

DELTA XI AKA ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Interviewer: Briana M. Davis
Interviewee: Lareatha Clay
Location: Austin, TX/Dallas, TX
Interview Date: 2021 July 10
Duration: 00:44.41

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

Briana M. Davis: Hello, we are back today to finish this interview. We are on Section 2, Question 2b.b. If you wouldn't mind Ms. Lareatha, please talk a little bit about your life on campus, where you lived when you were a student, how did being a part of the Delta Xi chapter interact with your experiences on campus?

Lareatha Clay: Okay. Before I answer the question, I wanted to clarify a couple of things from yesterday. One, I skipped saying my mother and I were the first DRT, so I wanted to say her name. Her name is Larutha Odum Clay, L-A-R-U-T-H-A C-L-A-Y. As you see I'm named named after her. My name is Lareatha, her name is Larutha Odum Clay. I said my sister was the third, and her name is Mathia, M-A-T-H-I-A, Lanell L-A capital N-E-L-L Clay. I just want to make sure that that was said. I did say who Jean Ann Ables-Flatt was, I spelled her name out. There was one other name I was saying I should spell it out. But I know it was those two, so I just wanted to say that. When I went to UT, first two years, I lived in Jester dorm, which we talked about a little bit yesterday about how we had what we call the inward knock back in those days. As you could knock on a door and then my roommate and I would let everybody out. All the Black people on campus knew about it within half a day. Everybody knew, Oh hey, if you go over there and you knock on the door like that, Lareatha and Benita will, and my roommate's name was Benita Michelle Rogers. She was not an AKA, but we both came from Beaumont.

Anyway, lived in Jester for the first two years. I think I said that one of the things that—the way we were back in those days was you would typically be on campus if you are Black, most of the Blacks, not everybody, but most of us lived in Jester. Then after two years and you get an apartment, and so that was how I went. That's what I did as well, two years on campus and then got an apartment. I think I was describing how Jester was more very community-like. When I was in Jester, and it's not the same way anymore, but you could go to the movies in Jester. There were stores in there, I think there still are stores in there. Of course, the cafeteria was there. There were so many African Americans that were there. It was like the hangout that even if you didn't live in Jester, if you lived off-campus or you lived in another dorm, if you wanted to just hang out and see people, Jester was the place to go because there was always a dominoes game going on, and I'm talking always. Now there are these doors that you have to come through, there were no doors there. When you came me in, it was just open. It was like a courtyard in that area, so anyone could come and go. It was just more open than the way it is today. Today is, you go in and, I'm not sure how people interact with each other. I'm sure there are ways to do it, but then it was just open, you just run into people, you hang out in the lobby, you'd see people all the time, you talk to people. The shuttle buses used to have a pickup at Jester, at the steps. You can't because now the street is closed. And Speedway used to be open and that's when the shuttle bus came. Shuttle buses would come through and drop people off and pick people up. It was also the meeting place because if you were taking a shuttle bus somewhere, well you go to Jester to catch your bus. Or in the morning, that's where the buses would drop everybody off. Every bus ended up at Jester.

I know all it is pretty different now. As a result of that, people used to like to hang around out, on the steps too, and meet people, see what was going on, hang out, do whatever. So that was our thing, almost everybody. When you were a freshman, almost every African American—and I have a cousin who just graduated in I think 2019, and it was the same for her when she was a freshman—that everybody would join Innervisions of Blackness regardless of whether you could sing or not. Because it was a good place and they used to have practice on Monday nights, and everyone would go over there and you'd sing as you find your own niche. If you were not a real singer, then you would maybe not join, not be a part of it anymore. But I was in Innervisions freshman and sophomore year. I think when I became a junior, that was when I stopped being a part of that. Because I was there with no car, on weekends it was pretty rough because the dorm cafeteria closed at noon. So you'd have to walk and find somewhere to eat, which was basically Wendy's, which I think is still on the same place it is today.

