regional director for the Ohio Department of Corrections. Initially was the founding Director of Psychology out at the C.J. McLin Correctional Complex that's located in Dayton on Gettysburg Avenue and last year, the year before, was promoted to a regional director for corrections within the state. Another graduate is Duke Ellis II, Dr. Ellis' son, finished our program in 1985, maybe 1986, I'm blocking on the exact year, and he is currently at

the University of Rochester or just recently was at the University of Rochester. And I understand just earlier this summer he accepted a position in North Carolina at Chapel Hill, so he'll be relocating by the fall to assume a position there. So he's doing quite well as well. I think what I can say in conclusion on that subject about our students is that within the United States, Wright State's School of Professional Psychology has graduated the largest percentage of African-American PhDs of any school in the country, and—barring the Virgin Islands because the School of Professional Psychology that's in Puerto Rico naturally would graduate quite a few other minority students by the definition of this country. So we're very proud of that. We've been able to maintain since the beginning a very respectable percentage of our graduates are members the minority community, specifically the African-American community.

OA: That's a really very significant statement that you just made. Would you repeat that? "We have graduated..."

EO: The largest percentage of our graduates of any school in the United States of African-Americans specifically.

OA: That's terrific.

EO: We have also graduated Native Indians and Hispanic persons, but that statistic applies to the African-American members whom we've graduated since our existence.

OA: Now do you have students coming to Wright State's School of Professional Psych from Central State?

EO: Yes we have. In fact, Ruth Davis, who I spoke of earlier that was in the charter class is a graduate of Central State, Victor McCarley is a graduate of Central State, Duke Ellis II is a graduate of Central State. We've had other graduates from Central State: [Andre Rodan], a young lady named [Dawn Talley], who is in this area still—Andre is also still in this area, practicing and working, as is [Dawn]. And so we've...from the beginning, we've tried to maintain a relationship with Central State that would assure that students from there had every opportunity to, and in every class—just about every class—we've had at least one graduate from Central State to matriculate through the program or gain admission into the program. We currently have two students in the freshman class who are from Central State University, so it's a goal of ours, not often accomplished, but it is a goal of ours.

OA: You mentioned the charter faculty in the School of Professional Psych. Who are your African-American faculty presently?

EO: Dr. Dobbins is still with us as a faculty member, and we have currently Dr. Rodney Hammond, who came to us after Duke passed as the Assistant Dean for Student

Affairs. And he came to us from Tennessee; he was at Meharry Medical College and he's been with us since 1983 as a faculty person. We are in the process currently of recruiting. We've just had some retirements within the school and are in the process of recruiting, and I don't want to speak prematurely of their signing a contract but we have one African-American lady who we are heavily recruiting from the Chicago area, and then we have another African-American who is local who we are recruiting. So, hope to be able to mention their names within the very near future.

OA: We've talked about faculty members, and I haven't said as much as I'd like about your position having been with the School of Professional Psych right from the beginning, and now you're the Assistant Dean for Financial and Fiscal Affairs.

EO: Yes, for Administrative and Fiscal Services, and that's kind of a way to say that I do perform, function in a lot of capacities at the school. I'm responsible for the inventory of equipment and facilities at the school, and I am the primary person responsible for the budget at the school. And I maintain that. So, in addition to other tasks that I am frequently assigned, for example doing the construction phase of the Ellis facility, I was project manager for that— [break in the tape] —tion that would happen, needed to happen within the geographic area of that particular [34:25] area, in Drew's initial service area.

Okay now that brings us to the School of Professional Psychology and the facility that is currently the Duke Ellis Human Development Center. When I came onboard here at Wright State, the Dean from the very beginning was talking about we need to have clinical teaching facility that would allow us to model the delivery of professional psychological service. There are in the area, in Montgomery County and in the Dayton area, community mental health centers, there's a Dayton Mental Health Center, and facilities who provide services. But we knew that, in training practitioners, we were going to need to provide a breadth and a range of services and of different approaches that might not be attractable to those agencies or might not be feasible for those agencies based upon their budgets because they were service providers and here we are a training program. So I knew of the money that had already been set aside in the state's budget but was not spent and there was no plan to spend it. And Beljan was involved in that process—who was also here at that time as Vice President for Health Affairs for Wright State University—and sure enough he said, "Well there are no immediate, short-range plans or long-range plans to use that money." And we then talked to C.J. and got the blessing of the University's administration to request those dollars to be used for the School of Professional Psychology. The intent of the money was still the same: it was to be available to provide a health service within the community, and secondly any construction had to be located within the community. So it was just a matter of spending money that had already been approved, and we were able to do that. That's what caused the facility to come online as soon as it did after we were created as a school

and, in terms of the construction, if you will the construction goals and plans of Wright State, because you know those things usually take ten years from the time that the request is made to completion in terms of how that happens with the University environment. But we were able to move more rapidly based upon those dollars being available. And that's why it's located in the downtown, West Dayton area.

OA: Is the African-American community taking full advantage of that Center? How are you evaluating the use of the Center?

EO: Well, first of all and foremost it's a training facility, but it's also...we are part of the community and we recognize that we are part of the community, so one thing that we did right away was provided an office spa— [audio cuts out] —a health organization's facilities would be involved in the training of physicians at Wright State. Drew Health Center, being in existence at that time as a facility committed and dedicated to improving the healthcare of African-Americans in this city, was involved in that process as well. So while hospitals such as St. Elizabeth and Good Sam and Miami Valley and Grandview were all had state money made available to it to add or to renovate facilities to provide training for medical students, C.J. saw to it that Drew Health Center also had money available to it to plan for a teaching facility and space. For the medical students who would come out of Wright State. Once the Dean was identified at the School of Medicine, they decided to first concentrate—which is understandable—the construction at the hospitals because they needed to have the full-range of facility and service that the hospitals could provide. The Outpatient/Ambulatory Care Facility that we represented was to come online later on. Well as it worked out, the Medical School's plan did not include the expansion at that particular location, so the money that had been identified for Drew Health Center contained a stipulation, which said that these dollars are available to this community, so any con—

[Tape stops abruptly at 39:06]