Interview with Diane Batts Morrow, who graduated from Swarthmore College in 1969. She earned her PhD in history from the University of Georgia, and is author of the book Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1828-1860*. She now teaches History and African American Studies at the University of Georgia. Interview conducted by Alison Roseberry-Polier, research assistant, on July 15, 2014, at the home of Diane Batts Morrow. The transcription is word-for-word, with the exception of filler words. At the end, there is an addendum written over email the following week.*

Alison Roseberry-Polier: OK, so, to begin with could you tell me a little bit about your time at Swarthmore, what you were involved in doing, what you spent your time on, just to give me an overview and a sense of what your time was like?

Diane Batts Morrow: OK, I will dig deep into the recesses of my brain to recall. I guess it was almost 50 years ago because I graduated 45 years ago. I was a history major at Swarthmore. I think I worked on the school newspaper. I was the circulation department for a while. I wasn't involved in athletics or anything like that. Let's see, I early on discovered I wanted to be a history major, and I think for me the biggest intellectual experience at Swarthmore was discovering the huge difference between history as presented at Swarthmore and history as presented in high school. I hated history in high school, and when I got to Swarthmore we were talking about concepts and ideas and people in a new way. It not only made sense, but it made history really important, so I was delighted at that discovery and decided to be a history major early on. I was not particularly active in any clubs or organizations and – let's see, what did I do when I was there? I was a senior resident my senior year. I did get involved with the Upward Bound program. I was a counselor on the Upward Bound program for my junior and senior years and that was a really important and wonderful experience for me. Other than that, I don't really have a whole lot to say. Classes were good, I had friends, and although I lived in Philadelphia, I stayed on campus, and I remember distinctly that it cost exactly one dollar to go home on the Media local. It was as if I lived much farther away because I did not go home any more than people who lived a significant distance did. I really did appreciate and enjoy my Swarthmore experience.

ARP: Thank you. Could you narrow in, tell me about your understanding of the events of the 1968-1969 year, especially as it relates to admissions policy and the SASS takeover?

DBM: Yes. I remember I attended the first meeting, the organizational meeting, for SASS, and did not particularly appreciate the tenor or the tone of it. First of all there were individuals who were not Swarthmore students who were there who essentially organized it, and were telling the black students who attended, 'don't speak to white students, don't speak to anyone, we'll tell you what to say and what to do.' And of course, this seemed to go against all the principles and values I had – my parents and my home, and certainly the thought of independent thinking would seem to go against it. It seemed really outrageous for these total strangers to come in and think they had the authority to tell me what to think, to whom I could speak, et cetera et cetera. So I essentially walked out of that first meeting, essentially saying that my own parents, who are paying my tuition, do not presume to tell me what to think and with whom I can associate, and so you have no authority to do that either, and so I did not join SASS, was quite troubled by the seeming intention of it, and so I did not join the organization. I did not participate in the student

sit-in in the admissions office. I had a different perspective on what Swarthmore could do in terms of increasing black enrollment. Now, I can't remember the exact size of the classes at the time, but my entering class in 1965, I think there were 16 people of African descent – as it turned out, in the tradition of the Quaker matchbox, 8 men and 8 women, although the college really couldn't control that. Obviously they had admitted more who chose to go elsewhere, but 16 people of African descent in that small class seemed significant. They were of varied backgrounds and locations and experiences. And I had no problem with the thought of increasing the enrollment of black students, but what I was concerned about was this feeling that in order to increase black enrollment you automatically had to go into schools where, I guess inner-city schools, and recruit students who may or may not have the kind of background – I mean, to be very honest, Swarthmore at the time and still I believe enjoys this reputation of being an academically elite institution of people who are very committed to and excel in academic work. The presumption that in order to increase your black enrollment you had to recruit from inner city schools seemed very problematic. For one thing, Swarthmore really at the time did not recruit. I mean, I think that Dean Hargadon, who was the dean of admissions, he would go to California. But they never went into the South, they never went into other areas where you would find students who were really very academically prepared to attend Swarthmore. And I think in a sense the presumption that you had to go to inner city schools to increase your enrollment was, in a sense, racist – that there were not black students who existed elsewhere who would have heard of Swarthmore who would be interested in going. And so I thought that was rather a wrong-headed approach. At the same time, of course, with my work on Upward Bound, working with the students from Chester, I realized that there certainly were students almost anywhere who were committed to improving academically and who would be interested in coming to Swarthmore. So this whole idea of going into Harlem or going into Compton and that's where you were going to recruit seemed unnecessary and frankly kind of stereotyped to me.

