

Oral History Interviews of the More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, 2007-2008
Oral History Interview with Cecil Brown Jr. and Loretta, August 9, 1995, part I

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Brown, Cecil, Jr., and Loretta, interview with Jack Dougherty, August 9, 1995 (at the Finney Public Library, 4243 W. North Avenue, Milwaukee).

JD: [discussion of consent form] ...Most of my questions are mostly about what people were thinking at the time, and certainly I'm glad that I can talk with both of you, since you've been around for most of this. I'm interested in what was happening from the late 50s through the 80s. When I stumbled into this report [Near Northside Non-Partisan Conference], and read the minutes and CORE's report, and the State NAACP report, one thing that I was trying to figure out was, what were the seven or eight people who made up this report, what were they thinking as they were talking with the Story Committee? Let me ask it this way: the report is divided into at least two parts here, because Story wanted it that way. Story didn't want anyone to talk about de facto segregation or sociological issues until later.

CB: We got into it anyhow, when they started asking the questions...

JD: When the people were making up this report here, were they thinking about school integration as the primary focus, or were they also thinking about improving the resources at North Division and other schools?

CB: I'm not sure that you could say that they were thinking necessarily about... school integration. But their concern primarily was with school segregation, and that's why we got into, we researched the census tracks, we dealt with the open, so-called "open" transfer policy, and the Willis wagons that were used to keep one school segregated. It wasn't so much to keep the school segregated, but the school board policy was to limit the number of African-Americans that went to surrounding schools, so that they had one employee whose full-time job was to redraw the attendance [boundaries...]

JD: Mr. Kastner, I think his name was, right?

CB: Yes, Mr. Kastner, and one of the ironies was that his daughter was a member of CORE. That and the building of school additions, there were about twenty schools where they built permanent additions, and before they built the permanent additions, or right after they built the permanent additions, reality smacked them in the face. See there were two things that were happening that the school board could not control, despite all of their shenanigans and redrawing of attendance area maps. That was live births over deaths. That's why we went to this... There were approximately 2,000 to 3,000 live births over deaths from 1952 right up until the time

we're talking about [1963]. And this, their attempts to deal with this were like, if you have a leak in the roof, patch here, a patch there, which never really does it. If you start having bad leaks, you've got to replace the roofing, because it's either due to the roofing material decomposing, or the lumber underneath rotting away. So, first thing was the busing. Now I found out about that, 5:00 because at the time I was doing accounting and tax returns, and one of my clients, who was an old friend, a schoolteacher at Robert LaFollette School, and while I was doing some of the calculating, she started saying how upset she was because her class and herself were being bused four times a day. This was in 1960.

JD: Exactly. I've heard you talk about this in the videotape of the conference at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society/Museum. Do you mind if I ask who that was you were talking with?

CB: That was Mrs. Alvin Thompson, and she indicated that she wasn't the only one. There was four classes being bused out of LaFollette, and four times a day, they'd bus them to the receiving school, and then when it came time for recess they were bused back to the sending school, and then after lunch they were bused back to the receiving school, and of course at the end of the day. The teachers started to complain. Well, the union wasn't very enthusiastic about doing anything about that, at that time, but it got so bad, by that I mean they were busing over, somewhere between 2 and 3,000 children every day, four times a day. So they were fearful that the African-American teachers would go to the press, which they should have done, but they didn't. They put pressure on the school board and the administration, so that they cut out two things: they cut out busing the teachers, and they cut out busing the children four times a day, and reduced it to two times a day. But when they, but in turn, they didn't integrate the recess or the lunch period. These children had a separate recess and a separate lunch period, so that there was no integration other than the fact that there were these bodies in the same school building. And even prior to that, I found out something that because of my, my interests were not directed immediately towards education, this was back in '52, when there was a....

JD:: You were in the Assembly then?

