

March On Milwaukee: More than One Struggle, Oral History Interview
Interview conducted by Matt Blessing, Marquette University Archivist
Conducted in the Raynor Memorial Libraries, January 22, 2008
Dr. Howard Fuller

Blessing: Today is January 22nd, 2008. My name is Matt Blessing and this is an interview with Dr. Howard Fuller, [of] Marquette University's Institute for the Transformation of Learning. (pause)

This is an oral history interview that is intentionally only going to address Dr. Fuller's early years, through the completion of his undergraduate degree at Carroll College. Other interviewers with much better depth than me have documented his many accomplishments in K-12 education, in higher education, in the Black liberation movement (at the national and international level), and in community activism in Cleveland, and Durham, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Dr. Fuller has resided in southeastern Wisconsin from 1948 to 1962 (from the age of 7 to 21), and again from 1976 to the present.

For the historical record I should add that this interview is being conducted for educational purposes for a Marquette undergraduate history course that is currently investigating the history of the civil rights movement in Milwaukee in the early-to-mid 1960s. The class is also studying oral history techniques and methodology.

Blessing: Dr. Fuller, thank you for joining me this morning.

Fuller: Oh it's my pleasure; good to be here.

Blessing: We'll jump right in. You and your mother moved to Milwaukee from Louisiana in 1948. This is going to be an oral history interview about the African-American community in Milwaukee in mid century

Fuller: OK

Blessing: It was 60 years ago and I realize you were only seven. Do you know why your mother selected Milwaukee over other Midwestern cities?

Fuller: I think my mother's cousin was here and she wasn't doing well. And I think what happened, the way I understand it, my grandmother asked my mother to come up to Milwaukee to take care of her, and I think that is how it all started.

Blessing: Do you have— as a 7, 8,9 year-old—any memories that are very distinctive, your first impressions? It must have been quite a contrast [between] Shreveport and Milwaukee?

Fuller: Yeah, the first snowstorm.

Blessing: Were you here for the famous 1948 snowstorm?

Fuller: Yeah I was here for the big snow storm, I recall, there have been so many since then. Actually I don't recall a lot. We lived over on 11th street between Reservoir and Vine when we first got here. I remember there was a big sanctified church right on the corner. I went to St. Boniface because when I was in Louisiana my grandmother had put me in a Catholic pre-school. So when I came up here, my mother wanted to continue that, so she put me at St. Boniface. I don't remember a lot about it. I remember the house that we lived in because we actually lived on 11th Street between Reservoir and Vine, and then we moved to Hillside projects, but then we moved back to 11th Street.

Blessing: The Hillside project neighborhood was where exactly?

Fuller: I lived on 6th and Cherry, so they've torn the building down now, where I lived, but right where they've got a gym there now, that was right where I lived. There was an old project and a new project. The old project really was on the north side of Cherry Street, the north side of where the gym is now. And the left side, the south side, was what we called the new project.

Blessing: Can you describe that neighborhood in the early 50's? Was it a neighborhood in transition, [or] was it predominantly African-American?

Fuller: It was just about all African-American. I remember one Latino family that lived across the street, that didn't actually lived in the project. From what I can remember it was if not all Black, pretty much all African-American.

Blessing: My father was a high school teacher in Racine in the late 40s in a predominantly African-American public high school. I remember him telling me that many of his students all seemed to come from the same community in the Mississippi Delta, and there was a real network of people; they knew someone in Racine and others from that [Delta] community. I have forgotten the specific name of the community. Was there anything similar in the Hillside neighborhood where there were patterns that you can remember?

Fuller: No, not that I can recall. I don't know whether or not that was true. For example, I don't think there was anyone in Hillside that was from Louisiana, that I know. So if there were other families or people had those relationships I really was not aware of them.

Blessing: Did other members of your family ever move north? You said your mother had followed one family member who needed some help.