ARP: Yeah. Just to back up quickly for one second, when was the first SASS meeting that you went to?

DBM: It was in 1968, I can't really recall. And if it wasn't the first it was among the first because they were still organizing.

ARP: OK. So SASS hadn't existed before 1968?

DBM: No. As far as I'm concerned it did not. It certainly was not in existence in '65 and '66, and I don't think it was there in '67. I really think it was '68, though I wouldn't swear to that. I think that if there are materials, other materials might indicate otherwise. But it certainly did not exist in my first couple of years there at Swarthmore. I think it was pretty much a 1968, late '67 maybe, '68 phenomenon.

ARP: OK. And was the meeting that you went to in the fall of 1968, or the spring?

DBM: That I don't remember.

ARP: OK, that's fine, thank you.

DBM: I believe it took place in the dining hall. I'm not sure about that though. But I can't tell which particular time. I think, because of my decision not to participate, that kind of historic information escaped me.

ARP: Yeah, definitely, that makes sense. So, were there changes that you would have liked to see in Swarthmore's admissions policy, or Swarthmore's policies towards black students, and how would you have wanted to see that?

DBM: Well, I think in a sense it was a question not of change in policy but perhaps of intensity. Certainly if there was a desire to increase black enrollment they could have done that. But again, this idea of having to go into areas and recruit students who might be very promising but clearly had not had the academic background would have created essentially a two-tiered situation, and I didn't think – in order to increase black enrollment, it was not necessary, and it certainly could lead to problems of its own. I guess everyone could say the admissions policy was by definition a very small school and there were lots of qualified people who did not gain admission. I'm sure a lot of people would have liked to have seen a change in policy, but I think at the time the goal was to increase – not talking about the black enrollment – but the school was going to grow toward a maximum number of I think a little over 1200 or something like that. So again, we're talking about a very small population. And while admission to college and access to college education for all minority students at the time was of course a very important goal, to say that a school that had this particular orientation had to increase it by a particular percentage number I think might have been problematic. I don't know that non-negotiable demands for particular increases either percentage wise or in numbers considered all the possible ramifications. Not that I, as a college junior or senior had all the answers, but I thought that there was no room for any kind of debate within SASS, it was much more like what people say, 'OK, we're all going to have this united front against, you know, we're not going to have differences of opinion exposed to the outside, et cetera et cetera.' Not all black students who were there at Swarthmore joined the organization.

ARP: Yeah. So you were involved with Upward Bound. Could you tell me a bit more about your involvement and how that fit into your vision of change?

DBM: Let's see. I think I started working in Upward Bound the summer after my [sophomore] year. Let's see. My summer after high school graduation I had worked in – this is where I really am very grateful to President Lyndon Baines Johnson's domestic policies and his War on Poverty because I was in the Head Start program.[1] I worked as a non-professional aide, so I was a teacher's aide with four year olds, which was a really delightful experience, for two years – after my high school senior year and after my freshman year of college. It was after my sophomore year that I went to Upward Bound, and at that time it was an overnight program so the students were there during the week. They went home on the weekends, but we were in charge of them in terms of basic tutoring and work to bring their reading skills up to snuff, exposure to black history, which at that time was absolutely non-existent in the schools. And it was quite a learning experience, dealing with middle school and high school students, some of whom had real desire to learn – I mean, it's what you get in any normal classroom situation – but what I really became interested in, was the idea of having African American history on a wider

[1] Head Start started in 1965 as an early-childhood education summer program for low-income families.

exposure, because when I was growing up in the public schools of Philadelphia, of course there was nothing like that. In fact, even when I graduated from Swarthmore in 1969 there were no courses offered in African American history. It wasn't until I went back to graduate school that I was able to study it professionally. So that was a very important change, and of course that was a consequence, I think a reflection of the interest in and the persistence of African Americans to be included in the curriculum, from high school on. I think that we certainly did have students from Upward Bound who attended Swarthmore successfully. I guess the point was that, with proper background preparation – and interest and determination – yes, black students from almost anywhere could succeed at Swarthmore. But to focus exclusively or primarily on inner city schools was not necessarily, as far as I was concerned, the best approach.