Dobie Mall—it was a mall then—I don't know what it is called now. But it was Dobie Mall, and it had a McDonald's in the basement. So you could walk to the McDonald's. There was a theater in Dobie. That was the only time I saw Night of the Living Dead. There was a club in Dobie because we used to—to show you how bad it was—all my friends and I would gather all our albums up and walk to the theater. We got to know the DJ and get him to play some of our music instead of, so we would have some music that we liked. He did it a few times and after a while I think someone must have told him something because he wouldn't do it anymore. But the DJ used to play our little Earth, Wind & Fire albums, and Kool & the Gang, and Ohio Players, as opposed to whatever rock he was normally playing, he'd play our music. Stevie Wonder's Songs in the Key of Life was out then.

Davis: All of the good stuff, right?

Clay: Exactly.

Davis: Earth, Wind & Fire and Kool & the Gang bring me back to my childhood because my dad always played the good stuff.

Clay: Yeah, that was the good stuff.

Davis: I personally think it's much better than any rock that could have been happening at the time.

Clay: Yeah, and he was playing some pretty raw rock in there and that's probably why the owner— whoever probably, after a few weeks was like don't accommodate them. Maybe play one every now and then, but not like you had been. Because we were being there just dancing, and it would be a bunch of us too. I'm not talking one or two, I'm talking 10, 15. We would get together in Jester, of course, get our albums together, walk down to Dobie Mall and get him to play our music.

Davis: What a beautiful memory.

Clay: I don't know if it was beautiful. We did what we had to do. Because you're talking about people with no car, and at that time, I don't even know if they do now—but Austin didn't have a "soul radio station". So everybody from Dallas and Houston and Beaumont had a good soul station at the time. Everyone was really bored. You couldn't listen to the radio, there was no place to go, you didn't have a car, so we did what we had to do.

Davis: You had to make it work.

Clay: You're right. We had to make it to work. We had to make Austin work for us.

Davis: Make the DJ work for you.

Clay: Right. We didn't have any money, maybe it would have lasted longer if we had some money.

Davis: You could have bribed him!

Clay: Right.

Davis: Super-amazing. Very sweet memories with friends there. Speaking of friends—

Lareatha Clay: This is all before I pledged. I'm a freshman. I pledged my sophomore year, and I remember then it was spring. We went over April. Well, actually, we celebrate that we went on April second, but when you go to the headquarters, they have it listed down as going over on April 1st. I don't know what happened, but anyway, when we went over back in those days, you know, they have these rituals and everything that lasted a long time. Let's just say we had stayed up pretty late that night and then our ceremony was like 10 o'clock in the morning. My sister was the Dean of Pledges that same semester I pledged, so she didn't come, but she sent her pin. It's always special when someone sends their pin because back in those days—I'm not sure it is now, but in those days—you ordered a pin, but it wouldn't be there in time for you to wear it when you were being sworn in. It was a big deal to have one—if you didn't have a pin, you just didn't have a pin. Maybe your special would let you use her pin. That was another thing specials would do. The day you went over there, they may give you their pin or if your mother was an AKA, she might come and bring her pin, so you could do it.

My sister was unable to come because she was involved with something with her but she sent her pin per the regional director and the regional director is the one that during our ceremony was one of the people who was there, swearing us in. She gave it to the regional director and the regional director pinned me with my sister's pin. That was special. We had been up all night—just to show you how important sports was to me—we'd been up all night and we had some event we were going to. We were up all Friday night, we got pinned Saturday morning at 10. There was some event like at 7 o'clock on Saturday night. But the Texas Relays—which is not what it used to be—back then it was a real relay. Texas Relays was going on and I had talked to some of my friends that were on the track team and had made arrangements for them to get me in. When we left the ceremony, I took off my little white dress and everything and put on my jeans and went to the Texas Relays and stayed in the Texas Relays all day. I went to the event that night and then slept. I slept all day Saturday and Sunday. You weren't going to mess me up for my Texas Relays, I don't care what I missed!