Fuller: Well, when my grandmother got older and couldn't care for herself she moved up here to live with my mother. But I was an adult when that that actually happened. I'm the only child, so I didn't have brothers and sisters, but most of my cousins actually moved to California and I also have some cousins in Minnesota. But most of them actually moved to California, the ones who didn't remain in Louisiana.

Blessing: Can you characterize the employment opportunities in the Hillside neighborhood? Who were the main employers there?

Fuller: Well, interestingly enough, at that time my mother wasn't supposed to be working. So I remember whenever Mr. Beckett, The Housing Authority would come by [and] I'd always have to give some excuse about where my mother was. I'm positive he knew that my mother was working because he knew something about the income and my stepfather worked for Armour, which used to be down in the [Menomonee] Valley. My mother, I'll never forget, she worked for it was called KEX. What it was, is back in those days, back in the day, instead of paper towels that you see now in service stations they used to have actual towels, and KEX was the people who provided the towels. My mother worked along with a number of other Black women at KEX. The plant was right at the top of the hill on 6th Street. It was before you got to what was then Walnut. I remember going up there--and I believe my mother suffers from this today-- I remember going up there and these towels would come back from the service station and then they would wash them and then send them through this big drier and then they would put them down in to these vats. And my mother and these other women stood there all day folding these towels. And they would be covered from head-to-toe with lint. I do believe that of the breathing problems my mother has today is because of the lint that got into their lungs. (I mean) I don't know that, but I can't imagine that that didn't happen. So they used to sit there and fold these towels and then they would bundle them up again and send them out to the various service stations.

Blessing: So there was an income level obviously for that project. When you said your mother wasn't supposed to work— it was because your stepfather was working?

Fuller: And we were probably over whatever the income level was for the housing project.

Blessing: A fairly common [practice] at all income levels. MPS [Milwaukee Public Schools] – I think in the 1930 and 1940s, had a policy that if the husband was working in MPS the wife was not allowed to also have employment during the Great Depression.

Fuller: So it was...so I remember that. Then later my mother left that job and went to work at the County. That's where she actually retired from. My mother also was a hairdresser, and so I know she used to do women's hair at our house.

Blessing: In the house?

Fuller: So it was another way of getting income.

Blessing: It must have been a learning experience for you, as a young person, just hearing the conversations that naturally occur in a hair salon.

Fuller: (laughter) Yeah, but you weren't allowed to You had to go to the side. Although I don't remember a lot about it other than that I know she did hair. I don't know like how many customers she had or anything like that. I just remember her doing it.

Blessing: Of course the African-American population in Milwaukee in the late '40s through the 1950s was growing rapidly. This is an oral history interview but we have a small map over here to your left that's depicting census tracts and the expansion of the African-American community between 1940 and 1960. Were you, as a young teen, aware of the rapid influx of African-Americans in the schools?

Fuller: Not really. I recall, obviously, when (pause) I remember the first Black family that lived on Capitol Drive and so I remember when Black people seemed to be moving north. I don't recall a lot of movement either east or south. To a certain extent, I guess, there was movement west, but I was just aware of north. Almost like... say 27th Street or 35th Street as like the boundary on the west, and actually Palmer even though so some people like Terry Pitts and others who lived a little bit on, I think, the east side of Palmer. But Palmer was sort of like the east side barrier.

Blessing: As far as moving north, as far as Capitol Drive, [in] 1956, 1958? When are we talking?

Fuller: Probably by the time I was in high school. What was interesting is that they had built a housing project, that I thought was like 100 miles away, but it was actually out there by Custer. So it was a long trek to get out there to that housing project because there were Black people living out in that housing project.

Blessing: I read in some source, I think it was Jack Dougherty's oral history with you; conducted 12 years ago now. Your mother sounded like a disciplinarian, a parent of her generation.

Fuller: Yeah, I think that's true.

Blessing: Were there unwritten or written rules in your household as to where a high school age African-American could travel in this city? Were you allowed to go the south side?

