

Linda Kennedy, Class of 1972 and Karen Kaufman-Codjoe, Class of 1974

Conversation 4/4/2018

Linda Kennedy (LK): So, how did you—how'd you hear about Macalester?

Karen Codjoe (KC): Um, one of our—one of Macalester's students came to my high school and told us about Macalester and asked that some of us apply. So, I did. She—Barbara Phillips—I think she graduated, maybe, '71? And we had gone to high school together and she said it was really nice. Sounded real positive. It was far away, you know, compared to Tennessee. But [I] thought, "Why not? Why not apply and see what happens?"

LK: Did you want to go far away?

KC: Yeah. I had made up my mind that I wanted to leave Tennessee. [laughs] With this one opportunity of college I was gonna give it a try, yeah.

LK: OK, OK. So how'd you learn about EEO [Expanded Educational Opportunities]?

KC: When I applied, this whole packet came back. I got accepted and then, it was a packet about EEO. And I thought, "Wow, what an opportunity." So that almost clinched it for me, as far as the decision.

LK: And when you got there, what was your first impression? What did you think when you got on campus?

KC: [laughs] It was—actually, I went early. They had us come in August, I think, before the school year started. And coming from Tennessee in August, to Minnesota in August, my first impression was, "Wow, it's really cool." I mean, pleasant weather, as compared to the boiling heat we always have in the South in August. So that was my first impression. And then the campus with the trees and everybody was really friendly, so it was a positive—positive shock. [laughs]

LK: [laughs] So it was all of the—all of the freshman that year came early? And was there faculty, other students there? I was a dorm counselor, I don't remember being there early to meet EEO students. Maybe I was but I don't remember.

KC: Yeah. And we had—we took a class. Most of us took English to make sure our writing skills were good, and we had, I guess like a mentor. Someone a year ahead who took us around and we could go to for questions, or whatever. I think we had our initial meeting at the Black House like the day after [I] flew in. We went to the Black House to meet our mentor and talk about how the summer was gonna go.

LK: Hm. How was—who was your mentor? You remember?

KC: Uh, I can picture her face...

LK: It wasn't me, was it?

KC: No, it wasn't you, Linda...[laughs]

LK: [laughs]

KC: All I remember—I wanna say Pam was one of them. And, oh, I can't remember her name. She—I had two, so, I can't remember—

LK: How did you get two?

KC: I don't know. Maybe one was for academic and one was for social, maybe?

LK: Hm.

KC: We are talking about forty-plus years ago. [laughs]

LK: So what did you think about Saint Paul? Did you have any impressions about the city, or the campus being in the city, or anything like that?

KC: Mmm, I thought that it was, uh, negotiable because I could ride the bus—you know, get the bus schedule and that—'cause I didn't have a car—and go to various places. I remember going downtown. I remember Dayton's and Donaldson's and having a good time looking at new shops and new stores. That was a—

LK: The Nicollet Mall and...[laughs]

KC: Yeah, yeah. If you go over the bridge to Minneapolis it's—

LK: Right.

KC: Yeah. I don't think I did that this—that summer. But I remember, uh, going downtown Saint Paul, just to see—

LK: So you got there early August?

KC: Yeah, we were there for a whole month. It was a month in the dorm, it was a month of class. It was for credit. Um...what else did we do? I think we went to a Twins baseball game, or maybe that was later. Was that baseball season? I can't remember. But it was a month, yeah. I remember because my grandmother lived in Iowa at the time, and my mother and father came up to Iowa to visit her, and they came up to see me. 'Cause that was really the first time I had been away from home.

LK: Oh.

KC: And I had been gone for over two weeks which was long back then.

LK: That was a long time. Well, yeah. That's long any time when you've never been away from home and you're eighteen or seventeen. That's, that's something. You were seventeen too, weren't you?

KC: Mhm.

LK: Yeah, cause I was seventeen, too. And that's—that's huge when you've never been away and—

KC: Yeah.

LK: —you're a girl and your Dad is warning you about things.

KC: [laughs].

LK: —boys... So what did you think of EEO when you got there? And the staff, and all of that?