Davis: That's a day to remember. Especially given your web of chalk with your father being a world-class track runner. I can see the appeal for sure.

Clay: Yeah. Right. That was the other thing I wanted to say. The Clay Internship is called the Matthew Honer and Larutha Odum Clay Preservation Scholar. Honer is, H-O-N-E-R. You see now where my middle name comes from. My middle name is Honette. My dad's middle name was, H-O-N-E-R, Honer. Matthew Honer and Larutha Odum Clay.

Davis: Matthew Honer and Larutha Odum Clay.

Clay: Preservation Scholar.

Davis: Preservation Scholar. Just wanted to make sure there. That's really good to know. I will be featuring that in our blog. Just because every month I do highlight some people and the things that they're up to.

Clay: If you go on the Friends of THC website, they have a blurb about it on there. Well that's the Friends of THC as opposed to the THC website. I think it's THCfriends.org or something like that, I don't know. But you can find it.

Davis: Perfect. That's all valuable because I do want to include links to the things that I'm talking at once so people can access it and just learn a little bit more about the Delta Xi impact and our greater Texas community. We did actually skip a question.

Clay: Okay.

Davis: But this one is a little bit less about— well I guess it kind of is—this is going to focus more on life lessons and skills acquired. How has your experience with the Delta Xi Chapter impacted your skill set. How has it affected your approach to community in the way that you view your role in your community?

Clay: Sometimes I think they when organizations do things, they don't follow through like they should. When we were there, we did—and I'm not sure what happens now, but, it wasn't like a flash in the pan type of commitment. It was more steady and even as a chapter and also as individual people. Like if the chapter did something—you'd see it to the end and see it all the way through. But even more so when I look at different people that I went to college with that were in Delta Xi—you've talked with some of them like Linda, she's been involved with Delta Xi dance theater for 20 something years and then you look at the DeMetris, all the things she's been involved in usually behind the scenes. I was going to say some of the things she's been involved with but I'll let her tell you. But I've just watched her do things politically and community wise, a lot of times, no one knows that she's involved and she's very heavily involved in organizing people and getting stuff done for 20, 40 years whatever. Janet, Jacqueline, when you talk to her—she has her things that she's involved with for a long time. You just meet people and you see people who just make commitments to whatever it is that turns them on, whatever it is that makes them flash or makes them just be excited about something, they really commit. It's really rewarding to hang around people like that because am I going to say that I learned that from Delta Xi. I think I learned more from my parents. But it's nice to be able to be associated with people who have those same types of commitments to passion. I mean, commitments to following through. They win as an organization you commit to something do you know, is going to be done, well done our way through, and finished and not have done in that, meet people at certain point then move on. I guess that would be my thing. I don't remember what word it was you used in the question, but that would be my answer to that question.

Davis: I see. A commitment to following through is something that you've seen reverberate throughout the Delta Xi Chapter. It starts, I think a lot of the life lessons taught start in the home.

Clay: Right.

Davis: The parents and the family. The word that I used earlier was skill set.

Clay: Yeah. What I'm saying is that I'm not going to say that being in Delta Xi taught me follow through and commitment. What I'm saying is being in Delta Xi and being around people who have the same follow-through and commitment that I learned is very valuable because not only is it just good to see, "Oh okay I'm not the only one, " because you come across so many people who don't follow through, who you can't take their word to the bank. You depend on them. It's good to just be in the company of people that you know that when they say they going to do something and they actually follow through. That's good, number one. But then number two, it's also good to know that if I have something I'm really passionate about and I want to find someone is going to help me get to my goal. Then there's like all these women that I can go to that I know I can depend on and vice versa. I think they feel the same way about me. If they have something that they really want to get done and they're passionate about, then they can call me up and know that I'm going to follow through on it. If I tell them I'm going to do it, it's going to be done. I think that's more of it as opposed to them teaching us anything, so like another way of dependent on each other. You're muted.

