DELTA XI AKA ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
Interviewer: Briana M. Davis
Interviewee: Lareatha Clay
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TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

Briana M. Davis: Hi, my name is Briana Davis. This is going to be an AKA oral history with Ms. Lareatha. We're going to start with Section 1, Question 1. Please tell us your full name and your role in the Delta Xi chapter.

Lareatha Clay: My name is Lareatha Honette Clay. Honette is spelled H-O-N-E-T-T-E, so the H is silent. I pledged Delta Xi in Spring of 1977. We were called the Interludes of Romance, which was not the name we originally wanted, but that was the name they let us have. Well, I don't even remember what my line name was because I hated that Interludes of Romance title so much. [Laughs] When we get together, we call ourselves the Interludes, and we leave the romance part out.

Davis: I love that, I didn't mean to interrupt you there. What line was that? What season and year?

Clay: Spring, 1977. In fact, I was with my line sisters the other day and I had a friend named Overtone Spence who had a radio show. He played reggae at the KUT FM, and he would get on there and say, "I want to shout out to the Spring '77 AKA line. Geneta, Tania, Donna, Wanda, Lareatha, Onella, and Fay." We were like, "Oh, that's right." We all had the same, all our names end in A except Fay. He would do that, I can't remember how often his show was. He would do that, so we used to tease each other about that, how Overtone would say our names on the radio.

Davis: What a special memory. Overtone, that is O-V-E-R-T-O-N-E?

Clay: Yes, Spence. He was going at UT on a track scholarship, but he was a RTF. Back in those days, a lot of athletes were RTF majors, Radio, Television and Film. He was an RTF major. He moved from Jamaica, reggae was just beginning to be known. At that time it wasn't widely known. He had a reggae show on KUT FM late at night, I can't even remember what time it was or what days it was, but that's what he would do, play reggae music.

Davis: I absolutely love reggae music, I grew up on Bob Marley.

Clay: Right.

Davis: That is so cool.

Clay: Actually I met Bob Marley with him. Bob Marley came to Austin, it was '78 I think. Because on his album, I can't remember which album it is, but he does have like a ticket of this Austin concert on the album cover. Because Overtone head that radio show, and because I was one of the few people who liked reggae, he was like, "You want to go to hear Bob Marley?" I was like "Sure, sure." He got us backstage passes, so I actually met Bob Marley. Thank you very much. [Laughs]

Davis: That is so cool. Man it's always good to have—

Clay: I met Bob Marley and Rita Marley. The I-Three's were with him at the time, so Rita Marley, Bob Marley and I can't remember the other two ladies' names now. Couple of band members in there.

Davis: Well, may he rest in peace.

Clay: Yeah.

Davis: Goodness.

Clay: It was something too because when he died, I would tell people, "Bob Marley died." and they would be like, "Who?"

I had a friend named Catherine who was from Jamaica, who went to UT. I called her and I said, "Catherine, did you hear Bob Marley died?" "Oh no." Then I was like, "Finally, someone who understands." This is a huge deal.

Davis: It's always different when you actually had a chance to meet them in person. It's very sentimental, I can imagine. But I get attached to every living thing that I come across. Like the other day, I saw a roly poly on the ground and I was like, "Hi, sir." Then I just realized, I get attached very easily. [Laughter] So, I can imagine, for sure. Let's see. We'll go ahead and move on to Question 2, Section 1. What high school did you attend and how did you come to be an AKA?

Clay: I attended Hebert High School in Beaumont, Texas. It was still an all Black high school at the time. Actually, I went to all Black high schools from the 1st through to 12th grade, except for the 7th. I went to a predominantly white school that year. At the time, UT had this program called, I can't remember what it was called, I think Achievement Scholarships or something. I can't remember it. It was—Project Info was the name of it and they would recruit UT students who go to predominantly Black schools, primarily in Houston and Dallas, but they would come to Beaumont and try to recruit people to go to UT. They had this scholarship that was $1,000 a year for four years, that would be the minimum you could get. Because my parents are—which is one of the stereotypes I think you were talking about. My parents both have masters degrees and they were both teachers, and so the thinking at my high school—because my parents went to college with a lot of the teachers that I had in school—so, the thinking in my high school was, "Well, Lareatha doesn't need scholarship money," so they didn't steer too many scholarships my way. When this $1,000 a year for four years came up, then that was something that was interesting, I'll put it that way.

But I still was determined to go to U of H. I knew I was going to U of H, I had gone to U of H for a lot of UIL competitions and things like that. But the top of all my class at Hebert ended up at UT. The main reason was because of a friend of mine who was at UT and we're still friends today. His name is Theo Gijeri, and he said, "Lareatha, we need to go to UT. This is a school we need to go to." He convinced everyone else to go to UT. In my class alone, my class was Theo, Letty Manuel, Benita Rogers, Michael Raymond, Thaddeus Darjean, Mary Barlow, and me, seven people. We were all in the magna cum laude part of our graduating class, so we all came here together. Couple of us roomed together, we would all drive home together in the holidays because Theo had a car that might run, might not run. We'd all get in the car and hopefully it'll start. We would get all packed in the car and it'd be like, "Okay, is it going to start today or not?" [Laughs] Then once we got on the road, "Is it going to make it all the way to

Beaumont?" So anyway, everyone in my family, just about, is an AKA, and my sister was an AKA at North Texas. I wanted to be an AKA primarily because of that, because of those influences. I actually wanted to be on the fall of '76 line and I was turned down. Some people encouraged me to go ahead and I'm not going to get into the whole gossip around it but some people that were in that, including some people on the fall of '76 line encouraged me to try again, so I did, and then that time, I got in.

Davis: Gosh, it's always difficult being turned down the first time. I can relate. I was turned down from the basketball team back in middle school. I tried again, and I made A team, so that was cool.

Clay: Okay. That's good. Yeah.

Davis: But that wasn't after trying again, it's one of those things. Try again. Now, look at you. You're a very influential part of the AKA Delta Xi Chapter here in Texas, which is super cool. I love that for you. But that never would have happened had you not tried again.

Clay: Yeah, that's true.