KC: It was very supportive. They were almost like, um... I can't remember—I remember John Warfield, the director. And I remember him talking to us and telling us how it was important to keep up with our classes, and it was important for us to develop good writing skills, because no matter what major we had, we had to be able to write well at Macalester. And I was Biology, but of course I took English and other courses, too. I remember—I can't remember names, but I remember a lot of the staff were almost like parents, you know, den mothers, or... Coming around asking us if we needed anything. And I remember students going, if they needed help...with their laundry—'cause I knew how to do mine—but, just different, just real basic things. They were very helpful.

LK: You know, before you got there—just before you got there, they used to do laundry for the boys.

KC: What? Really?

LK: They changed their—well, they didn't do their laundry but they changed their linen, and dusted their rooms.

KC: Wow. Hmm... that would keep us spoiling...

LK: Yeah, they didn't have that when I got there. It ended, I think, the year before I got there.

KC: Isn't that something?

LK: But they had—they had people that I remember, the woman who came around and dusted and stuff in Dupre. [laughs]

KC: [unclear] I think that the year that I went—I think I stayed in Dupre that summer, and then my first year was in Wallace.

LK: Oh, OK. So what—was there much dialogue around race when you're—you were there?

KC: Oh yeah, for sure. Um, I think my race consciousness was raised at Macalester. I remember a concert with Olatunji. I think it was a band from Nigeria with the drums and—

LK: Oh, I remember that!

KC: It was a fabulous concert.

LK: Yeah, I went to that!

KC: [unclear] right to your, your core.

LK: Wow!

KC: And Kofi Annan [Class of 1961] spoke. Remember, he had graduated from Macalester—

LK: Right, right.

KC: —[unclear] ones that came back and he spoke. I remember we used to have poetry slams in the Chapel, and skits. So yeah, it was very nurturing for black consciousness.

LK: And I remember the boys used to have groups and sing—

KC: Oh yeah.

LK: Everybody was trying to be a Temptation. [laughs]

KC: [laughs] Oh wow, for sure. And then the Sounds of Blackness was, they started when—I always tell my sisters, ‘cause they know I can’t sing, I always say, “Oh, Sounds of Blackness invited me to sing with them” and they, they chuckle like, “that’s unbelievable.”

LK: [laughs] I can’t sing either and I was in it.

KC: Oh really?

LK: Yeah, but I just—I was a doo-wop.

KC: Oh.

LK: You know, I didn’t—I didn’t really, I didn’t really have a lot to, to do. And I certainly never had any solos. You can never hear me. I was just you know in the background, just moving from side to side. But it was fun, it was fun. I went to all the different things that they, that they did. You know, we travelled around. So, why didn’t you do it? Why didn’t you join?

KC: One thing, I couldn’t sing. That’s number one, and...

LK: That didn’t stop me. [laughs]

KC: Um, I don’t know if it was my first year or my second year, and I was thinking, “I need to study. I can’t do too many other things,” and focus, focus, focus. I think that was part of it.

LK: How about the campus community? What was that—what was that like? Interactions with other students and...

KC: I believe my first semester there the dorms went co-ed. It was either the first or the second year. So, everybody was thrown—and that was different, that was different.

LK: It was different. I remember that. [laughs]

KC: But everybody was friendly. I don't— I can remember, I always had good roommates that I was able to pick, or we could agree on. Actually, my roommate my freshman year— we had gone to high school together. We both decided to go to Macalester, so that was good. And I can remember meeting—

LK: Who was that?

KC: Her name was Tametha Malone [sp?]. I don't know if she finished from Macalester. But we were roommates our first year.

LK: Hmm. How about the white students? What—was there—did you interact very much with white students?

KC: Especially in my classes. Uh, biology, chemistry. [There were] quite a few whites in those classes. And I didn't have any problems with anybody. A lot of us were just trying to, you know, get the grade and do what needed to be done. It was quite busy. But I remember lab partners, white lab partners, that were very supportive, and study groups where we used to get together to prepare for exams.

LK: Did you ever—did you ever get a sense of “less-than”—that perhaps people expected you not to be all that Macalester needed you to be, at all?

KC: Um...maybe if I didn't do well on a test, or something. You know I always questioned my—was I well prepared, or was my background sufficient? That kind of thing. But I think it was more self-generated than someone making me feel that way. I think it was mostly me.

LK: OK. I think—and you got there two years into the program as well.

KC: Oh, OK—

LK: I think.

KC: Oh, OK—

LK: Because '73 was the first graduating class.

KC: Oh, OK.