Davis: Sorry about that! Great. I see. Super cool. Being around people like that just solidify those life lessons and skills that you have been learning along the way. It seems that you guys are growing at the same rate especially some of the line sisters that you talk about now. It seems that you all do have that similar approach to the community and what you start you finish and you do it all the way through which is admirable to say the least. I think we all want to be a person that can be dependable, that people see as dependable. I think a lot of young people want to be that way, but they might not know where to start and it seems like Delta Xi is a great place to start seeing what it looks like to be committed in real time, in action. This project is going to show the legacies of individuals that do take commitments seriously and it's going to show what their lives have become as a result of that commitment they made while in the Delta Xi chapter or before, so super nice, super neat.

Well, that concludes section 2. We have one more section, and we only have two questions left. So please feel free to elaborate on these as much as you'd like. We kind of talked a little bit about the legacy of the chapter in our last question and we're just going to elaborate a little bit more on that. What was it like being a Black woman in the '70s at The University of Texas?

Clay: Good question. It's a good question. There were so many people there—especially when you were a freshman, sophomore, you were still in the class with the 400, 500 people. But then as you become a junior, you're the only one in the class. You're the only one. The only Black person and there were women. But one thing I learned—because when I was a junior, I joined a business fraternity, Phi Chi Theta—business fraternity for women—and I was the only African American, only Black woman in the business—and I was also involved in the National Student Business League, which was an all Black organization. I remember I was talking to one of the Phi Chi Theta women and I said something about the president of the National Student Business League and it was a woman—it was a girl or woman, whatever, and the Phi Chi Theta lady said, "Does that organization have men in it?" I said, "Yeah," and she said, "And a woman is the president?" I say, "Yeah!" That was the first time it really dawned on me how in my growing up I never felt limited being a woman in any new organization.

I was president of almost everything I was in when I was in high school. Even if there were men there, or boys or whatever. So I never had that idea that women are supposed to take the back seat to men. My father wasn't a person that felt like he had to be in control of everything or—now, now he and my mother had—you know the boys in the family had different rules than we did—which I thought was really, really horrible—but as far as limiting me because I'm a girl or something—no, that wasn't it.

Especially when it came to the intellectual. Now, when it came to going out and physical—he was able, he may not have known because Title X didn't happen until I was a junior in high school. But, all during the summers he always enrolled my brothers in these summer track organizations and stuff and he would teach them all that. But when it came to being an intellectual person or trusting, or thinking that I could do it, be a leader, my parents just didn't think that way and neither did Hebert High School. Hebert High School didn't have that philosophy. None of my schools did. So, to me it was more about being Black, then being a Black woman. Everything I think about of how I was in the '70s was more about a Black person as opposed to a Black woman. I was always a little bit more—as they say a little militant or whatever because like, someone was telling me the other day when they heard about apartheid in the '80s and they were like, "Lareatha, you are boycotting gold and diamonds in the '70s." I was like, "Yeah!" I'd be out there at the table with the anti-apartheid people on the west mall and everything. To me it was more about being Black than being a woman—was what I was tied to.

Davis: That's a very interesting take. One thing that I noticed while conducting these interviews is that based on the time period of when the narrator was at The University of Texas, they had very different experiences per decade, so that's something that's interesting. You were boycotting apartheid in South Africa?

