

University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives
Project 500 Anniversary Oral History Project
Malcom Rockhold
Urbana, Illinois
September 28th, 2018

Bethany Anderson: Ok so I'm Bethany Anderson and I'm from the University of Illinois Archives and I'm here today with Malcolm Rockhold and today is September 28th, 2018. And thank you for being here with me today, Malcolm. So why don't we go ahead and get started? But if you wanted to just give a brief intro about yourself, that would be great.

Malcom Rockhold: Thank you, for saying my name correctly,

BA: Oh, did I? Great, I'm so happy I did.

MR: I've been called all types of Rockholds, but you made me feel comfortable already.

BA: Excellent, excellent.

MR: Ok, I came to the campus in 1969. In the Project 500 program and didn't have a clue on what I wanted to do with my life. All I knew that I had a tremendous opportunity to go to one of the greatest institutions in the Big Ten. And I had a choice to accept an ROTC scholarship at Loyola or come here and since the Vietnam War was going on, I thought this would be the wiser choice. So, I came here, and it was a...It was a culture, a cultural shock when I came on campus because I came from the inner city of Chicago and culturally, I hadn't been exposed to many different people from races, different races and backgrounds, so the first experience I had. Can I put this on tape?

BA: Yeah, well, yeah, definitely whatever you would like to share.

MR: I'm gonna be you know keep, as the young people say, I'm going to keep it 100. When I first got on campus, I was residing in the MRH, men's residence home, and I saw all these guys running around. It was about almost 1000 of them and I was the only black guy in the group. I just joined in because I thought this was what you do on campus and they were going from building to building, yelling "panty raid" up to the residents of the young women's residence and I said "Well, wow, what is this you know?" And so, they kept yelling and the girls would, you know, every now and then throw something out the window and what happened was, they started pouring water on the guys. And I said "Well, this is not something I want to do." You know? I Went on into the dorm and I saw the black guys and they were sitting down having conversations with ladies and getting to know them and I said, "Well, this is where I need to be." That was my first experience on Campus, you know?

BA: Right, right, yeah. Ok great, well thank you for that intro. [They laugh.] So, you said you got here in 1969, correct? So, could you say what were the total years you were here. When did you leave the University?

MR: 73

BA: OK, and you sort of hinted at this a little bit already, but how did you decide on the UofI and what did you consider any other schools?

MR: Sure, I applied to Northwestern because I wanted to be a journalism major and couldn't get in. Loyola was my only other option and then U of I which I gladly accepted because I you know said this would be a great experience. They invited me down for a weekend of exposure to campus life and I really was really excited about that.

BA: So, what was the climate like when you first arrived on campus?

MR: In terms of how I was treated or?

BA: Just generally

MR: The atmosphere.

BA: Yeah, the kind of atmosphere that you encountered.

MR: Ah, it was I, I felt free. You know, I think college is an opportunity for a young person to discover who they are, and I was going through a process of who trying to find out who I was and being self-empowered by my identity once I discovered it, you know. So, it was a perfect environment for me to find out who Malcolm Rockhold was on the road to become.

BA: So, I'm going to ask you a more specific question about a particular moment here in the history of the university. Did you participate in the September 10th, 1968, sit in? And can you describe that event and its impact, if any?

MR: I wasn't here.

BA: You, oh that's right. Yeah, I'm sorry, my apologies

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MR: I came in 69

BA: That's right. You were here in 69, but did you, even though this happened before you were here, did you see any sort of impact that had or feel any impact that that had after you were here?

MR: Oh, the gentleman that you're going to interview after me, Jeffrey Roberts, we grew up together in the church environment as little boys, so I knew he was here already, so I had someone to kind of be my mentor on how to survive in this university environment, which made me feel really great and those students that made those sacrifices in 1968 warmly embraced me, like a warm winter coat and made me feel welcome and it's because of their efforts I was able to continue my education here. It was a beautiful thing.

BA: That's great, yeah, were you involved in any student organizations such as the Black Student Association?

MR: I was a member, and in fact when they had the archive display, I saw the actual membership card. I said "I remember signing that card." I said "Wow, that was cool." I remember that I was with a group called the Turtles, which was a drinking group, and you know, and that was a you know, kind of like a party group to have fun and make new friends and then my biggest and greatest exposure was being on one of the first blacks to be on the campus radio station WPGU. I was a news anchor and also an air personality on the radio station and it was myself and this other young man by the name of Mike Hall and we were the first to really get some airtime on the radio station and that's what sparked my interest in broadcasting.

BA: Were you involved in any extracurricular activities, and you already talked about this a bit, such as you know, but more specifically the arts or sports? And can you describe those experiences?

MR: I was just all about the radio, that's it. That's all you're gonna get out of me on that because I mean, I had found my calling and once you find what your what, what your passion. and is, you go for it, you know? And that gave me direction to apply at that time. You could only apply for the College of you know the College of Communication after you finished your first two years of liberal arts and then you had to apply and then you had to be accepted and that was my greatest moment when I got accepted in the College of Communications, because I knew I was on my way.

BA: So, what are some of your favorite memories?

MR: I have favorite memories, but...before we proceed with that, I want I want to address going into the College of Communications and what it was lacking for my development.

BA: Sure, yeah.

MR: I did not have any mentoring. I didn't have any mentoring and if I had someone that would show me the direction, the right direction for me to go for my career, it probably would have went a little differently, you know, and that's something that needs to be addressed in the future for students. You cannot be really successful without someone giving, sharing their wisdom and giving their guidance. Especially if you've made a commitment to what career path you have chosen. Okay, I'm sorry.

BA: No no, yeah no. Thank you for sharing that. And I'll ask you also a question later to see that'll kind of go back to that a little bit. Maybe yeah, if you could talk about any favorite memories you have from your time here. What would those be?

MR: Getting back to finding out who I was in terms of my own personality and identity. I got a chance to try different things. I was uninhibited, you know, I would wear strange clothes just because I could, and it gave me a feeling of self-empowerment and allowed me to work on my social skills. That's what college is good for, you know?

BA: So, do you think protest tactics, philosophies, and so forth related to Project 500 differ from those used in other protests at the time or even protests happening today and how so?

MR: Well, we marched. I remember...what was that march that we did. Was that for? It was someone's death,

Third Speaker: Edgar Holtz, he got shot. He was a young man from Champaign who was killed by the Champaign police, and it happened right off campus here and that spurred a big march.

MR: So, I joined. I joined in that see, because you got to understand I was pretty much a freshman and the students that were, had been here before me, they were pretty much giving us the guidelines to follow as, you know, African American students on campus. This is our cause. This is what we're about, you know.

BA: Yeah, so what advice do you have for incoming freshmen or seniors as well?

MR: Find a mentor. If you, the sooner the better. If you're a freshman coming in and it's the first, and you've made a commitment in terms of your major or your career choice, then find someone in that field that wants to help you and along with your studies and the mentoring, you should be on the right path.

BA: That's great advice. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

MR: Thank you so much.

BA: Well, thank you. I really appreciate it, Malcolm.

MR: Okay.