Fuller: Oh yeah. Because by that time I was playing basketball and we used go over to the south side to play. Not often, because really most of the time if you had game, let us say, back then you played up in Franklin Square. And even after awhile, white ball players like Ron Glazer, you know guys who could *play* [emphasis] would come up to Franklin Square. But when I was a freshman and a sophomore the strong team in the city was South [Division High School], and Bob Jasna and all those guys, and so I remember about that time we were either juniors or seniors we used to play the others in the summer. I remember going over to play them a couple of times. But I never really went over on the south side that much. Because back then we didn't have fieldhouses in the the city. Like we'd play all of our games, our home games we played at Rufus King. But we would have to play at Pulaski. And I remember getting on the streetcar to go from my house over to Oklahoma Avenue and it seemed to me a long trip to play at Pulaski. Because Pulaski was one of maybe three or four schools in the city that had gyms that you could play at, like Lincoln, King, Pulaski.

Blessing: [Others were] Little cigar box gyms -

Fuller: Yeah, and Pulaski, I really thought it was such a big place. Then I remember being invited to speak there while I was superintendent and I'm like, "Man, this is really small." But when I was playing it seemed like a huge place.

Blessing: Where did you pick up your basketball skills? Did you play CYO? Did you play in the Catholic [league] at St. Boniface?

Fuller: No, no, actually I started playing basketball when I was in about the 8th grade because I used to play baseball. I used to play everything. I really started concentrating on basketball when I got into 8th grade. I went to Lincoln for the 8th grade and then transferred to North [Division High School] when we moved from the project back over on 11th Street. Because we were on the west side of 11th Street we were in the North Division district. If I had been on the east side I would have been in Lincoln's district. Actually I learned how to play at Lapham Park, on the playground.

Blessing: ...pick up games?

Fuller: Well, at the social center. Because they had social centers back then. I played Junior Optimists; that was one of the leagues and actually I still have a photograph in my office of our Junior Optimist team that won the city championship. We represented Lapham Park. I really learned how to play on the playgrounds and in the social centers.

Blessing: The Milwaukee Police Department in an African-American neighborhood? The Police Department was overwhelming white in the 1950s—.

Fuller: You know it's interesting I don't know a lot about that. You are probably right. I have no real memory of the police department.

Blessing: Did you and your mother return to Louisiana to visit friends and family on a regular basis?

Fuller: I used to go back almost every year until I was about 15 to visit my grandmother and I think by the time I became a sophomore I didn't want to go back because I wanted to stay and play basketball during the summer.

Blessing: Right, teenager, sports, were important to you—

Fuller: Basketball was everything to me. So I think by the time I was a sophomore I quit going, because I used to go and stay the entire summer with my grandmother.

Blessing: Were there a different set of rules, when you were getting ready to go to visit your grandmother, that you would be reminded of that things are different in the South? Was there that type of thing?

Fuller: No, no, I don't remember a lot of discussion about that. I mean my grandmother told me what I could do and not do. Then I was down there with my cousins; you're young and there's a lot of stuff going on, you know, that you're just not really that aware of.

Blessing: You mentioned that your grandmother had enrolled you in a Catholic elementary preschool and basically that led to your being enrolled at St. Boniface. Pre-Vatican II Catholic education, are there aspects of your Catholic education that stick with you today? That influenced you?

Fuller: I don't know if it was the Catholic part, as much as it was the foundation, the knowledge, that I was a part of the Catholic part. It was less the *faith part*, and more the *academic foundation* part of it that obviously I benefitted from. So because I went to a Catholic school until 8th grade, and I think when

I got into 8th grade, as far as I knew, I was prepared. And then when I went into high school, the only issue I had was really conduct. I mean I was enrolled in the college core, where you took algebra and geometry, and physics, all of that stuff. Obviously, somewhere along the way, I was, I'd been prepared and so I attribute that to the teaching and learning that happened at St. Boniface.