Davis: So that's a life lesson right there, I think. Try and try again if at first, you don't succeed. I'm going to get all Aaliyah in here. Just to recap, you attended Hebert High School in Beaumont, Texas. You went to all Black high schools except for 7th grade where you attended predominantly white. Project Info recruited you to go to UT, is that correct?

Clay: Correct.

Davis: There was $1,000 a year grant for 4 years.

Clay: Yes. Everyone who came in under, I think they call it Achievement Scholarship, because you can nominate yourself for it. That was one of the things, too, you didn't have to go through your counselor, you can nominate yourself for. At the minimum, you would get $1,000 a year, which back in those days—so, I would get $500 per semester because all I got was the minimum. Some people, even though some of those who went to high school with me, they got the $1,000 and then they got money on top of that. I just didn't. Thank God, y'all don't have to go through it now, but in those days, when you would register, I don't know if you've seen pictures of it but that was when you had to get in line at the stadium and register. Even though they had people whose last name begin with A through G or something would come one day and at certain time, then people's names begin with something would come another day, the line would still wrap all the way around the stadium. You'd be in line for, let's just say hours. You get in the line just to register for your class. Then you'd have to get in line again, a different line on a different day, to get your financial aid. I have to get in that line again, wrap around, stand in line for ages and ages to get my $500. But that $500 paid for all my books for the semester, all my tuition for a semester, and the first month of the dorm. That was a lot of money in 1975 when I got to UT. Nowadays, that $500 wouldn't pay for books.

Davis: Right. It is so expensive.

Clay: Right. Because back in those days, UT was considered one of the schools that was good school that wasn't that expensive, especially if you were living in the state. It was like one of those schools that was considered a real good bargain, good education for not a lot of money. All that is a whole lot different today.

Davis: Very cool. Would you mind elaborating a little bit on how you became an AKA, like what the specific experiences were that brought you to make that decision?

Clay: Just like I said, I grew up, my sister was an AKA, and that was the closest I had. I have so many cousins on both sides of my family that are AKAs. But especially on my mother's side, there are so many of us that are AKAs. At our family reunions, we have a special time where we all get together and sing songs. Sing AKA songs and sorority hymn, and welcome the new people who may have just become AKAs. Because our family reunions are every other year. Maybe in that two year time frame, two or three people have become AKA, so we welcome them into the sisterhood and so forth. It was more like that. Are you trying to ask about the actual pledging process? Because back in those days, we actually called it pledging. Nowadays, they don't call it that anymore. It was challenging. I'll put it that way, it was challenging. But I think that you would always say that pledging is like a very unsophisticated team-building exercise because in my job, I do team-buildings. That's one of the things I do is team-building. Basically, you're just having experiences and having to figure things out in a way that makes you have to work together, and the experience makes you lifelong friends, which is one of the goals of the sorority is to promote lifelong friendship among women. Like I said, my line sisters and I were, we went on an outing a couple of weeks ago for my birthday. When I pledged, one of the women who was on the fall of '76 line, one of the ones who encouraged me to go ahead and try again, she was my special when I pledged. She lives in the Dallas area so every now and then when we get together, we say she's our honorary member of our line because a lot of times when we get together, we invite her to come along as well. That's Linda, in fact. Linda Todd was my special.

Davis: Do you mind telling me what a special is?

Clay: Well, whenever you pledge, there is supposed to be one big sister, as we called them at the time, who is the one that looks out for you and supposed to be like your special friend or whatever, your special big sister. You just call them special for short. Linda Todd was my special.

Davis: Yes, we need to continue our interview. Me and her are the ones where we had to cut the interview short. That is so amazing. Wow.

Clay: I was talking to her yesterday because she was telling me she was going out of town. I think she's going out of town either Sunday or Monday.

Davis: Yes. I think she's been traveling for some family things.

Clay: Yeah.

Davis: How cool. Wow, so you all are very close. How long have you guys been special friends?

Clay: Well, actually in the fall of '76 she and I were in an accounting class together and I told her that I was planning to try to get on the line and she was like, “No.” She may not admit this, you should ask her but she's like, “I'm not so sure”, and her mother was an AKA and I was like, “Linda, how can you not be an AKA and your mother is an AKA?” I'm not so sure. We decided we were both going to apply to get on the line and she made it and I didn't, so that was really, I was like Dog, that hurt my feelings. But you weren't even interested and you got in and I didn't. [Laughs]

Davis: That stinks.

Clay: That's the way it goes sometimes.

Davis: Well, you don't succeed, try again. I'm glad that she made it though before you because she might have been able to put in a good word for you.

Clay: There was another woman who wasn't my special who I learned later wanted me to choose her as a special and she was one of the ones who encouraged me, too. In fact, my pin, she gave it to me when I went over there and I still wear it.

Davis: That is so sweet. Lifelong friendship, that seems to be definitely on-brand with the AKA purpose. I've noticed that lifelong friendship is something that definitely does happen just from some of the things that you have told me and some of the things that other Delta Xi members have told me as well. Though it seems like you go into it and then you have those connections with certain people and those connections with certain people become so strong that they last for a very long time. But I've also noticed that those connections don't happen with every single person in the line. It just happens with certain people that have that strong connection there. But I think that AKA as a sorority and an incorporation does a really good job of setting situations for like-minded people to meet which is very cool.

Clay: Like minded but also, you know AKAs are very diverse. I think someone finally explained to me the whole pretty thing because when we were in school, the pretty thing, that was not a thing. And I talked to my line sisters and people in my era and we're like, "What's up with the pretty thing?" Some younger AKA told me that that was about the people were saying that AKAs was too pretty and so it was like they were trying to own it and say, yeah, we're pretty but we also do stuff and so that's why they do it like the whole mirror thing, I'm like, wait, what's that about?

Davis: The mirror thing was not a thing by 1976? No.