CB: This was before I was in the Assembly. When I was in the Assembly, I did not know the severity of the problem, so I didn't deal very much with education. I dealt with what I thought were the pressing issues. But there were all of these little clues going on, which, you know, because I hadn't done my homework, frankly, I wasn't aware of the severity of the problem.

JD: What's one of the clues that struck you?

CB: In '52, this club that I belonged to was a social civic organization called the Gentleman's Club. And we put on, we used to do things during Brotherhood Week regarding brothers. So we had this workshop on brotherhood at the Lapham Park Social Center, and we invited different people to come in and talk about different aspects of, you know, how to develop brotherhood.

And one of our members, Richard Goens, who is now deceased, but his wife, and the sister of another member, Geraldine Gilmer, was a teacher in the public school system.

JD: Richard Goens?

CB: Yeah.

JD: And Geraldine...

10:00 CB: Gilmer. Later became Mrs. Goens. She indicated at a planning session that maybe we should look at something that was going on. Well you see, in '52, this was just when that first year of live births over deaths had approached 2,000. And she said that the school board, as part of its contract with the teachers' union, had a clause in it that said that no teacher had to be, could be assigned to a school more than three schools from her or his residence. But all of the African-American teachers were assigned to four schools.

JD: Uh, 4th? 9th?

CB: 4th Street, 9th Street, Lloyd, and Garfield. Now it's kind of interesting that 9th Street is no longer in existence, and the other three have become city-wide specialty schools. But at that time, that was it. And there were no African-Americans teaching upper-elementary or secondary. And those teachers, African-American teachers who had secondary education certification were placed in what they called Special C classes, and the Special C classes were kind of like the dumping grounds where children that the system couldn't figure out a way to handle, and I can recall, anyhow, at that workshop, in '62, an assistant superintendent was there, and so we had primed two of the wives of our members who were teachers to raise that question, and the press was there, so during the give-and-take, one of the teachers got up and asked why was it that all of the African-American teachers were assigned to four schools, and wasn't it true that there was a rule that no teacher could be required to go more than three schools from her residence for an assignment? Now most of these African-American teachers were living north of Capitol Drive already by then. Well, the superintendent hemmed and hawed, and he was a smoothie, you know, because at that time, they believed in not meeting the accusations head-on, but to smooth your way around it, and "Well, we'll have to get back to you." Now that should have awakened me, but it didn't.

JD: You remember it though.

CB: Oh yes, I remember it clearly, but because there were other things that seemed to be more pressing, like unemployment, housing, equal access to public accommodations, because you see, in '52, we were not that far removed from being accepted in hotels, restaurants, resorts, those kinds of things, see, so we weren't ready for it. Alright, the second clue came when I was in the Assembly, but I still didn't get tuned into it completely.

JD: When were you in the Assembly? I should know that....

15:00

CB: '55 to '56. Some of my friends who were European-Americans had children who were going to North Division. It was the Webb family, Lloyd Webb and Marguerite Webb, their children. And they told me, because they knew I was a North Division High School graduate, that something was going on, because European-American children who lived in the same block where they lived were not going to North Division. Remember, this was the time when there was attendance area rules. You went to the grade school where you lived, you went to the junior high school where you lived, and you went to the high school where you lived. The only exception was if you got a transfer. And in order to transfer out, you had to have the approval of the principal of the school you attended in the attendance area, and the principal of the school where you wanted to transfer. It was a double-whammy. Now whites were able to do this. African-Americans, very very difficult. They might get one, but they couldn't get the other. So that was another clue, that was one that didn't register on me until, oh in '57, when I was out of the Legislature then, because I ran for the State Senate and lost. But this was a time of the Little Rock Nine, and I was a subscriber to *U.S. News and World Report*, and *U.S. News and World Report* did a series of stories, not only about Little Rock, but they also included one about North Division High School.

JD: Maxine Jeter from North Division remembers this particular story. She thought it was *Time* magazine, but I think you're right....

CB: *U.S. News and World Report*, and I was so incensed about that, that I wrote them a letter and told them that because of their biased coverage, I was cancelling my subscription.