Clay: Yeah, South Africa. This is when Mandela was in jail. One of the big books was Steve Biko—Steve Biko was the book, I can't remember who wrote it. A lot of it came from, like I said, my silos. One of silos was foreign students and there was a lot of Africans, not South Africans, but people from the continent of Africa that were in that. I think the first time I really, really learned a lot about it was I took a class, the professors' main was Wanjohi Washuma, and he was from Kenya I think. His class was on, what was his class on? knew was basically about how the whole world is set up to keep Third World countries, that's when I stopped using the word Third World was with him, but it went Third World countries, it's set up to keep them from being able to prosper. For instance, the whole way the money system works is you have to use dollars and back in those days dollars were the number one, pounds were good. I don't think francs were that good, but in order for you to be able to trade on the world stage, you would have to do dollars. Well, the only way to get dollars was to sell stuff. When you had a multinational company coming in and they were utilizing the natural resources but not necessarily making sure that the dollars were able to get to the government. Dr. Waisuma was one of these people that was hanging out with people whose names now are mud but at the time weren't so muddy. That's like Mugabe who ended up being a dictator, and Kenyatta and some of these people. Those were people of his level that he knew and was trying to teach their philosophy but in the end, they ended up not being the freedom fighters they started out being, they ended up being dictators, whatever.

Davis: Well, that took a turn for the very worst.

Clay: Right, right. Yes, it did. Even when you look at Haiti today, they've killed the president or whatever. Things that they don't teach you in school, that you have to learn later. Things like when Haiti got its independence. All you hear about, Oh, great, Haiti, the slave uprising, they got their independence and everything. Well, you know France and the world put a debt on Haiti that they just paid in the 20th century, I think. That they were paying, they wouldn't trade with them. So therefore, Haiti couldn't get the dollars because they didn't want to encourage other slave people to revolt, so Haiti got invaded and taxed and whipped and no wonder it's still a poor country. You know what I'm saying? Anyway, those were the types of things that to me being a UT was—being able to be exposed to people from different parts of the world which is probably why I had all my little silos and different experiences and learning beyond—even though I went to a black school. We learned a whole lot more than if I had probably gone

to the white school in Beaumont at the time. But still, you're dealing with the same textbooks they had the white school. Unless you had a teacher who was very diligent about making sure that he or she taught beyond the textbook, you were going to get what was in there. Some were, some weren't. Just as any in a situation.

UT was like, "Hey, man, I'm exposed to everything. I'm learning all kinds of things about the world that I never knew before, especially when it comes to Black people." Not only in America, Black people throughout the world because the 70's, I don't know if you remember but that was when Jamaica was in real turmoil and you could get killed for being in a wrong party. I had Jamaican friends, they would tell me all about that and a lot of Caribbean places had just gotten their independence within a few years. Maybe in the '60s or something and here we are in '75 and had been part of the Commonwealth of Great Britain. I would hear stories about being in a colony growing up and things like that. It was just a lot of exposure to things that—I had not had the opportunity to be exposed to. There was no internet so you couldn't Google stuff. You had to know to go to library and check out a certain book. You had to know what to do. It was just very eye-opening. I guess—a good learning experience regardless of whether I had a good GPA or not, it was a good practical learning experience about the way the world works and people.

Davis: Most of the world events that you were privy to came from friends that were international, as well as international books and literature? That's something that I didn't consider.

Clay: It was mostly friends and they might say, "Hey, have check out this book or whatever." Then it was fun to teach them things too because I had a good friend, just a Nigerian friend, and I remember one time—he was very smart person. We had decided to take a class together because we knew each other before this class. He was on track team. We took this class together and I can't remember what it was about, but it was something that was said in the class. When we were coming out of the class, he was just totally lost and it was some reference to Greek mythology. I was telling him the whole story behind whatever it was—who knows the story of Pandora, the story of Atlas. Whoever it was that was in this class and how I came about in the whole loose end of Jupiter being Roman, Zeus being Greek and I'm just breaking it all down which is what you learned in English when I was in school, in the 10th grade. That's when you do all of the mythology stuff. He was like, "You learn this in school? All this make-believe stuff?" I say, "Yeah because that's—the reason is because so many of the classics refer to it and that type of thing and so that's why they feel like you need to know it so you can understand a point when a time comes." He was just and on. He says, "Yeah, I don't learn anything at all about all the things that happen on the continent of Africa but you know about this make-believe stuff that no one doesn't believe in. You take a whole year to learn about that?" He was learning about the mythology and I was learning—oh, that the world is set up that way to make some cultures be more important than others. Anyway.