Blessing: Any specific teachers that stand out as particularly influential, that you stayed in contact with as you went to North Division and gained a scholarship?

Fuller: Not from St. Boniface, I really only remember the nuns. Just nuns. [laughter]. Although over the years I have run into a couple and have talked. Clearly by the time I was at North, probably the most central figure in all of our lives, those of us who played basketball, was Nick Anderson, who is still alive, and Mr. Withers, who's the only Black male teacher that we had and there were a couple other instructors.

Blessing: What was Mr. Withers's background?

Fuller: Mr. Withers is very interesting. He had been, I think, and All-American football player at the University of Wisconsin and he ultimately became the football coach. When we were there I think he was like the assistant football coach or something, and the gym teacher, and he was the only Black male teacher in the school, and I think there was one Black female teacher.

Blessing: And by this time North Division was, what would you estimate, 60% African-American?

Fuller: I think it went from like, it was probably like about 55% Black when I got there, or less, and the turnover at North happened during the period when I was there, from '55 to '58. You know if you look at *The Tattler* [high school year book], you can see the change that was occurring.

Blessing: You are obviously a student of civil rights history in the City of Milwaukee and beyond. Do you know any— is there any story to be told in terms of sort of MPS policy, where neighborhoods are being redlined and North Division was going to be the African-American school, or is it just the nature of the expansion of the African-American community?

Fuller: I think that during that time it was both the expansion of the African-American community, and white people moving out of certain areas of the city. You know when I was in high school I was playing basketball. I mean whoever came to the school, you know I didn't understand what you're trying to understand. I was just trying to get an education and play basketball.

Blessing: You were in eighth grade when the [U.S.] Supreme Court passed *Brown vs. The Board of Education*. You were a high school sophomore when Mrs. Parks rode—started the Montgomery Bus Boycott. You're an intellectual, you're a student athlete, you're a student leader. Can you give us a sense as to among African-American high school students in Milwaukee, those very early years of the Southern Civil Rights Movement? How tuned-in were you?

Fuller: None. I can tell you man. I've always tried to think about that, in terms of what do I recall. I have to very honestly say I recall nothing, and because you get to understand, and I mean that I

understood a lot, the world that I was in at that time, was a world of— we were trying to win the state championship. We played on the first team from the City of Milwaukee ever to go to the state tournament. I was having fun. I was going to dances at the Y on Friday nights. We were playing basketball on all the playgrounds. We went to these (pause) you know you could have house parties back then, because nobody was shooting nobody. It's the stuff you would do in high school, and the only intellectual endeavors that I can remember are what I had to learn in order to get a good grade in school. But as far as the reality of current events, either in Milwaukee or in the South, I knew nothing about it. I mean for example, I knew nothing about the Daniel Bell case, and that happened in '58 when I was a senior. I was learning much more about it later.

Blessing: Emmet Till?

Fuller: I remember Emmet Till because, you know, the way that it was publicized, and the open casket and all that. I remember it, but I don't remember how it impacted me, or if it impacted me at all, other than I remember it. I definitely remember Emmet Till.

Blessing: You've always been a voracious reader—or have you, did that come later?

Fuller: I think it started in college, and certainly when I went to graduate school and then as I got more involved in the movement. Then it became clear that I needed to learn more. So then I really just became the type of reader that I am today.

Blessing: I noticed in the Jack Dougherty oral history transcript that Wesley Scott from the Urban League was cited as one of your mentors. Can you give us more background on that relationship, when it started, or his influence?

