

Paris McBride interviewing Denise Hayman clip 4

Topic: Dr. James Newton

Interviewer: Was James Newton a good figure you could look at or go to and talk to on the campus if there were any issues?

Denise Hayman: Well here's the thing. Dr. Newton, I think my first class I took with him when, it may have been my sophomore year, junior, senior, not my senior but junior, sophomore, junior year. The thing that was really instrumental about him obviously the first positive thing was just having some of Black Studies department on campus, because a lot of campuses didn't have that. We even had a Black Studies course in high school in Newark, believe it or not. But he's very astute I think in terms of racial politics and the challenges, and I remember having numerous conversations with him about that, not only as a student but after I graduated I came back to Delaware and, and I'll tell you with some of the things that happened.

So one of the concerns that I had after I graduated and Dr. Newton was still there, was that the University, and I'll just say this the perception with the people in the community that was still living there and those of us who grew up in that community, the New London-Cleveland Avenue area, is that the University was beginning to encroach on that community. In other words, they were buying up property to build dorms and other residence halls. So, an example would be, and this is kind of an historical perspective, where your north campus is, now when I was there it was Christiania Towers and... I can't remember them, Christiania Towers and Pencader, where Pencader is now, that used to be all Black family homes. All in that area, including my own relatives and other people in the community. Obviously, this was before I was, I may not have been born then, or I was probably a real little, little person, the University bought that property from Black people who lived in that community, they used to call that area down there The Hollow because you know it was down there near the creek. The University bought that property from the Black families and built Pencader. I don't know whether, I don't want to say the rumor is, but based on oral history, many of us were told that those, that land was bought from the Black families there for a much cheaper price than what it was really worth. Okay, a lot of people don't know that. So all that area down there where Black families lived, my grandmother lived down there her family etc. So when I graduated from Delaware, many of us were still concerned about that because we saw little by little that the property was being purchased and used for stuff at the University.

I came back to campus, and actually I remember having a long-extended conversation with Dr. Newton. At the time, President Pete [David] Roselle was the President UD and, through conversations with Dr. Newton, in letters that I sent to the University, they actually started creating something to, like committees or groups of graduate students to kind of help document the history and some other types of things. So a lot of the stuff like, and this class in particular, was an outgrowth of my sorority and me, but mostly me kind of spearheading this, wanting to document the first Black sorority on this campus and as a result it warped into this class and some other things.

So this has been a long-- I don't want to call it a fight, but an interest that I've had for a long time. Dr. Newton was instrumental in just kind of making me aware of what the challenges were and some of the things you have to do. He considers himself controversial, so he's not someone that, and I'm sure you probably saw that from the discussion you had, and he'll tell you that he's not someone who mostly sits back. He basically, you know I would talk to him about all the different things, you know what could we do whatever, and he would give me some direction, so he was beneficial. We did not really have Black faculty that were probably as involved as we wanted, and I'll be honest with you the people who probably had the most impact with us day to day, were the Black staff, so you're talking about Agnes Green, there used to be someone in Admissions named Richard Wilson, he passed away, and then Vince Oliver used to be over at the, now it's called the Center for Black Culture, it was called the Minority Center. So a lot of the administrative people were instrumental in kind of helping us navigate that campus. Because there were more of them than there were faculty members, excluding the people in Black Studies. And the other thing in Black Studies which I marveled at, and it was actually a good course, one of Dr. Newton's faculty persons was a white male, and he taught that Black history like he was a Black person, and I, you know I sit there and marvel, cuz I was like how does this man know all this. I remember one time he was teaching us something about the Black church, and he was saying, well you know the call and response and whatever, and I'm looking at this man thinking what does this man know about call and response. But he did a good job, so you know it was multi-ethnic and kind of open-minded, and you know wasn't like we were trying to call anybody like racist or whatever, but it was just trying to integrate us into and do inclusion and to keep us as part of the mix in terms of things that we're going on on campus.