Clay: No, not at all. No pretty thing. We were about trying to be professional, I guess that was the thing. Because back in those days and some of those—that thought process remains today, like when you're going to a certain event, you have to wear your white. Today people don't wear hose. If you go to official AKA ritual thing, you have to have a hose on. I notice a throwback from back in the day, but no, we were all about making sure that if we were going do a program, it had to be done top notch. It had to be on time. If you were going to speak you couldn't get up there and, as my father would say, jaw bone. You had to have something prepared, you had to know what you were saying, you had to speak well. That's what we were about was presenting our sales as prepared, professional. I don't know if the word professional is right but prepared and on-point and stuff like that, that's what we were about. This pretty thing came up I think in the '90s or something. That was 20 years after I was gone. I think that's when I started noticing all the steps were about being pretty.

Davis: That is a very, very interesting take on the organization. My older sister was an AKA and she did show me her video some time ago because I asked, I was like, “Hey, you have anything you want to show me?” But of course she pledged in Alabama that Theta Sigma chapter and so she was states away from me at the time and she's the older sis that goes off and no one knows where she is. But she finally showed me her step video and I saw them do that thing [gestures] and I was like so what's that about? She's like, "Oh, well, AKA's are known for being pretty people. They're known for being well-dressed,

well-presented." It's interesting to see the shifts from well-dressed and well-presented into we're pretty, but we still do things. It's very interesting. Like we're pretty to beauty and brains. It went from brains and professionalism to beauty and brains, which is interesting.

Clay: Yeah.

Davis: Sorry, I'm just writing some notes here. Super cool. Are you ready to move on to Section 2 or is there anything that you wanted to elaborate on that question?

Clay: I don't remember but if something comes up I'll let you know.

Davis: Awesome. We're moving on to Section 2. Are you interested in doing both parts?

Clay: Sure.

Davis: Cool. Section 2, question 2a. What can you tell us about the activities and service projects you participated in and how did they impact you?

Clay: Let's see, what did we do? I know we raised money for families. I'm trying to think of what we did, that was such a long time ago. So many service projects in between. What I do remember, and there was one year where we didn't do anything because that was the year we were suspended, I don't know if they talked about that.

Davis: Do you remember that specific year?

Clay: That was spring of '78. You see, I graduated in spring of '79. Was it spring of '78? Or maybe it was the fall of—actually, oh I don't have it here. Because I kept all the clippings that were in the newspaper because it was in the newspaper. It was in several newspapers. I think it was in the Dallas Morning News, Dallas Times Herald, Austin American Statesman because the chapter was accused of beating girls up and hazing and we were suspended. I'm thinking, it was in the fall of '78 and the spring of '79 and that's the reason. It must have been the fall of '78 and a spring of '79. I think that's when it was and I can't remember right now, but anyway, they had an investigation at the campus level. The university did an investigation and they basically were like, "They aren't exactly a 100 percent innocent, but they are not the barbarians that this woman is saying. They didn't do all this stuff that this woman is saying that they did. So, we're going to suggest that they—" Because number one, when we were at UT, the only Greek organizations that were on campus—meaning that fell under the umbrella of university jurisdiction—were the Black sororities and fraternities. When I was at UT AKAs were on campus, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, Alpha Phi Alpha, Omega Psi Phi, Kappa Alpha Psi. Those were those sororities and fraternities and we were all on campus.

The white sororities and fraternities would not be on campus because one of the things that you had to do in order to be a, "campus organization" was you could not discriminate. They did not want to sign anything saying that they would not discriminate so they were considered off-campus organizations. The only advantage of being an on campus organization was you could use university facilities. You could sign up to use auditorium that was on-campus or you could be involved in the student union stuff, that was only the deal. That's the reason that the university did an investigation was because we were an on-campus organization. They came away like I said, saying well, they did do some things that were a little out of the box but they didn't runaway and beat people up like this person is saying they did. Therefore,

I think they suspended us for one month or something. I can't remember what it was because the [Bulae 00:31:06], Bulae, meaning the big international conference, was going to be in Houston that year and they suggested and make sure that they go over the Bulae and learn what they need to do. Well, the sorority also did what they called an investigation and they were not nearly as forgiving. They basically suspended the chapter. I think we got back right before I graduated, so that's the reason that probably I don't remember a lot of different things that we did. What did I learn from that? I learned that AKA doesn't play. [Laughs] I'm not sure if I should even admit this and everyone knows it, I'm just going to say it aloud, but there was some let's say tension with the graduate chapter in Austin, and the chapter at UT. Other than our graduate advisor who was very supportive, other than that, we weren't getting a lot of "give 'em a chance" kind of thing from the graduate people.

Davis: I see it.

Clay: When I went to Orlando, I was active in the Orlando chapter. Delta Omicron Omega was my chapter in Orlando. I learned that, apparently, that's something that happens a lot because the Orlando chapter it was more supportive, I should say of HBCUs than they were of chapters at PWIs. If you were a chapter at a HBCU, then those tend to be more supported than the chapter in a PWI. I've talked to AKAs through the years about that, and I think that a lot of it has to do with, especially in the older, back in the day, a lot of those women went to the HBCUs so naturally it was more of a familiarity, or hey, that's my old chapter and so therefore I'm going to be a little more supportive of it or whatever. But that was the case. I'm not sure how it is now, but that was the case when I was there. That Beta Kappa, which is the chapter at Huston-Tillotson, was supported a whole lot more than Delta Xi which is at UT, by the graduate chapter. That's all the dirt you're going to get from me today. [Laughs]

Davis: That is very valuable. It's very interesting to think about how segregation in the school system has led to a lack of familiarity I think when it comes to graduate chapter and the undergrad chapter. It's very interesting to see how the social climate of the time has led to maybe, I'm sorry, let me turn off this TV, but it has led to, not division per se, but a lack of connection and it's very interesting to see the school system and the desegregation of it having lasting effects. Very interesting.