JD: What did it say? I'll find it, but what did it...

CB: I don't remember exactly, but it gave a distorted viewpoint...

JD: It got you angry for some reason...

CB: ..the coverage was biased, it was written from the viewpoint of a southern person who happened to be of European descent, and that somehow these nine children had been put up to it. It was a phony issue, that there was no desire in the African-American community for the children, or on the part of the children themselves, to go to this school. The schools they were attending were perfectly alright, you know, and then they went on to point out how, they didn't use the word "rape," but the emasculation of North Division High School. Well bingo-bango, what was behind the emasculation of North Division High School? By that, they meant the sudden disappearance of the overwhelming majority of students who were of European-American descent.

JD: I want to ask about this. In a couple of other interviews or other things I've read, you've mentioned a couple of times about Principal Mahalak [?] is it?

CB: Mahalak.

JD: Definitely encouraging, counseling, white, er European-descent girls...

CB: He had a policy, because at that time North Division was still predominately European-American. His policy was to discourage social integration, so that, and that wasn't anything new at North, they did that when I was there....

JD: Back in the '40s. No dancing....

CB: Well, the proscription against noon-hour dancing, if you were dancing, and you happened to be an African-American, and you happened to be dancing with a European-American girl, or vice versa, but it was more likely European-American girls and African-American boys, a teacher would come up and tap you on the shoulder, and say, "No, no, you can't do that."

JD: Did you ever get tapped?

CB: Yeah, yeah.

JD: A teacher came up and tapped you.

CB: Sure, and I stopped going to the dances after that, because you know, at that age, I was 15, you're not really equipped to deal with it because nothing has happened at home to fortify you, to stand up and make a challenge, and you were in the mid, well, at that time, there were 1700, maybe 52 students at North, and only about maybe 52 of them were minority, so you, and there were no, I never had a minority teacher, never! In all the years that I went to school, even through Marquette, so we just weren't equipped for it. Well, that and the reason Mahalack, what Mahalack was doing, he not only had staff doing that, but when he got more than one report, he would call in the offenders, separately, not together, and if they were white, he would tell them that he was going to contact their parents and let their parents know what they were doing, and usually those kids, you know, [unintelligible], didn't know all of the ramifications, but they knew that if the school contacted their parents, they were going to have a problem.

20:00

JD: Was he mostly talking about white girls and Black boys?

CB: Mostly, but not always.

JD: Now you were obviously at North Division in the '40s, you weren't there as a student in the '50s. How did you know about this? How did you hear about what he was doing.

CB: My clients would tell me, because many of them knew that I went to the North Division.

JD: There was a deposition given by an African-American man, I believe his name might have been, I may have this wrong, Thomas Boyd?

CB: Yeah, he was a CORE member.

JD: And in the deposition, if I've got the story right, he is one of the African-American students who was called into the office, it wasn't for dancing but it was something about....

CB: ...dating or any kind of social intercourse, or just walking, see during the noon hour, the lunch hour, which was actually two periods, 4th and 5th, when you got through eating lunch, if you didn't have anything to do and the weather was inclement, you walked around the corridors of the first and second floor, or if the weather was good, you walked around the half-block or the

block where North Division was, and St. Boniface was on the southern half of that. And Boyd was one of the ones who we knew directly was involved, but there were others, they simply didn't have enough confidence in court at that time, you know...

JD: Let me ask you, just while we're here in the '50s...

CB: Well, let me conclude. What Mahalack, his real deviousness was, and, which made me so upset when I read *U.S. News and World Report*, I found out that what Mahalack was doing, he would also call students in, European-Americans, and tell them that he was going to be the principal of the new Custer High School, and that if they wanted to transfer, now would be a wonderful time, because they wouldn't have to deal with another principal. He'd approve that transfer as the sending principal, and he'd approve it as the receiving principal. And his conversations produced, I don't have any hard evidence, but in our estimation, it produced over 500 transfers out of North Division to Custer, reducing the European-American population at North Division from 1,000 to 500.