Fuller: Yeah it started when I was either a freshman or sophomore in high school. Mr. Scott came to the Urban League, and I think he— I'm not clear if by the time I was a freshman or sophomore he was the head of the Urban League, or Mr. Kelly—but Mr. Scott. I was the president of a thing called Tomorrow's Scientists and Technicians, and that was a club of young people created by the Urban League, to get us to go to college and all of that. And you know for some reason I was identified as, you know, a young person who was going to, you know— [to] do something with his life. And so people like Mr. Scott, Dr. Atkinson, and George Nash— all of these people— Mr. and Mrs. Starms, a whole lot of these people, in one way or another, sort of assisted me. And Mr. Scott, was one of those individuals and we remained; well our relationship sort of grew. Whenever I was going to deal with any kind of serious issue I would always talk to him, from the time I was going to make the decision about where to go to college I went into the Urban League and talked with him about that, and then over the years I would always sit down and talk with him. And when I was superintendent [of Milwaukee Public Schools], when I was getting ahead, people like him and Mrs. Starm, they would always sit down with me and kind of talk me through stuff I was engaged in. It was an extremely important relationship in my life.

Blessing: Now the others that you mentioned—Nash and others. Were they small business leaders, were they religious leaders?

Fuller: Dr. Atkinson was a physician and he used to give me jobs around his house. He gave me free medical care. Mr. Starms was I think the head of the Y and Lincoln Gaines, they were all connected to the Y. Mr. Scott was the head of the Urban League. George Nash actually, I met him because he used to be a director on the playground, so he probably worked, he worked for MPS in some way.

Blessing: Were they all African-American?

Fuller: All African-American.

Blessing: Any white teachers or coaches?

Fuller: Yeah, Vic Anderson, our basketball coach. So there's you know Vic Anderson, Mr. Jaffreys, Pete Kennis, they were all white, but they were all coaches and that was how that relationship developed.

Blessing: You graduated from North Division in 1958. You have already spoken [as] to your focus being having fun and your focus on basketball. By the time you're a high school senior, do you remember a presence of the NAACP or the Congress for Racial Equality?

Fuller: No.

Blessing: Any other civil rights organizations in the City of Milwaukee that seemed—

Fuller: No.

Blessing: Do you mind if I ask you, did you attend church regularly, in terms of a minister, was there any semblance of civil rights activism coming from the church that you were connected with?

Fuller: I wasn't connected with a church because I had gone to a Catholic church in, so like Father Matthews, for example, was one, from a faith-based, because I was connected with Catholic Church. So I never had any real connections with the Black ministers.

Blessing: 1954 you started high school at North Division High School. As a former superintendent of MPS, how would you gauge the quality of instruction that you received at North Division?

Fuller: From what I know, you know and again it's great, like when I got to Carroll [College], I felt like I was prepared. I never thought I couldn't do college work. And what was interesting [is that] when I went to Carroll, I took an academic-athletic scholarship, because I had torn ligaments in my ankle my senior year, and I was worried, because I had been recruited by I think New Mexico, and Indiana, and then Hickey saw me play during the summer.

Blessing: That's Ed Hickey here at Marquette?

Fuller: And he started talking about Marquette. And what's really interesting about that, is one my closest friends on the team who passed, Dewitt Moore was recruited and played at Marquette, and the interesting thing about Dewitt Moore is that he's Wesley Matthew's grandfather, so I should have come to Marquette. So I ended up taking an academic athletic scholarship and I had to get a higher grade

point each year in order to keep my scholarship, but what it meant was that if I got hurt, I wasn't going to lose my scholarship.

Blessing: I see, so that's the driving force in the decision to go to Carroll, which I don't think a lot of people remember, they had a very good basketball program.

Fuller: Yeah you know, actually the reason why I went to Carroll, was David Heinbuch was there, and he was the one white player on North's team, and David and I were friends but the... **[Tape ended, Sound cuts.]**

Blessing: Shirley Hilger?

Fuller: Shirley Hilger, she was the recruiter and it was more her than the coach or anybody, and I remember when I went out to visit Carroll. You know, they assigned a doctor to me as sort of like a sponsor, and they gave me a car for the weekend to come back home. I was pretty, I was, 'ah man, I got a car, and stuff'— so you know all of those things sort of combined, and the discussion with Mr. Scott was I was going to integrate Carroll. And I think I'm the first Black male to graduate from Carroll. I know that there was a woman who graduated from Carroll before me. I don't think any other Black males graduated before me. So I decided to go to Carroll.