Clay: Even to this day, I know a lot of soros that are in Beta Psi Omega which is the graduate chapter in Austin. It's not a written rule. It's this tradition, let's put it that way, that when they are looking for a person to be a graduate advisor, they try to get a person who went to UT to be the graduate advisor of UT. I'm not sure if they try to make sure a person went to Beta Psi Omega if they went to Huston-Tillotson, is a Beta Psi Omega graduate advisor. The graduate advisor comes from the graduate chapter. But the last few with Delta Xi have all been people who went to UT and pledged at UT, so that's still that tradition. I'm not sure. But then, I have a friend that went to TSU, Texas Southern University, and she's in the Houston chapter, and it seems like they do that too. Maybe that's just a tradition that people do, they try to get someone that can I guess identify with whatever school. In my chapter here, a person who went to UT was the grad advisor for Paul Quinn, which is the a Black school, HBCU in Dallas. I don't know what's—because we have two chapters, we do Paul Quinn and University of Texas at Dallas. I'm not sure what's school the grad advisor from UT Dallas went to. But here, we don't have that in my chapter. Now we're one of the legacy chapter in Dallas, Alpha Xi Omega. I think they have SMU and they may have North Texas. I'm not sure, but I don't know they handle it, but with the two that we do, whoever wants to do it does it. You don't have to have gone to the school.

Davis: I see. And Alpha Xi Omega, just to be sure, is a legacy chapter in Dallas or in North Texas?

Clay: In Dallas. Alpha Xi Omega. When I say legacy, I mean that was like the first graduate chapter in Dallas. You can basically tell because chapters are named according to, they go down Greek alphabet. You can tell how old the chapter is by its name. Alpha it means they up there, Alpha Xi Omega it means they—and the chapter in Houston is Alpha Kappa Omega—so you can tell that chapter is even older than the one in Dallas. The chapter I'm a member of it, is Omicron Mu Omega, so you can tell we way down. We were, I think, just 25 years old or something. I was the charter member of a chapter that's in Arlington and it's called Xi Theta Omega. I'm trying to think, I think Xi Theta Omega is a little bit before Omicron Mu Omega. Yeah. Anyway, that's how you can tell. Even when you're looking at undergraduate chapters, Beta Kappa is the chapter in Huston-Tillotson, and we're Delta Xi, so Beta, Delta, right? Anyway.

Davis: Very interesting. I've been learning all of these Greek letters since I started this project. It makes lot of sense that it would go in alphabetical order. I just never really put the two together. Now that I have, I think I'll be able to guess how old a chapter is now. That's useful.

Clay: Now there are so many chapters. Chapters used to be, if you were undergrad it be two letters and if you were grad it would be two letters and then Omega at the end, right? Well, now there's so many chapters that chapters are three letters, so you have to watch it. Undergraduate chapter could be Alpha Alpha Alpha, or whatever, right? Then the grad would be Alpha Alpha Alpha Omega or whatever. I don't even know if they do it that way, but anyway, but you see what I'm saying? And so, the chapter at Howard is the Alpha chapter, so they let you know they are number one. Then there's the chapter at Fisk is Pi, so they let you know that they are way up there because they are single letter chapter. If you only have a one letter in your chapter then you really old, but actually it's only two single letter chapters I know is Alpha at Howard and Pi at Fisk. I'm not sure what other ones are.

Davis: Very cool. Wow. It just feels so ancient, but I know it's not that ancient. Just, to know that there's already chapters in the three Greek letter combinations means that there are so many across the globe. Wasn't it 1,018 chapters so far? I saw a number online.

Clay: It's got to be more. I'm not sure how many there are, but I think it's more than that, but I'm not sure.

Davis: I'll have to double-check my number there. But is there more that you wanted to speak to regarding the service projects and how they impacted, you, now?

Clay: Not at Delta Xi. If I went into it, it would be more my graduate experience and we're supposed to be talking about Austin and Delta Xi.

Davis: Awesome. We'll just mosey to the next question, there. Section 2, question 2b. Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority is the first Black organization at UT that was established by and for women. What are some firsts you've experienced or contributed to the organization? Some examples of these firsts are any initiatives founded by this chapter or social experiences that you've had for the first time, etc.

Clay: I'm not at a part of the first with regard to Delta Xi. Yeah, I hadn't started any traditions or anything like that.

Davis: Were there's some firsts when it comes to like, firsts that you've experienced personally?

Clay: Well, I got my mother, I'm second, my mother's first, and my sister's third, but we're the first African Americans in the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. And in order to get into the Daughters, you have to prove that your ancestor was living in Texas when it was a republic. That was in 2003-'04 something like that, I can't remember. But I was in Leadership Texas, which was all women, it still is all women. And the way Leadership Texas works is you would go to different organizations—I mean, different cities—and learn about what are the issues that are going on in Texas at the while. So it was about learning about the inner workings of Texas, but also about getting to know other women who might be up and coming or whatever in the state. When I was there, Class of 2001, we went to San Antonio and there was a woman who was doing a presentation as she was talking about all the different cultures that had contributed to making Texas what it is today. She was talking about the Native Americans and then there's a German part in Central Texas, and Alsatians in Castroville area, and Mexicans and Spanish. She went on and on and she never mentioned anything about Blacks. And so, Leadership Texas, predominantly white organization—but several of the Black women who were involved, we left and we went across the street to the Alamo and we were like, "Can you believe she went through this whole hour-long thing about all the different cultures that have blended together to make Texas and didn't say anything about Black people? I can't believe that."

And so I knew that the Alamo at the time, it isn't now, but at the time the Alamo was run by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and so I said, just off hand, "I'll bet you that there are no Black people that are members of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and that just shows you how we are not recognized for what we contribute to this country and to this state." And someone said to me, "Well Lareatha you should find one," because they know that I'm into history and stuff and I say, "Yeah, you know what, that's going to be my goal." First, we went and talked to a Daughter because they always had the Daughters there. We went and talked to a Daughter and said, "Do y'all have any Black members?" And she said no. And we were like, "I can't believe this." So, I said, "I'm going to find—" They challenged me and I am going to find that one person that can be a Daughter. When we got back to the thing I went to every Black woman that was in the Leadership Texas class, "Where are you from, what's your background," and "Louisiana," or "I moved here from Michigan." So, I was like, "Okay, nobody." Someone said, "Well, what about you?" I said, “No, I don't think so because I know my ancestors were here, but I think they got in after 1845”—which is the cutoff because the republic ended, I think December 1845. If you could do 1845, then you could do it.