JD: Very quickly.

CB: Very quickly, within one year, because he knew that he was going to be the new principal at Custer before they even had the groundbreaking, and the school was built within a year after that.

JD: While we're on this, in the '50s, I'm trying to get a sense of what African-American Milwaukeeans thought when you opened up the newspaper and May of 1954, you read about the Brown decision, Thurgood Marshall, Topeka, Kansas and the other southern cases. Did you see it in the context of Milwaukee, or did you see it as a "Well, that's what's happening in the south"? How did you think about it? Or did you not have any discussions about it? Was it just a removed issue?

CB: I don't recall any group discussions although there may have been some.

JD: Or just chatting with friends and family.

CB: With friends and acquaintances, the general tone was that that was a good thing, and something should be done about what was happening in Milwaukee. I'm not aware of anybody, including myself, who was fully knowledgeable about what was happening in Milwaukee at the time of the decision.

JD: That's what I've heard from many people.

25:00

CB: You see, there was only one civil rights organization, and that was the NAACP. Well the NAACP in the '50s had a serious problem. Most of the members were very light-complected, especially in the leadership roles. There were not very many dark-complected African-Americans in the NAACP chapter. Now I had, in my days at Marquette, been wooed to become active in the NAACP, especially the Youth Council, by an acquaintance of mine, attorney Ted Coggs, who was president at the time. And I was impressed, and I decided to go to a couple of

meetings, and the tone and tenor of the conversations began to irritate me. It wasn't because I wasn't exposed to that. My mother was probably... 50% European-American, because her mother and her father were at least... 50%. And all of my relatives on my mother's side were very light-complected, on my father's side, because they came out of slavery later, were very dark-complected, so that subconsciously, that was always an issue with me, although I didn't talk about it, I didn't verbalize it, and I didn't really ask too many questions, but I know this, that when I look back on it now, that most of the young women that I was attracted to were very light-complected. And how I noted one time when I was in junior high school, that there was this very beautiful girl, who was very dark-complected, and that astounded me, because I had never seen anyone that was very dark-complected who was very, very pretty. So anyhow, the NAACP, I raised it at a meeting, "Where were the average African-Americans?" Well that immediately got me branded as a maverick, to say the least, and Ted said, "Why did you have to bring up that up at the meeting?" I said, "Because it is important, otherwise you're going to have an organization that speaks for so-called colored people and you don't have very many dark-complected colored people in your organization. Because all of the doctors and the lawyers and the preachers and the undertakers and that," I said, "they're all light-complected." I said, "You don't have any laborers, any mechanics, you don't have any factory workers, you don't have any barbers or beauticians, you know, run-of-the-mill average person." So anyhow, I went and made it was about three or four speeches to college chapters of the NAACP while I was still in their good graces.

JD: This would have been in the mid-to-late 50s? While you were still in the Assembly?

CB: No, it was before...

JD: So '55-ish we're talking about.

CB: It was before, because I remember I wrote an article for the *Marquette Journal*, which was a literary magazine, it was entitled "Tolerance is Not Enough." And Mrs. Halyard, who was then the treasurer of the NAACP, saw it and contacted my mother, and my mother conveyed to me, they wanted to know if I would give that talk to the [unintelligible], well I did and they liked it, and so they said, "Well, we can go to the UW in Madison and talk to the NAACP youth up there," and I did. And I went to a couple of meetings, but then of course, I unfortunately expressed some truths that they weren't willing to hear, so then I became a persona non-grata, so it wasn't really much that I knew or was involved in prior to the '60s, about school integration or desegregation.

JD: The way I've been approaching the issue isn't necessarily just focusing on school integration, but trying to think of, trying to look at what educational issues African-American groups were focusing on. As far as I can tell, I'm just trying to get your sense of awareness here, if you weren't directly involved...

30:00

CB: It was more from the standpoint of the teachers than it was of the pupils.

JD: Was it hiring and promoting Black educators?

