**Reminiscence of Myrtle Glascoe**

**3/2019**

I shall here write my reminiscence of Myrtle Glascoe, whose death I mourn. I shall write it as accurately as possible. Myrtle would want me to, and as you will see by the end, we parted as close friends/allies.

In about 1960, Dr. Ernst Borinski, famed professor of sociology at Tougaloo College, got a modest grant to start what he called the “Social Science Advancement Institute.” Situated in a large corner room with beautiful windows in Beard Hall, it mostly consisted of a person hired by Dr. Borinski, who usually taught a course “Social Work and Social Welfare,” or sometimes other courses, and who interacted with students in various creative ways.

Perhaps the first inhabitant of the position was John Salter, a.k.a. Hunter Bear, who became advisor to students in what became the Tougaloo chapter (“North Jackson”) of the NAACP. He left Tougaloo at the end of the 1962-63 academic year. By 1968, David Barnum had replaced him. He left Tougaloo at the end of the 1968-69 academic year, I believe, and wound up in Evanston, IL.

Then Dr. Borinski hired Myrtle Glascoe. She became a member of the Department of Sociology-Anthropology, which I had joined in the fall of 1968; almost surely she taught “Social Work and Social Welfare,” among other things. I became chair of that department in the fall of 1969 or 1970. I was often complaining about bureaucratic foibles and obstacles at Tougaloo, and Myrtle jokingly called me Tougaloo’s “Minister of Protest.” The next year, Myrtle became a Muslim, and she also became anti-white, refusing to shake white people’s hands or otherwise touch or be touched, and maintaining a coldness hard to penetrate. She was always professional, however, and very intelligent.

In about 1972, she left Tougaloo, to be replaced by Louise “Shani” Brooks, who stayed in the position until after I left Tougaloo in 1975.

I met Myrtle several more times, however. Our warmest encounter came in Charleston, SC, in 1997. She had been working at the Avery Institute in Charleston and the Penn Center in nearby Beaufort. The Unitarian/Universalist Churches of SC had invited me to hold a race relations workshop for them. Myrtle and I had stayed in touch idstantly, so we got together after my workshop. I think she took me to the airport. Maybe we had lunch together first.

At a certain point, she stopped the car in downtown Charleston and said, “I have been thinking about you and Dittmer and the Morses and others [white faculty members at Tougaloo] and I want to tell you, you folks not only talked the talk, you walked the walk.” Moved, I thanked her warmly. She then said, “I hope I didn’t become too difficult to deal with?” I replied, “Well, it was hard when you wouldn’t shake hands, and stuff.” She immediately turned toward me in the car, put forth both hands, grabbed my right hand, and shook it, saying “Thank you.” What a warm encounter! I passed it on to the Dittmers and Morses and Steve Rozman and others.

Then she taught at Gettysburg College, and we met a couple of times in Washington, DC, including once by chance (!) at the Library of Congress. I learned that she had become celebrated by students, including white students, because of her intense interest in reaching and teaching them. She promised to have me come up s a guest speaker at Gettysburg, but all too soon, I heard she had had a stroke. I tried to send her best wishes but don’t know if they arrived.

People reading this ages hence, if any do, need to realize that even in institutions like Tougaloo College, filled with people dedicated to ending racism and to educating African Americans, race can still play a divisive role, and not just on the side of black folks. Whites at Tougaloo, myself included, played our white part in causing friction. Myrtle’s story is ultimately one of the triumph of the human spirit over the ideas of division that can infect every institution. I shall light a candle for her at church this Sunday, and I salute her example. See https://snccdigital.org/people/myrtle-glascoe/ for her own video autobiography.