I thought about it, see people, ask them. I came back there and some women in my church who belong to a Black genealogy group and I went to talk to them, do you know anyone? “No I don't know,” we’d trace them back. We can't find it. I was a commissioner with the Texas Historical Commission. There was a lady from Terrell, a lady from Dallas and I went over to an event in Fort Worth and we decided to drive together. When we were in the car on the way back, I just mentioned this was my mission to find someone and one of the women in the car said, "I do genealogy. When I get home, I'll look up your ancestor. Write down their name and I'll look it up and see what I can find." She went home and emailed me this in about an hour later. "I found X. Can I work on this and help you find someone?" I said sure. She is one of these real serious genealogists. She's ninety something years old now, but she used to go to Utah every year because you know the Mormons have all these records and stuff. She would go to Utah every year and work on genealogy projects. That year when she went to Utah, she only worked on my family to find whatever documentation that she could. She came back and said, okay, I think I've got it and she laid out how it would work and everything. She says, "You're going to apply." I said, well actually, I wanted my mother to be the first because only reason I even know this is because my mother's the one is involved in history and stuff and I want her to be the first, to which the lady said, well, you know it's not just about finding—and her name was Jean Ann Abels-Flatt just so I can put that

on the record. Jean Ann Abels-Flatt, and she was the commissioner at the time, at the Texas Historic Commission. She's known for finding some very obscure fact about Quanah Parker that everyone had been looking for and she found it, but I can't remember what it was. But anyway, genealogists know her. Jean Ann is the one that found this thing about Quanah Parker.

Anyway, she says to me, well, Lareatha you know it's not just some genealogy you have to be vouched for, she used the term vouched for, but basically that's what it means, you have to be vouched for by a person who is a Daughter, and I don't know your mother. She said, I can get Gayle Loving Barnes, and this is Loving Ranch and all that. Gayle Loving Barnes was a commissioner at the time and she said, Gayle and I have talked and we will vouch for you. I said, "Well, what if we do this? I will—" Because Jean Ann looked at it as a real good—I said, "I'll get in, but my mother has to come in first. You vouch for me and mother and I'll go in, but if not—", I just wanted to prove a point. I wasn't trying to actually be in the Daughters." [Laughs] She and Gayle agreed, so that's why my mother's first, I'm second. My sister is third, because after my mother and I got in, we got my sister in and I've tried to get other people. I don't know how many African Americans are in there now. But I know at least three of us are.

Then while I was on the Commission, I started a paid internship program for students that allows them to work at the Texas Historical Commission for the summer. It's been going for what? For almost 15 years now. At first we had one at a time but this year we had six. We have six students and we've build in endowment. I think that's one of the things that I'm really proud of is having started that. In fact, my siblings and I put some money in to start an endowment. There's one that's named after my parents, and is specifically for Prairie View students because that's where they went to college. We've had the Prairie View—or the Clay Scholar as I like the call it—because it's called Preservation Scholars and so the Clay Scholar is a person from Prairie View. This is the fourth year. Because we started in, my mother died in 2015. This is 2021. I think it's fourth or fifth year that we've had it. I'm pretty proud of that. Those to me those are my firsts. Have nothing to do with Delta Xi.

Davis: I think that they're super cool. I think it does have everything to do with Delta Xi because Delta Xi was like your crucible. It has produced a leader in the community that currently works with the Texas Historical Commission there. I think that that is so nice to be able to use your position to get back to students who are just trying to find their footing in anything that they can and that they like. I think that that's something that is really cool, I commend you, that is something to be proud about.

Clay: That's the reason that this Preservation Scholars program, you do not have to major in history. Because the whole point of it was, as I tell people all the time, and every year because I'm still on the committee—I'm not on the Commission anymore, but I'm on the board of the friends of the THC, which is basically the organization that runs the program now. When we first started it, THC ran it, but it's now it's been switched over to the non-profit organization. I'm still on the committee that reads all the papers, come in and it does the interviews and everything. We have this conversation every time because I'm always telling them, don't give a person extra points for being a history major. Give them extra points for being interested in history, but not necessarily being a history major. Because the whole point of this thing is that a lot of times, especially if you are an African American or Hispanic kid, which is mostly what we have, although we do have other underrepresented in the preservation field. If you're smart then people are trying to steer you toward at least one, especially when I was in school, they're trying to steer you towards being an engineering major STEM person, math or business or something. Suppose that's not where your real love lies. Let's say that you've been steered towards being an architecture major. But you think I'm going to be designing parking lots, I'm going to be designing, being a little bitty of cog in a wheel of doing some big building. Then you come to this program, you learn, oh,

there's such a thing as preservation architecture or trying to preserve buildings or trying to help figure out a new use for buildings.

Well, that may spark your interests more than a traditional architecture job. The whole point is to expose people to what the possibilities are because I think a lot of people think that the only thing you can do in history is teach. They don't know if you can be a science person and scientists were the ones that found the bell at the bottom of the ocean. You can be an archaeologist. If you are a person as a business major, you can help with economic development for smaller towns and help them use their historic fabric in order to tout their town and things like that. Anyway, the whole point is to try to help people understand that there's a whole lot of paths out there and not just being a engineer or what else is STEM? Mainly engineers is what they try to steer people toward. When I graduated from high school, all of those people that were in the top of my class, everyone tried to get them to be engineering majors and a lot of were and they ended up changing their major. Luckily, I knew that I didn't want to be an engineer, so I was able to ward them off, but I ended up majoring in business. When I look at it now, if I knew being what I know now, I would've majored in English and go on and get an MFA. But I didn't know that then because I'm not sure the community knew how to steer me you know what I'm saying? Even my parents, when they graduated, what could they be? They could be teachers. They weren't invited to broaden their horizon or think big about what they could be. All their friends that they went to college with were teachers, doctors, dentists, attorneys, because that's what you could be if you graduated from college in the 1940s. Anyway.

Davis: Wow. There are so many more positions that need representation, that need to be filled. Every time I talk to an employer, I always tell them from jump, my goal is to be able to bring people into a position that normally wouldn't have been considered because of their background. I want your position because you're hiring, or you're looking to hire. But I think a lot of that has to do with just people not knowing what's out there.