CB: That's one.

JD: What else were the major issues at that time?

CB: Well, the atrocious practice of not hiring African-American teachers unless there was an overabundance of African-American students. And you see, at the same time, I remember...prior, yeah, it was prior to being in the Assembly, I was talking to two friends who had come here from Louisiana. Ralph Williams Sr., who is now deceased, and his wife, Ruth.

JD: Is this Ralph Williams, like Ralph and Evelyn Williams?

CB & LB: No that's the junior.

JD: Oh, good, that's the junior. Ralph Sr. taught at Fulton, right?

CB: Roosevelt, and then Fulton.

JD: Okay.

CB: He was certified for secondary education, so was his wife. His wife was teaching Special C, and he was teaching at Roosevelt, and they were so upset about the lack of opportunity to teach on the secondary level, that they were talking about moving. And I spent a whole day trying to convince them that it wouldn't always be that way, that there was going to be some changes. I didn't know exactly when, but there was going to be some changes, and if they left, who would we have? Because there weren't that, there was Andrew Douglas, a friend of theirs and mine, and some others who I had talked to off and on. We'd go to Roosevelt, because it was my alma mater, and I'd talk to the principal and some of the teachers over there, and I'd go talk to Ralph and Andy, and then when he got assigned to Fulton, it seemed like a breakthrough because, but we didn't know it at the time..

JD: This is, you're talking with, this big one-day talk, this is while you're in the Assembly?

CB: No, this is before. Because, see, we were in the second, no the third year of that 2,000 to 3,000 live births over deaths, and it was impacting on the school system. Nobody was really sitting on top of it or aware of it. The only way it got to my attention was that the European-American teachers were complaining about having discipline problems on the lower-elementary level. My god, when you're talking about having discipline problems with children who are 6, 7, and 8 years old, that should tell you something. That it isn't the children, it was the attitudes of the teachers. See, in order to be a good teacher, a successful teacher, you not only have to love the subject that you're teaching, but you've got to love the children that you're teaching. And what would happen is that these teachers were used to teaching European-American children. And when you had children come in, who sometimes came from poor homes, where they didn't have breakfast in the morning, or their habits of hygiene were not the same, and sometimes they suffered from lazy lips, and so their enunciation and pronunciation was not up to snuff, these

teachers began to resent them, especially when the European-American parents began to transfer their children out of those schools, and the teachers, European-American teachers began to resent these children because now they had classes where they had discipline problems, and the children would sass them and talk back to them, and wouldn't say, "Yes, Miss Jones" or "No, Miss Jones." The children, God bless 'em, would feel this hostility, and the more hostile the teacher became, the more hostile they became. You had all of these, and I would get these from teachers because a lot of the people that I associated with, not [unintelligible] necessarily, were teachers, or they were married to teachers. And we'd see, they'd say, "Well, why can't, you know, I go past six schools to get to 4th Street, and I can't get a transfer," and the union was no help, it still isn't. The union is a bunch of baloney. So all of those things began to, they were out there, they were festering, but they weren't being focused, and they weren't being sensitized, they were just happening, it's just like a pot boiling, but you don't know why it's boiling, and you don't know what's going to happen if it overflows.

JD: One person who, in the African-American community, who was aware and doing some pressuring of the school system about African-American teachers' issues, from what I could tell was Bill Kelley of the Urban League. There are some letters that I've come across to Lester Granger at the National and [Superintendent] Vincent. But, it sounds like, well, A, my first questions is, was this a really quiet advocacy? Did people know what Bill Kelley was doing, do you think?

CB: No, because he was, he was in a precarious position. Well, he was in a precarious position, because most of the funding for the Urban League from the European-American community. So absolutely, he could not be a firebrand, because he had a family, three girls and a boy. And so he jeopardize that, so it had to be quiet. I remember two years after I was out of the Legislature, I was helping a friend of mine, Mary Ellen Shadd, with the *Milwaukee Defender*, as an editor, and low-and-behold, we got an editorial and I read it, and I said, "That style of writing is familiar." I said, "Mary Ellen, who wrote this editorial." She said, "You've got to be careful, we don't tell anybody." I said, "Why?" She said, "That was Bill Kelley."