Davis: I find that we do learn a lot about Greek mythology. I learned about Greek mythology in 10th grade as well. Not much has changed there but we don't really dive into Native American history and culture.

Lareatha Clay: No.

Davis: Or true black history which is the point of this project, is to really unveil some of the histories here in Texas.

Clay: I think the lesson in that is that even if you do go to a predominantly Black school and grow up in a predominantly Black environment, you cannot escape the western supremacy leanings that permeates the United States. Because like I said, first through the 12th grade I went to all-Black schools except for the 7th grade. First grade through six, eight through 12, we had the big blowout. At that time it was a National Negro History Week. I think it became month in '75. But we'd had the big blowout and everybody did their reports and you had to learn about the people and had the programs and everything. When I was in seventh grade, National Negro History Week was coming and no one's saying anything and I was like, "Well when are we going to have a program?" Nope, nothing ever happened. I—being a little militant person that I was—so I made up these little name tags, and every day I wear different one about a famous Black person with a little bit of blurb on them and I'd wear it in school all day. No one ever asked me about it but who really looked at it and read it was when I would go to lunch in the cafeteria because it's cafeteria women were Black and they would look every day. They would look and say, "Who you have on today?" and they read it and asked me about the person. What I'm just saying, even with all of that and I tell people all the time, I learned the Black national anthem when I was in the 5th grade, all three verses because our teacher taught it to us and you would go to programs and you'd sing it in the programs. But even with all of that, you still end up not knowing as much about the real-world as you should but just knowing a lot about western civilization in western culture.

Davis: Wow. That's such a good idea to put display a little blurb. A good conversation starter. I guess the cafeteria ladies at UT have always been super nice because my experience there—I felt like we were actually friends and I think that we were to this day, but they would see me and they would ask how my sister's doing. The cafeteria ladies at UT have always been A1, which is important to note. We can move onto the next question if you're ready.

Clay: Yeah.

Davis: Awesome. Well, this one's pretty open-ended here. This is Section 3, Question 3b. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in the Delta Xi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority incorporated?

Clay: I like the fact that back in 1999, there was a big Black Alumni Reunion '99, I think there was one in 2000, where everyone went and now there are even the African-American Alumni Weekends that they are having at UT now. Every time there's one of those things of Black Alumni Reunion or Black Alumni Weekend or whatever, Delta Xi always gets together and has a lunch or just gets together and does something. You get to meet not only the people that you were there with, but you get to meet people from across the spectrum. That's the reason, I don't know, we have a GroupMe page. I guess what I'm saying is—I think we have a Facebook page—so it's not just a cheer in school. I know a lot of towns with white Sororities. I have no idea why anyone if I count data is today, which was their business fraternity for women, as they called it, Business Fraternity for Eliminating College Sorority. I have no idea where any of those people are today. I remember some of their names but I have no idea where they are. But Delta Xi, if I'm trying to find someone, I can go on GroupMe or Facebook or call some friends and say, "Hey, help me find X person," and it will be done because we continue to live up a sisterhood, continue to keep in touch, continue to foster the relationships that were started when we were in undergrad. I'm sure that happens a lot with other chapters of AKA because that's part of what AKA is about. But I know that Delta Xi really does a good job of doing that.

Davis: Well, that's just beautiful. I think that's very special that Delta Xi continues to live out their sisterhood and to foster those relationships and the bond is strong with you all. That is amazing. I do

want to thank you so much for taking the time to answer these questions that we have about the Delta Xi Chapter and to thank you for your service to this community as a whole, this Texas community, and to thank you for your input and sharing your life. Thank you so much.

Lareatha Clay: Thank you.

TRANSCRIPT END