Blessing: I just want to back up one more time to basketball. Ken Burns taught us that sports can provide insight into American society with his baseball documentary. You were All-Conference, All-State in basketball, and the first African-American team to make it to the state finals in Madison. You played Madison East. Madison was very white [community] – liberal white in the late Fifties. Anything stand out in terms of that trip to Madison in March of 1958, or was it all focused on the game?

Fuller: Well, first of all, we were the first team from the City of Milwaukee to ever go to the state tournament. Now in part that was because they didn't allow Milwaukee into the state tournament, I think until the 1950s. I don't know why that is, I never studied it, but the teams like South[Division] and all those teams would always get beat in the sectionals. My junior year we had placed like fifth, and [Rufus] King had won the City Championship, and we beat King in what they used to call the sub-regionals. We had to go play Shorewood, at Shorewood, in the regional finals, and of course we weren't supposed to beat Shorewood—but then we beat them. And then we went to Whitefish Bay for the sectionals, and that first night we played Racine County Aggies, and we beat them. The next night we were supposed to get our comeuppance, because we were going to play Waukesha, and Waukesha had either won the suburban championship, or had been co-champs with Shorewood. And Duckett, Coach Duckett from Waukesha, had already made his reservations to go to Madison, because Milwaukee was—Black— and we beat them by forty, and so we were the first team to make it through and get there. And then they only had one [school division] they didn't have the different division, so we lost in the first game to Madison West. Then we won the, because they had the consolation championship, and we won the consolation championship. That was my junior year. My senior year when we went back up there, we won 28. We were undefeated. We beat Shawano in the semifinals, and Shawano had been rated number one in the state. Then we played Pat Richter and Madison East. You know, I just

remember *playing*. I'm sure there was a lot of stuff around it, you know for us it was going to Madison and playing for the state championship. We were just high school basketball players.

Blessing: But before basketball practice, you were senior class president.

Fuller: I think actually I was president of the student senate. I think that Kenny Tatum might have been the senior class president. I was in a whole bunch of clubs, and I shared, you know, the president of this, and the leader of that, always various leadership roles.

Blessing: Any school issues that you remember addressing?

Fuller: I don't know, you know, you were the president of student council. What do talk about when you're in high school...whether or not the library books are out—I'm sure it wasn't anything too earth shaking.

Blessing: Well, should we jump ahead to your Carroll [College] years?

Fuller: Sure.

Blessing: What were the biggest challenges?

Fuller: Being the only Black student in the school the first two or three years. You know, it was like how can I put this, kind of weird in terms of how people you know viewed me. I mean some people, I became very close with. I made life long friends. I got into a fraternity, the "jock fraternity," because Heinbuch was in there, Theta Theta Phi, and you know I was named, what was I, chairman of the school spirit month freshman year. I ultimately became the president of the student council. I've actually been the president of student council at every school I've attended. But it was a bittersweet experience. It's not something I would want any of my children to experience. I was seventeen years old and coming from North [Division], and then being out there in Waukesha, essentially by myself. It was, I mean, it was a sweet experience, in the sense that I think I got a lot out of my education at Carroll. But the social experience was not something that I would do again. If I could separate them (pause) if I had to do it all over again, I probably would not have gone to Carroll College, even though I believe I got a great deal out of it.

Blessing: You win the state basketball tournament for North Division, you have some bittersweet experiences at Carroll College. Did it at all influence, did that experience influence you in terms of the importance of North Division, and keeping (the high school) together when you went back to community activism in 1979 and 198?" Was it that experience from 10 years earlier?