JD: Do you remember what it was about?

CB: It was an editorial, see the county board at that time, was thinking of changing the name of the swimming pool at 9th and Brown. And I don't remember which county supervisor had come up with the idea of naming it after Booker T. Washington....

JD: Yeah, I read the *Defender* issue about this.

CB: See, that editorial was written by Bill Kelley.

JD: Now if I've got this right, if it's the right editorial...

CB: He was advocating that it be named after somebody who had some standing and respect in the community, George Washington Carver. And subsequently, it was named after George

Washington Carver, but see, he couldn't sign it, because that wasn't the direction that the so-called European-American community was going in. They were favoring Booker T. Washington. So I knew his struggles, of course at that time, I was a young firebrand, and I didn't give a rip, so I didn't say anything to anybody, because I didn't think he wanted his cover pulled away, but you see, there were probably many others who I didn't know about, see I grew up with his two daughters...

JD: Helen?

CB: Helen, and Louise was younger, Jane was the eldest.

JD: Helen is the only name I know, I haven't talked with her.

CB: Well, Jane is deceased, and of course, his son was younger than I, but Helen, and Jane was more my contemporary, Helen was a year or two younger. But most people depended or relied on the NAACP.

JD: Was there anyone in the Milwaukee NAACP who was, openly or quietly, pushing MPS on hiring African-American teachers or promoting African-American educators?

CB: Attorney James Dorsey was. But in his later years he became, I don't know whether he was suffering from Alzheimer's, probably was, but then they weren't talking about it. But he reversed himself, he was one of the reasons that my family moved here from Fort Dodge, because he came from Helena, Montana to Fort Dodge...

JD: Fort Dodge is where?

CB: Iowa. And then from Fort Dodge he went to Milwaukee. Well, that was in the early 30s, and things were so bad as a result of the Depression, especially in mid-sized, of course Fort Dodge was about a middle-sized, small-to-middle sized, that there were no employment opportunities, unless you wanted to be a porter, or a shoeshine boy, you couldn't even be janitor, because that was high-status then. And certainly not a teacher or anything else. The only opportunities were in the slaughterhouse, the railroad, or doing janitorial, but not really having the name, or being a porter or a red cap. So my dad made up his mind after talking with James Dorsey, and of course my uncle, who was very light-complected, in fact, he was one of the few people that I knew who had a [unintelligible] policy with Metropolitan Life, because they didn't know that he was an African-American.

JD: What was your uncle's name?

CB: Earl Saltow [?]

JD: Earl?

CB: See, he was a master mechanic, and that misled a lot of people too. He was a master automobile mechanic, and he had a \$5,000 endowment life insurance policy with Metropolitan Life, because they didn't know that he was African-American. At that time, Metropolitan would only write industrial life [policies] for minorities. They treated Jews the same way for....

JD: I forgot you were State Insurance Commission staff, I forgot that.

CB: See, those kinds of things are always underneath. People don't talk about them a lot because they hurt. They're painful, and you don't reminisce over painful experiences. Not unless you're a little off. So Dorsey spent many years championing the cause of African-Americans, both through lawsuits and his activities in the NAACP.

JD: And involved with labor issues is where I see his name, Mr. Toliver.

CB: Quite often. Aaron Toliver.

JD: I believe so. That would have been early '40s.

CB: Aaron Toliver was active in A.O. Smith union.

JD: Right. But anyways, in terms of education issues for hiring African-American teachers,
45:00 Dorsey would have been there? Openly, vocally?

CB: I don't think he had enough time to have all the facts, so he would probably use, or have used his position with the NAACP and the underlying threat of a possible lawsuit to do things.

JD: Anyone else who was in the NAACP at that time who was pushing hiring teacher issues?