LK: Were you '74?

KC: Mhm, mhm.

LK: Yeah, so—so you were a year in. So, they probably had that realization that these students were, were well-prepared, but didn't always have opportunity.

KC: Right, yeah. I do remember, um, one—I went back a few years ago it was for a trip or for the alumni college, and someone had said, "You came with EEOC? They invited—they had a lot of minorities here. How did everybody do?" That's what the gentleman asked me, "How did everybody turn out?" And I said, "Well, no five- or sixers—you know, I can't speak for everybody..."

LK: Uh-huh.

KC: But I think it was a good program and most people graduated and, you know, had successful careers.

KC: OK.

LK: Um... so, did you—what was your social life like, versus academics? Were you—were you very social, or were you studious all the time? What—

KC: I wasn't very—I wasn't very social. I went to some parties, you know, the basement of Dupre, or the Saturday Night—I guess you'd call it a sock-hop. I did some of that. I didn't do a

lot off-campus. I didn't have a car. I know some students would go to different venues. But I didn't—I didn't—I guess I was just studious, trying to get all my grades and do all that was needed for my classes. But all the things that they had on campus—the poetry slams, if it was on-campus I was trying to make it, and participate. But not a lot off-campus.

LK: Right, and I hear that from a lot of students that didn't go off-campus very much. I didn't go off-campus very much because I didn't have a car, either. And I think there were a lot of us who—and there was a lot going on on-campus.

KC: Oh yes, it seemed like every weekend they had something. Concerts or lectures—remember Alex Haley came, were you there then? Alex Haley.

LK: I think so—

KC: He came and—

LK: I think I saw him.

KC: —came and talked about Roots. That was like, wow.

LK: When was that? Do you remember what year that was?

KC: Oh man, it had to have been...maybe seventy...two, maybe?

LK: I might have been gone. It might have been '73.

KC: Oh.

LK: And I was gone, because I remember—if he had been there I would have gone. And I remember when he was doing tours with the book, and I went to see him and got my book autographed—

KC: Oh wow.

LK: —and—but I think I was maybe a year out of Mac.

KC: Oh, OK.

LK: So I think it was '73, because I graduated in '72.

KC: Maybe so. I feel like it w—I remember going with my roommate, who was short, and we went up to meet Alex Haley after the talk and he said to my roommate, “Oh, you probably came from the pygmies,” cause she was so short. The pygmies?

LK: [laughs] Yeah?

KC: She didn't graduate from Macalester. I'm thinking that she left, maybe our third year which was—

LK: Maybe went back to the pygmies. [laughs]

KC: I think she went to Western Illinois University.

LK: [laughs]

KC: She just transferred. So I'm thinking it was '72, but I remember that as being like, “Wow, Macalester, Alex Haley telling a story,” you know, and then, the movie coming out what, ten years later or something? But that was a unique experience. Walter Mondale—

LK: Yes.

KC: Hubert Humphrey.

LK: Hubert Humphrey.

KC: Just phenomenal people right—

LK: Right.

KC:—just sitting in front of you, you know, not on TV, just sitting in front of you.

LK: Mhm. Mhm. So, um...did you—was there—were you involved with any of the Vietnam protests or any of the—the um, racial issues around Vietnam or around campus?

KC: No. I remember a student ahead of me—that would have been the year of Kent State—talking about all the unrest on the campus—

LK: Mhm.

KC: —but when I got to Macalester I think a lot of that had— I know we were still at war in Vietnam but a lot of the campus unrest had subsided. I don't recall too many demonstrations on campus against the war. I do remember McGovern [George McGovern] came, I believe to campus, and I think it was some support for him—

LK: Oh, that's right. I remember that. I remember he was running for president.

KC: Mhm. I remember that, and listening to him. But I didn't participate in any protests on campus.

LK: OK. So is there anything you want to add?

KC: Let's see, um...well, it was a wonderful experience, Macalester. I met a lot of wonderful people. And I often thought about—with EEOC, we had over 100, 200 students there. And we were as cohesive as, possibly as an HBCU. It was so many of us that we had the support of each other. And I think that reflects the same type of cohesiveness they have at HBCUs. So that was a unique experience for us in a time in our life.

LK: Well, terrific. Thank you. And now you're on the Alumni Board.

KC: Oh, it's exciting. I'm looking forward to it.

[end of video]