Fuller: Yeah, first off, unfortunately we came in second. We lost to Madison East in a game I'll never forget: 62 to 59. Anyway, Pat Richter and I have encountered each other over the years and talked about that. You know, the thing about Carroll, was that it made me understand how important it was to be with Black people. Let me try to explain. I always felt I was in between two worlds when I was out at Carroll, because I remember people saying they didn't understand me, didn't understand why I didn't have a mustache. You know different things about....a cultural experience I brought coming out of

Milwaukee and coming out of North. So I remember trying to figure out how to live there and make it. But then when I would come back home, it was like I'm back home, but I'm not really home in my home now because I'm dealing with that out there, but I'm not really totally there, so I always felt like I was in between two worlds. So when I got ready to go to graduate school, I said I have to go to a place where either there are a lot of Black people in the city or there's a lot of Black people in the school. Because I felt like I was losing my sense of identity, as a Black person. And that was really important to me. I can't think why, it just was, and I felt deeply about it. Because I felt like I'd given up a part of myself to get through Carroll College, and I had to reclaim that part of myself.

Now, the whole feeling about North, actually came just because I had such a phenomenal experience at North Division. Because I made life-long friends, because of the way that we grew up, the basketball teams were all of the relationships. And I wanted the young people to be able to experience what we had experienced. Because I do believe that the foundation that I got at North was critical. Both the academic foundation but the personal relationships and the Blue Devil's spirit was really very important to me and to a lot of other people my age who lived through that experience.

Blessing: You're at Carroll from the fall of 1958 until 1962, and most historians would agree the Sixties had not started.

Fuller: Correct. Right.

Blessing: You started reading any history, political theory, or was that more graduate school?

Fuller: No, it really—my whole involvement as an activist really didn't happen until I went to Case Western. We got involved with the Congress of Racial Equality. Cleveland was the first time I was arrested for sitting in, demonstrating at a school board. It was that experience in Cleveland, with CORE—the Congress of Racial Equality—that set the stage actually for activism. Now one of the things, at Carroll I was trying to make the decision as to whether or not I was going to go into teaching or social work. I decided social work. But somewhere along the line I also began to say to myself that at that point you had "case work" and "group work" as the primary, quote disciplines in Social Work. I went to Western Reserve University because they had a new discipline called Community Organization. I, for some reason, I concluded that case work and group work was helping people manage oppression. I wanted to get involved with helping people eliminate and be empowered -- and I don't where this came from -- so to me, this idea of Community Organization, which was a new field of social work at that time, was what I wanted to learn.

Blessing: Western Reserve has a reputation as actually being for creating activists. Are you the first generation? Was it that new?

Fuller: It was pretty new.

Blessing: Or when you were making the decision which graduate schools to apply to, you mentioned you wanted to go to a city with a significant African-American population or a student body, did that influence your decision.

Fuller: Yes, what influenced me was I heard about this thing called Community Organization and they had a thing called a Hough Project which was aI really don't remember exactly what it was it was-- probably a forerunner to what ultimately became the Community Action programs. So I was really intrigued by this and I got the first Whitney Young Scholarship in the Urban League to go to graduate school.

Blessing: Was that the National Urban League?

Fuller: Yes, National. So I ended up at Western Reserve.

Blessing: By '61, '62 what's your level of involvement in the Urban League?

Fuller: I really didn't have much involvement in the Urban League, a little bit with the Cleveland Urban League when I was in graduate school, but not a lot. I was really involved....you know '60-'61 I was still at Carroll, so I was still connected to Mr. Scott. In fact, I remember getting Mr. Scott to come out to speak to a convocation in Carroll. So I was still connected to him, but not with the Urban League per se. And then when I went to Cleveland in '62 the organization that I got to connected with actually probably in '63 or '64 was CORE.

Blessing: And in Cleveland is it a rapid transformation that you're experiencing like a lot of graduate students? You mentioned one civil rights protest where you were arrested. Can you describe others, or what you were reading, or encounters that you had?