CB: Ted Coggs, he was associated with Dorsey. Some of the other members in the NAACP who were not that well-known might have been, but again, I didn't, see after my experience with the NAACP, that was the last organization I was interested in.

JD: Let me ask then, to sort of bring it up to the early '60s here, and I know I'm taking a lot of your time, you've been very helpful for me, I appreciate this very much. In '63, in the fall of '63, there's different groups of African-Americans who speak to the Story Committee. I'm trying to get a sense, I know what each one of them said, because the School Board kept all these minutes, and I found reports, and interviewed some of them. I'm trying to get a sense of how aware each group was of the other groups. For example, the people here, including yourself and Rev. Beauchamp with the Near Northside Non-Partisan Conference, working on this report. Lloyd Barbee, E. Gordon Young, and others working with the State NAACP report. Did you know that they were doing that when you were working on this?

CB: Oh, sure. In '63, right after the CORE chapter started, because it started in July of '63, Channel 6 editorialized against the NAACP and its efforts to get the School Board to stop segregating schoolchildren. Well, because I had a background in radio and that was one of my minors at Marquette, I recommended to the CORE chapter that we demand equal time to reply to that, and we did, we did on three occasions that summer.

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[Side B]

CB: ...and there were others, Tom Little.

JD: Jeannetta Robinson.

CB: She wasn't quite that active, but...

JD: ...okay. Another group that is talking to the Story Committee is an informal group. It doesn't have a title, but the spokesperson was Gwendolyn Jackson. They spoke in September. A number of people along with that would have been Mrs. Finlayson...

CB: Well, that would have been the local NAACP.

JD: Um, because Mrs. Jackson was with the Family Life Committee of the Urban League, and the NAACP Youth Council advisor, she, Lucinda Gordon's another one, people who were sort of involved with both camps.

CB: That was primarily NAACP though.

JD: Now what they said was, "We want better quality education for our kids in these schools, we want better resources." And what's interesting in their report, they say, about this location of new schools to be built in the future, some people were saying that they should build them in areas outside the inner core as it was called at the time, so they'll be naturally integrated, and that group of 11 led by Gwendolyn Jackson were against that because that means students in the inner-core won't have those schools in the neighborhoods where they should be.

CB: Yeah, well that position was being based on... a wish and a dream rather than reality.

JD: It sounds like tough decisions that people have to make at the time of what they're going to ask for.

CB: Well, because the school board had this policy of the double-whammy on transfers. If your child went to an elementary school in the central city, the chances were maybe 1 out of 100 that you could get a transfer. Same thing for junior highs, which later became middle schools. So it seemed the idealistic, or the dream concept, yeah, that sort [unintelligible] but the reality is, the odds of you doing that are going to be so...

JD: The odds against you doing what?

CB: Getting a transfer for your child to get to a better school. That's what most of them were thinking, getting their child to a better school and get a better education.

JD: With the transfer system as it existed.

CB: Yeah. Even if it was resolved, see they wanted, most people, even today, are not willing to deal with the root cause: racism. If you don't change the attitudes of the teachers and the counselors and the principals and the administration, all of this other stuff is only one-third of the way. You can have integrated high schools, you can even have integrated staffs, integrated student bodies, but if you don't have counselors and administrators who believe in the equality of individuals, then they're going to short-change those children, they're going to short-change those children. And my youngest daughter was a victim of that, because the counselors at Milwaukee Tech, there are no minority counselors. And when they counsel those children about going to college and university scholarships, et cetera, they give them bad information, poor information, incomplete information.

JD: I want to ask about another one of these groups, if I can for a second. It's talking to the Story Committee, it's Richard McLeod, I think, the Education Committee chair...

CB: For CORE.

JD: I read over the report. It seems to me, just as someone who's reading it, I wasn't there in all this, it seems to me that there was sort of at least two themes going at each other in the report. In the beginning of the report, it talks very highly of integration being a goal, the Brown decision and how this should be in Milwaukee, and so forth. Inside the report, when you get down to the nitty-gritty of what they're really asking for, I hit things like this: "We want an end to the noon-time busing."