Clay: You're right. That's been really good about this internship program because at the end of the summer every year we ask the interns to come and do a presentation. What did they work on, whether they learned how did it affect them. Nine times out of 10, they would be like, "I came in here thinking I knew what I was going to do." Even if they are history majors, even if they are in graduate school and as a history major. "I came in here thinking I was going to be a professor of history somewhere. Now I see that I have so many other things that I can do and it's made me re-evaluate which direction I'm going to go in." That just makes me be like "Okay, good." This is what I wanted. This is what we got. Mission accomplished.

Davis: I love that and if you think about it, life is just a series of stopping and choosing where to turn or where to go. To go straight, or left or right. That's really what life is about. It's a series of redirection. That definitely plays out in the job world as well and in the career realm. I love that your firsts are so involved with the community. I love that they are not only a first for you, but that last one, the Clay Scholar, Preservation Scholars Program allows other people to have firsts as well. If you wouldn't mind, we can move on to the next question if you're ready. This is section 2, question 2c. Please speak to the legacy of the chapter and its members. What would you like the community at large to know about the Delta Xi chapter and its members?

Clay: I think our chapter has really nurtured and brought about a lot of leaders and that was the reason that I'd be sure that you get the first Cotton Bowl Queen. When we were in undergrad, there used to be something called Orange Jacket Sweetheart or something. I think the first Orange Jacket was an AKA,

first Black Orange Jacket I mean. It really helped me—I tend to have friends in silos. I had my friends, that were business majors like me and I had my Beaumont friends and we did our thing. Most the time, because my father was a world-class athlete, that's how I knew all track guys because I hung out at track meets all the time. Then I had AKA's, the AKA silo was the one that was more about learning to be the polished professional woman as opposed to the tomboy that followed her daddy around the track meets and the basketball tournaments throughout high school. How to think beyond Hebert High School, Beaumont, you know what I'm saying? Not that Beaumont was horrible or Hebert was horrible because they weren't, but it's more of—if you grew up in the family I grew up in in Beaumont, where your parents were teachers, you knew all the teachers, it was insulated for lack of better term. I tell people all the time I had a very charmed childhood.

Like you were saying, stereotypes, all the stereotypes about African-American families are broken and hot fussin' and poor and all that, none of it. I'm very middle-class, we did our vacations, we did our thing, whatever. But still if I had an issue at school, I would go home and talk to my mother as she knew the person's phone number because she was either friends with them or she knew someone who was and she'd call them on the phone and figure it out. At UT, that was the first time I had to figure things out on my own and so being part of Delta Xi was very helpful in that area. Even little things like how to coordinate your clothes and jewelry and things like that and stuff like that. [Laughs]

Davis: Those are among the beautiful things in life.

Clay: I was jeans all the time and I had, of course, a dress for Sunday. But even when I got to be a senior and it came to small talk and interviews, I remember I went on an interview trip one time for—I can't remember what organization it was but second interview, just being able to know what to do and stuff like. Those are the types of things that you pick. It wasn't like they said, okay, this is how you do it, but you just picked up on it while you were growing up. Growing up stuff.

Davis: I love that and it seems like everyone has learned how to dress from their older sisters or their mother or a mother figure or sister figures. Looking the part, presenting yourself as the part, and being prepared, having the materials that you need seems to be something that the Delta Xi Chapter has done really well of implementing into the experiences of its members on campus. It's super cool, that's really neat. Just to be clear, the main thing that you would like the community at large to know is that the Delta Xi Chapter has nurtured and brought about a lot of leaders in the community.

Clay: In the UT community and Texas and actually world community, because there was a woman, that she didn't pledge at Delta Xi but she spend most of her undergrad there. She's my friend on Facebook and just looking at where she goes and stuff is like, I think she must be in national service or something because she's always with pictures of Oprah and Obama and then in South Africa one day and then—so I'm like, "Okay." And I've never said, "Hey, what do you do?" I just went, when her kids graduated from high school, "Yay, yay." I think one kid just got married not too long ago, and I just, "Oh, great."

Davis: Excellence is just something that is synonymous with Delta Xi, the more that I research it. It's a shame I never pledged, I will say. If you wouldn't mind, please speak to your experiences courting, living, and socializing on or around campus. This Section 2, Question 2AA. What it was like living, socializing, if you had any dating experiences that you don't mind going into detail about?

Clay: Well, as I said, I went to all-Black schools from first to the 12th grade except for the seventh. So it was a huge adjustment to me to be in a predominantly white environment when I got to UT. As a result

of that, I tended to really hang in with the Black communities because I had ready-made community because so many people from my graduating, high school that I graduated from, we got to UT together, so we already knew each other and everything. In fact, my roommate and I, we lived in Jester in room 353. I don't know how it is now, but at the time, just in order to try to make parents feel secure about leaving their daughters in such a huge dorm because Jester was like the largest dorm in the US or Southwest, or whatever. So, they would have certain floors that were women only, certain floors that were co-ed. Our floor was women only and the way they made it women only was, you had to have a key in order to get into the hall. That meant guys couldn't just willy nilly come up and walk the halls or whatever. That was supposed to be the case anyway. Of course, we get here, all these Beaumont people get here, and within the first week of being here — and at that time they used to have these African-American or "minority focused", freshman orientations. You go to those and you meet people there as well.

I went to one, met people. In fact that's when I first met DeMetris because she was a counselor, for lack of a better term, a student volunteer at the African American orientation. I tell her all the time, one of the first things—see that's what I mean by leader because she was a Delta Xi. One of the first things she said and one of the things I really took to heart was do not go to this person's class because there was a tenure professor on campus, biology professor and everyone had to take a science class. He had this belief that African American people were inherently not as smart. He at some point had pointed to some kids, Black kids and say, "You will not get above a C in my class because you can't do the work." So don't go to his class. The second thing was, when you go to a class with 500 people in it, always sit in the front because you want people to know that you're there. Number one, go to class. But when you are there, sit in front so that they know you're there and they know that you are taking this whole thing seriously. Don't get lost in the crowd basically is what she was saying. They would have sessions and we would talk and I got to know older people.