ARP: Yeah. You were mentioning curriculum at Swarthmore also. Were there ways that you would have liked to see the curriculum that was taught in Swarthmore classes change?

DBM: Well, at that time I was just going through this very Euro-centric curriculum. I think that would have been a wonderful idea. But it was not something that I was thinking about at the time because I myself had not had any courses in African American history or studies. Those kinds of changes are wonderful, those are very important. I mean, I think the more inclusive you can be in a legitimate sense, the better that is for everyone. One of my great satisfactions here is that I teach primarily African American history at the University of Georgia. That would not have been anything one would have foreseen in 1969.

ARP: Yeah, definitely. I've been going through the faculty minutes, and in one of the meetings from January of 1969 I found – you went to that meeting – and I found a quote where you were saying that if the college were to admit these so-called risk students, they should be including other ethnic minorities and white students. So I have a couple of questions. First of all, do you remember how you ended up going to that meeting?

DBM: Well, I think that was where the college essentially shut down after the death of President Smith and there was an effort to try to address the concerns at that point. I went to that meeting, I think my now husband was in attendance at that meeting as well.[2] And it was interesting to hear what the faculty had to say. I don't remember particular individuals. I do remember there was a wide range of professors from – you know, hands off, 'I'm not your parent, this is not in loco parentis,' to using the idea of supporting the protest. So that was kind of interesting. Believe me, obviously this was a situation that attracted national attention. And I remember, I think the reporter from *Life* magazine, I think his name was Paul Good, came to campus, and he did talk to me. But it was clear that his sympathies lay with the students who had been participating in the demonstration. It was just a very interesting experience. [phone rings] Can we stop? [pause]

DBM: I'm not sure I remember where we were.

ARP: We were talking about the faculty meeting that you attended.

[2] John Morrow, Swarthmore class of 1966.

DBM: Yes, and I think that as a consequence of that my husband wrote a letter, I think that's the one he wrote, addressing some of the concerns that he had.[3] We were of one thought at that point. I think I sent a copy of that entire letter to Dr. Dorsey. It was interesting, I reread that, and I thought, 'well, that made sense then and it makes sense now.' I'm pretty much of accord with the issues and concerns that he raised in that.

ARP: Yeah. Do you remember how you actually got to be at that meeting? Was it an open meeting, or were you invited, or did you ask to go?

DBM: I think it was an open meeting because – and again, I'm very fuzzy on these details – there were no classes, the campus had essentially shut down in terms of class, and so there were meetings and discussion groups and workshops going on to try to assess or understand what was going on but also try I think to reassure the students, and some students attended, not all did. For some reason, I think this one was in the biology lecture hall. I remember that. But otherwise, I can't remember what happened that got me to go there. I think I was interested in what the administration, what the faculty would have to say, and was certainly interested in what other students would have to say. And there were a variety of opinions voiced there.

ARP: Yeah. You mentioned that there were various other black students who weren't involved with SASS and weren't involved with the action and may have been opposed to it. Could you talk more about those students and the nature of their opposition? Do you know if there were alternatives that they might have supported?

DBM: Well you know, it's interesting. I think those students who did not participate and – there was no counter-group, like an anti-SASS group, there was nothing like that – a lot of those students just sort of absented themselves, they did not get involved one way or another. And so I don't think that I could with any legitimacy say what a lot of the other students thought. We did not have discussions. And so I think they withdrew or withheld their participation for a variety of reasons but I am not privy to those.