Fuller: Yeah, well that was the victory because I was beginning to be much more aware of quote "integration" as an issue. Also becoming more aware of social welfare issues, in terms of both what I was studying, papers that I was doing. I remember having to do a paper, because you didn't have to do a master's thesis, but you had to do a project. I remember my project was about—something to do with welfare— and I ended up having to go out and knock on doors and interview people and all of that. But the thing that moved me into the activist thing was they were trying to build a school, interesting with my history, but they were trying to build a school in Glenville and people were protesting because it was going to be all Black and they wanted the school to be built somewhere where it would be integrated. So the protest was against them building the school. So we sat in all night at city hall, I'm sorry, the school board and the cops came in and I forgot which floor we were on, and they threw us down flights of steps, and they beat us as they were rolling us down the steps and put us in jail and we had been demonstrating over at the site where they were trying to build the school. After we got out of jail, we went over to this site. We had been laying down in front of tractors and they had been ...you know they usually started up the tractors and they dumped dirt on us. So we were laying down in front of this tractor and there was a Presbyterian minister named Bruce Klunder. I think I was in the front and he was in the back. I don't recall, but anyway a tractor started up and we thought that they'd do what they normally did which was to throw dirt on us. Except this time they guy either moved forward or backwards, but he crushed Bruce Klunder? Obviously that left a huge impression on me, but what happened really effected my thinking about now I was There was a lot of Black people just standing around and when they learned he had been killed they started throwing bricks and bottles and we were out there talking about nonviolence. I'm out of here. Because I was so enraged. Then that was about

the time I began to listen to Malcolm X because when I first...The first time I saw Malcolm X I was like, I got scared. I mean like "Ah man, what is he saying." But then I began to really listen to him. There was debate between Louis Lomax and Malcolm X and they had one in the afternoon where it was mostly white people and Black people who had jobs that could come in the afternoon. The people there were like fully in support of Louis Lomax. Then that night they had a debate at -----Methodist Church where I also saw King speak. This was working class and that church was packed. These people were clearly with Malcolm. That was a huge turning point for me, in terms of beginning to understand the class aspect and the differences that existed between Black people with money and Black people who didn't have money. Then, as an organizer organizer where was my allegiance going to be? What was going to be the purpose of my work?

Blessing: You were coming back to Milwaukee to visit family in graduate school. And you're moving more to the Malcolm X camp during those years. You had a life time relationship with Mr. Scott. How did the established civil rights leaders in Milwaukee react to a radicalized Howard Fuller?

Fuller: I don't think people had to deal with me in a radical sense until later and after I'd gone down into North Carolina and built a reputation as an organizer, then my work with African Liberation Movement and all that. But the one time I do remember I came back I spoke for a meeting of music and that was the Barbee and I was in the integration wing then because I'd been engaged in this stuff in Cleveland. I remember being asked to speak at some kind of rally for MUSIC [Milwaukee United School Integration Movement]. So that really the only time, during graduate school, when I came back that I interacted in any way with the community. It was later, after I'd been in North Carolina, when I came back and the quote "militancy" issue was more paramount at that point.

Blessing: Dr. Fuller, I realize you probably look back on those years as maybe boring years in terms of your political involvement. You were a young man concerned about getting a good education and good grades for the basketball team, and winning on your basketball team but I do think your observations and your reflections on political maturation--I really appreciate you sharing your past with us this morning. Thank you.

Fuller: You know the one thing I want to add, though, I think somewhere along the way playing on the playground. I always remember there were guys on the playground I thought were better than me. But for some reason, they never got the opportunity, or never took the opportunity that I had to go to college. The fact that Mr. Scott, George Nash, Mr. and Mrs. Starms, Mr. Gaines, Dr. Atkinson, all these people helped me those two things, I think, combined to tell me that I needed to come back and give something back to this community. So that's actually why I went into social work, because I felt like I should come back to Milwaukee and I should try to help in the ways that I was helped. So those lessons, I think, stuck with me.

Blessing: Nice parting words. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Fuller: Oh sure.