Anyway, we get to UT, we're living on this all girls floor. We told our friends, men, so if you want to come see us then you do (gestures) on the door and we'll come and unlock it and let you in. Within a day, all the Black people on campus knew if you came to the door and went [gestures], my roommate and I will let them into the room. [Laughs] Guys were going to go, there was a lot of Black women, not a lot, but several. Like a couple of my friends from Beaumont were there, this woman from San Antonio was there, whose name I can't recall right now. When they would meet guys and they would tell the guys, “Hey, just knock on the door and Benita and Lareatha will let you in.” So, I got to know everybody because people will come and visit and other people and they wouldn't just be rude and let you—they would, "Hey, oh hey," they stop by and visit a little bit and then go where they were going. Anyway, but I was so immersed in the African American community and so comfortable. Because at UT you have to find your group or you will get lost. I didn't get lost, which was really great. But then on the other hand, I didn't take advantage of everything that going to UT offers, which is getting to know people who will end up being the governor of the state or will end up in other positions.

Looking back, which, you know, hindsight is 20/20. Kept the camaraderie and everything that I had, but then at the same time, branched out. I did branch out by the time I was a junior into other organizations and things like that. But I branched out a little bit sooner than that. That's what it was like. I didn't know all the ins and outs of going to a big school like that, little tips like, "If you're not doing well in the class, you should just drop it and take it again,” because in my mind, my parents are paying for this, and they pay for this class, and I need to stick it out and make it work. But so my GPA suffered and things like that made it very different for me coming from an insulated Beaumont. All the teachers knew each other. All the teachers were my friends, were my parents' friends. You having to transition from calling someone

Miss Jerry, to Miss Lee, to Miss Doris, to Miss Osborne because when you're in school, you can't call them by their first name, and then to not even knowing the professor, sitting in a class with 500 people, and the professor not knowing you. That was a huge, huge transformation and it took a couple of years for me to figure it out, and my GPA showed it.

Davis: Same here. Same here. My parents have always told me, Once I start a thing, I can't quit. I have to be sure to stick it out. There were a lot of times where I also stuck it out, and I might have failed a class once. I remember failing that one class, and it just felt like my whole world was just ending, because I really gave it my honest shot. But I think that that has a lot to say about who you've become after college and the fact that GPA matters in order to get to the next step, but only to get to the next step and not there after.

Clay: When I went to UT grad school too 20 years later. I worked at AT&T and had done my own business and all this kind of thing. When I got ready to go in, they were like, "Well, you know, your GPA" And I said, "You're going to judge a 40-year-old woman by what a 19, 20-year-old woman did? That doesn't make sense." So, my grad school, just to prove my point, I graduated with a 4.0 in grad school. I was like, "Hey, wait a minute. You know, that person is totally different from me, who this person is. No. That person was just trying to understand life and really try to make that transition from all-Black Hebert High School to predominantly white UT. This person has it figured out a little bit better."

Davis: I can't imagine how proud you were at the moment that you received a 4.0. I bet, to you, everything just came full circle then.

Clay: No, I think I actually told the professor who asked me that question, "You see, I told you, two different people here. Two different people." I have grown a little bit, 20 years gives you the time to grow.

Davis: Right. That's what we're here to do.

Clay: Right.

Davis: That is wonderful. Was there anything else that you wanted to speak about regarding your experiences courting, living, and socializing around campus?

Clay: Well, before you turned on the—I just got an email that means I think I'm going to have to get off in a few minutes. But before you turned on the recorder, we were talking, and you were saying it seemed as though UT now doesn't have the camaraderie in the on-campus Black community, and I was saying something about, we may have been number 1, we didn't have computers to occupy our time, so we hung around each other. We didn't have—most of us didn't have cars. As I mentioned earlier, of all my Beaumont friends, Theo was the only one who had a car. Well, when I became a junior, I had a car. I had a car that actually ran. My parents bought me a car, but even when we pledged, we didn't have a car. I remember, I tell people—seven of us went over, we started out with 10.

When we still had 10, we had gone to visit —you know, part of pledging was you would go visit your big sisters. The thing then back in those days was a lot of people stayed on campus for their freshman, sophomore year. By junior year, most people were living in apartments. We had gone to a big sister's house, and she lived in an apartment in Riverside. That was the area then. I don't know where it is now. But now a lot of apartments that cater to students are on Riverside. We go over there on Riverside and

we had got—we were out there and the buses had stopped running. We were trying to figure out how we were going—because we all lived on campus—how we're going to get back to campus. Everybody had a list. We called Alpha Omega Kappa someone to come and get us. The person had a Toyota, and what was so crazy, the guy we called, I don't even remember who it was, he brought someone with him. Like, why? You know you have to bring eight women back, and you're going to bring someone with you? At first, they were like, "Why don't we take half of you and come back and get the other half?"

We were like, "No, no, no, we all want to go together." Do you know we stacked each other in that car? I think about that, and it was like one person, then another person, someone's lap, then another person. One girl had her feet out the window, she was laying across, feet out one window and her head out the other window. We were just regular people. Now everyone has a phone, everyone has a car. Maybe this is what the difference is. Plus, so many of us lived in Jester because there was a reason. It was like, "Let's all go back together instead of you making two trips." Because we were all going to Jester because we all lived in Jester.

Jester, when you walk into the west side, that whole area, and now it's closed off, that area was the hangout area for everyone. Let's say you walk in and you go up the steps, you turn to the right, and then you turn to the right to go into Jester. On the right side, there was like a 24/7 domino game that went on. That's where all the African American and Black kids were. I think that I'm pretty sure that they got rid of that because they didn't like the fact that Black people were hanging out there because you know how Black people play dominoes, get loud, and whatever.

On the left side, there was a piano. I'm sure DeMetris has talked to you about how they started Innervisions. Innervisions started at that piano and then a little further down was a TV, because remember, everyone didn't have their own TV, so that was a TV room. When you were just walking and go to the elevator, you might pass by some people you knew that were playing dominoes and you stop and talk and hang out with them for a while. Or someone may be over playing the piano and you stopped and talked to them or there might be a show on television and you stop in and see them, although I had a TV in my room because my sister's godmother was my government teacher in high school and she told my mother that I needed a TV because I needed to keep up with current events. My mother bought me a TV so I could watch the news. Anyway, I'm not saying I watched the news, but that's the reason she bought the TV.