ARP: Yeah. Do you have a sense of how many black students that was, that weren't involved with SASS?

DBM: Hm. That, we could probably do that two ways. I don't know, is there a membership roll of SASS?

ARP: No. I think – we should be able to –

DBM: Yeah, that would be interesting. Are there minutes of SASS meetings?

ARP: I haven't seen them. There might be.

DBM: OK. Probably the college, unless someone who was involved with it. You know I guess, Clinton Etheridge was the president and I think Sam Shepherd the vice president at that particular time. But there were certainly some very strong black women who were involved in

[3] Letter from John Morrow, 01/09/1969.

the organization and in promoting and supporting it. I don't know – again, because I wasn't a member, I couldn't really say – whether they kept minutes or notes or who might have them if they do exist. Clinton Etheridge might know.

ARP: Earlier, you were talking about how when you went to that one SASS meeting, there were students from outside –

DBM: Mhm. Well, I don't know that they were students. There were people from outside.

ARP: People from outside. OK, can you talk about a little bit more how you understood their role in SASS?

DBM: My point was, if you call a meeting of black Swarthmore students – and I don't even know if they said they were going to form an organization – what they didn't say was that there were these people, these individuals who were not Swarthmore students, who not only were present but in some respects tried to take over the meeting, which to me was problematic. And so that in itself was an issue, and then as I said before, they were saying, 'we will talk and we will speak and you don't speak individually,' and I mean, that just to me was outlandish. If this was their modus operandi, I was not really interested in joining anything like that. That's why I left. And unfortunately, because I left, I am not in a position to say what happened internally. By that time, I know that there were individuals who – have you talked to Don Mizell, for example?

ARP: I haven't, but students in the class will.

DBM: OK, I think Sherryl Brown, Michael Graves, Marilyn Holifield, Marilyn Allman, Janette Domingo, Joyce Frisby - I can't remember names at this point, but there were several who were active in the organization. Pat – I can't remember Pat's last name.

ARP: I'm sure we can find that. In early January of 1969, SASS sent around a letter asking other black students not to speak in opposition to them.[4] Do you remember that?

DBM: I don't remember that. I probably at that point was discounting anything I got from SASS. They may have, I don't know.

ARP: Sure. So after President Smith died, a lot of black students left campus. Did you leave campus at that point?

DBM: No.

ARP: OK. Do you know, was that only SASS?

DBM: I don't know.

ARP: OK. I wanted to ask you more about the *Life* magazine article that you're quoted in. Do you mind if I read?

[4] Letter from SASS dated January 8, attached to John Morrow's letter.

DBM: Please do.

ARP: You were quoted there as saying, "A few people in SASS formulate policy and impose it on others. They don't let people think for themselves, browbeating them and calling them 'Tom' and 'honky.' I'm just not willing to subordinate my individuality for the common thinking. You make an implicit commitment to education when you choose Swarthmore. SASS disregards the fact that it's intellectually tougher here. They say there should be just as many blacks as at a state college, whether or not they qualify. That's reverse paternalism. At the same time, some of them tell cute black chicks: Don't date white! Then they do it. I get cynical."

DBM: My god, I said that?

ARP: They quoted you as saying that.

DBM: OK, well.

ARP: So I was wondering how you felt or how you feel about how *Life* was using your words and your perspective?

DBM: I think that I probably – that's a pretty accurate assessment. I don't think I would have said, 'I get cynical,' [nor would I have used such terms as 'cute black chicks.'] But I think almost everything else there was an accurate reflection of how I felt. I was particularly noting the fact that while, again, the leadership was trying to restrict contact with white people, it was almost as if 'you don't talk except through us,' there were certain men in the organization who didn't seem to have that problem for themselves. In other words, they were fraternizing with white women on campus even if they were telling other people, 'you're not supposed to be doing this kind of thing.' So that was really quite hypocritical. I was not impressed positively with that.

ARP: Yeah, definitely. In that article, they're using you to put you in a conversation that's very critical of SASS, and I'm wondering how you felt particularly about your role in that conversation, in that larger national conversation?