It was just like buzz going on all the time. People didn't hang in their room all day. It was buzz, and people doing things, and, you know, "Let's walk to the park," or, "Let's walk and go play some tennis," or—and then, you know, and all the—when the guys would come and do the little special knock on the door to get in, that's how I was able to meet the members of the track team, and I was like, "Okay, well, let's go to track meets." We're doing this event or whatever. Anyway, it was—I think gadgets have gotten in the way of a lot of human interaction today. Even when you go to the airport, I don't know if you remember, but it used to be in airport you sit next to someone, y'all start talking, "Where are you going?" Whatever. Now, everyone is like, no one talks to each other. Anyway.

Davis: I definitely can say that I see that a lot of the time. I'm a very talkative person, and I love getting to know people and getting to know where they come from. Hence why I'm doing this project now and I enjoy it so much because I have a genuine interest in people. It's like I notice that people are taken aback by that because it's not really something that's super common now. Everyone is into their phones. But I am the kind of person that just cannot sit in silence next to a person. I have to be like, "Who are you?" I'm hoping that this culture reminds us or it starts to shift to a place where it reminds us to get off

of our devices for our sanity and to not forget that connection isn't only online, connection is around us, and there's so many opportunities to make connections with different people. Even at the grocery store, when you're checking out, just a simple, "Hi, how are you?" can spark an entire conversation, and can leave that person feeling better about their day, and it can leave you feeling good too. I think that there was definitely a difference then versus now. Now, you see people walking to class, and they're just like, you know.

Clay: That's so funny. I had a friend, like I said, silos, and one of my silos also was foreign students. I had a lot of friends that were foreign students. There was this guy from Nigeria, and he used to talk about how African-Americans—he used to say, "You have a little unspoken, you passing each other, you go. You don't say hi, you go." Nothing comes out. He said, "That's like a take on the way Americans are." He said, "Americans, you don't talk," he said, "After a while, you're going to be walking around with a little device in your hand and you will see someone, and you'll hold it up, and then that'll be it. You won't even talk to people. You'd would just be looking at the device, and then somebody will pass and you hold it up or it'll tell you what to say or whatever." One day I was messing with my phone, I texted him something. Wait. His name was Chimalum. I said, "What Chimalum said has actually happened," because everyone walks around with a device in their hand. They don't look at each other.

And even when you're sitting there—and this is going to be horrible, you might even be sitting in church, and you're texting someone that's sitting next to you, or you may not even in church, you just sitting somewhere and you texting people instead of actually talking to them. Or people will say, "Now no one actually enjoys an event. Everyone has their phone up and they're looking at it through the phone as opposed to actually looking at the event itself," so anyway. I wish I knew where Chimalum was so I could say, "Man, you were right." He probably doesn't even remember saying that.

Davis: Well, he predicted the future for sure.

Clay: That's right. Because you know Chimalum Nwankwo. He's Igbo.

Davis: Very interesting. I studied Nigerian language when I was at The University of Texas there. So very interesting.

Clay: I remembered that. That's why I was like—when I meet someone from West Africa, I'm always trying to figure out, "What clan are you with?" by your name or something. A lot of times, not all the time, but a lot of times consonant blends like Nwankwo. You know, that's—and a lot of the, what do they call them, Yorubas are o's and they don't do consonants blends like Igbos do. You know what I'm saying?

Davis: Their dialogues are very different. Anything from an ancestral standpoint, most African Americans in the States and in South America are of Yoruba descent, which I thought was really something cool. That's something that I found out this past week when I was researching tribes and things for fun. But I thought that that was really interesting there. There's just so much culturally there that has like blended into our society. Even though we like to say that African culture was lost during the middle passage, there's still some remnants of it.

Clay: I have a Yoruba friend, and one time we were at Pappadeaux on a Friday. There was a table of Black women. They were sitting, and talking, and laughing, having a good time. He was like, "You know, that scene could be in Lagos." He said, ''You would think that after 300 years, y'all wouldn't be like us

anymore. But you're just like us." Then, I had a professor at UT named—oh, what was his name? Okot Bitek . He was from East Africa. He was from Uganda. He was a professor, and I took him for a class, but I also got to know him as a person too. He used to say that, ''You can tell that you Americans are from West Africa because you're loud and brushing.'' I was like, "How can that be true?" This is what he used to tell me. This is while I was in college, right? I said, "So what?" He said, "We East Africans, we're cool, and calm, and we're quiet," and all this kind of stuff. I was like, "Man, what are you talking about?" And then with my friend, years later, 20 years later, says the same thing. He's like, "You can tell that y'all are just like us." I was like, "Okay. There must be some truth to that." But Okot would say, "You look like them, you talk like them, you act like them." I was like, "What's that supposed to mean?"

Davis: Man, I can definitely see where he's coming from. I took a class with Professor Livermon on, I think it was, African Pop Culture. It's very similar to Black culture here in the States. It's similar but it's not.

Clay: It is very similar. But you can tell that things were passed down over generations, and generations, and generations. Even my friend who's—he lives in Dallas—he's Yoruba, he'll even say—you know, even the way—liking bright colors and spending money on things to show that you have the money because he'll say, "A Yoruba man, everybody knows he has money because he's going to buy the big house and the big thing." This is his stereotype. He says, "If the honest man has money, every honest man has money because he's going to share with everyone. If the evil man has money, you would never know it because he's going to hoard it and never spend it on anything." That's his little stereotypical view of the different clans in Nigeria. Anyway, I don't know how true all of that is, but that's his take on life.

Davis: Man. So interesting. I mean, even the whole idea of like putting a dance with a song has been passed down through the lineage. We do line dances at every family reunion I've been to. I mean, I know almost every dance. Associating that dance with a song is something that's been happening in Nigeria forever. So it's just very interesting how maybe, maybe, just maybe our cultures were not completely erased during the Middle Passage.

Clay: Right.

Davis: Super cool. I know that you have a meeting soon.

Clay: Yeah, that's why I was keep looking at my thing because I'd asked this guy—he was supposed to send us a document and it hadn't come. Okay.

Davis: We're just going to continue this interview. Stay tuned. To be continued.

TRANSCRIPT END