DBM: One of the things was, I think it was that experience that taught me a valuable lesson that if I give an interview that I always want to have final right of editing or reviewing. I think that – those were not verbatim quotes – but upon reflection some 45 years later, they essentially did represent the way I felt, and I did not feel that it was a problem to be presented as in opposition to what I perceived SASS' policies were, because I was. I really don't feel, 'oh, if I had to do it over again I wouldn't do it,' because I was really just expressing at the time the way I felt based on my own personal experience and my own personality and what's amazing is that, 45 years later, I don't think I would retract any of that. It was interesting, I don't know if the reporter went to other people and tried to get them to speak. I don't know that. I don't know how he operated. I don't know if other people did speak and he chose not to use them. I don't know if I was the only person who was willing to speak. I have no idea about the context in which that came out. But once it occurred, I was neither pleased nor displeased because I could not say that he has

completely misrepresented my perspective and my focus, because he hadn't. But it was obvious that he was setting me up as the one person who did not seem to agree, and that was not the case.

ARP: Right. In terms of there being other people –

DBM: Other people who'd either, I mean, there are both acts, if not sins, of omission and commission. And by purposefully not participating, by leaving campus, by not identifying one way or another, you still are taking a stand, you still are voicing a perspective or an opinion, and I think that there was probably more diversity of opinion than just me in opposition and everyone else in favor. I don't think that was the case at all. It was much more nuanced, much more complicated than that.

ARP: Yeah, certainly. Those are all the questions that I prepared, but I don't know if there's anything else you think it's important to say in terms of what was happening over that school year or what your perspective on that was.

DBM: Yes. As you can tell from many of the questions you asked where I have had to say I don't remember, I can't recall. I do remember something very personal that happened in 1968. Aside from the then shock of Dr. King's assassination in early April, a little over a week after Dr. King's assassination, John Morrow's and my engagement was announced in the newspaper, and there was very little response from anybody on campus, except I will always remember that Marilyn Holifield very graciously congratulated me. And at the time, I noted that and I appreciated that, and I understand that Marilyn also gave Dr. Dorsey my name as someone that should be included in her reformulation of what was happening, and I appreciate that today too.

ARP: Yeah, thank you. That's good to hear.

DBM: And, anything else. I'll say this, I've often said that at this stage of my life there are two decisions that I made that I do not regret. One is choosing to attend Swarthmore. And the other is saying yes when my husband proposed to me. And in the intervening years, there are lots of decisions I've made one way or another, but those two stand out to me as, if I had to do it again, I would do it again. For all of the complexity and all of the issues attending my four years at Swarthmore, it was a very positive experience. I went to it for academic rigor, I certainly got that, and I think it has stood me well in the professorial career that I have chosen.

ARP: Thank you. Is there anything else?

DBM: Let's see, Ali. I can't think of anything. But if I do, I have your phone number, or I could email you. But, this is interesting, as a historian, to look at something that happened 45 years ago as an eyewitness, and of course you always have to adjust for eyewitness accounts and memories. But I was quite interested when you quoted me from that article, because I thought, yeah, I probably did say that, and I certainly stand by that. So, in a sense, how do they say that, 'that's my story and I'm sticking to it.' It's interesting that I would not say, 'in the intervening years I have come to feel this that and the other' – but no, not about that. About other things in life, but not about that.

ARP: Yeah, certainly. Well, thank you.

DBM: You're welcome.

Addendum, July 21, 2014:

ARP: Listening to and reading over this, I would be interested to know if you have anything to say about SASS' demands for Black Studies or a Black Cultural Center.

DBM: I did not attend any SASS meetings beyond the first organizational ones, so I do not recall their demands for Black Studies. Given the fact that at the time I taught black history on the Upward Bound Summer programs, I would probably not have taken issue with that particular demand. Given the fact that I have devoted my professorial career to teaching black history I certainly endorse it today. The Black Cultural Center and its segregating potential would have been a different matter in 1969.[5]

[5] The first documented demand for a Black Cultural Center came in July 1969, after Diane Batts Morrow graduated.