CB: This was the intact busing.

JD: Right. Didn't say, "End the intact busing and integrate the kids into the school."

CB: That's because they hadn't done their homework.

5:00 JD: It seems also to me like, CORE's Education Committee was having meetings with African-American parents, every once in a while I see a clipping on a meeting, there will be a meeting tonight, a parents' meeting, and sometimes I come across minutes about what parents were asking CORE to do for them. As far as you can remember, what were parents asking CORE to do for them at this time, '63.

CB: Well, CORE was in a transition stage at that time. When the CORE chapter started, which was July 21st, 1963...

JD: The Lins stuff, right?

CB: That was, Lins came after we started.

JD: When it started, I'm sorry I interrupted.

CB: The chapter was a group of very idealistic people when we started, because we had Willis Baker, was chairman, I was vice-chairman.... Jane Alder [?] was recording secretary, I can't remember Dorothy's last name, but she was corresponding secretary, she worked for the Sentinel. I should remember that. That's where we held the first couple of meetings at her apartment on the east side.

JD: It was very much an inter-racial group as well, right?

CB: Oh yeah.

JD: That was the big, all across the nation, COREs were by-and-large at the time...

CB: It started, but it began to change as the leadership of the CORE chapters were instructed to be minority, not white. Anyhow, we got attached to the Lins thing, and that of course, was like giving a patient who was dying an intravenous..[laughs].. I shouldn't say we were dying, but we were on the road, to growing, but then this Lins thing came and we had meetings where maybe we had about, of course [unintelligible] was out, it was bam, bam, bam, bam, it was, CORE met weekly, every week there was a meeting, and then the committees met between that time, and then you had action projects going, you see, so we needed an action project, to get the charter, you needed an action project. Normally we had maybe 19 people at a meeting. Well, that's not bad when you're meeting weekly. But when we got into the Lins thing, I remember one meeting where 119, and this was in September, and some of the people that came to those meetings, cause Grant Gordon came, Lucinda's husband.

JD: I know, I interviewed them. That's interesting.

CB: Did he tell you that he went? No, he didn't, he came to join CORE, and we used to put everybody through workshops and non-violence, demonstrations, all that stuff, because it was the thing to do. That was where the action was. Bam, bam, bam. CORE would say this, and tomorrow, they'd do it. Wouldn't be next week or next month or next year, it was tomorrow. And boom.

JD: Can I ask, Mrs. Brown, did you know each other before CORE?

LB: No, we actually met at a MUSIC meeting.

JD: Okay, because I saw, you were a member of CORE or not?

LB: Yes, but my first contact was with MUSIC, was my first....

CB: The reason that that report that CORE gave [the Story Committee in '63] was kind of topsy-turvy, was because CORE was going through some changes.

JD: I'm not blaming anyone, it's a difficult time.

CB: It wasn't so much because of what was going on, it was a power struggle. See, there were people in the CORE chapter who felt that Willis was kind of flaky. And they couldn't control me. So they decided to have a putsch. I was involved in the March on Washington at the same time, so when we went to participate in the March on Washington, they had their little coup.

Willis and I went to Washington, and here we had 100 plus people circling the courthouse, protesting Grobschmidt's appointment of Lins. By the time we got back from Washington, they had had illegal elections, and they replaced Willis, they replaced me, they replaced Jane Alder [?], and Dorothy, and the treasurer, it was just, putsch, pow. And because we were involved in the Lins thing, we decided, those who were replaced, that we wouldn't make a big stink and go public with it, we'd take proper steps, which we did, we complained to the national office, and they sent out an investigator who made a report and it took six months but the chapter was placed in receivership. So McCleod is a nice guy, he was going, I think he was going to UW-M, but he let himself be used, and the people who were behind the putsch were Tom Jacobson and Robert [Morgan?] Gibson, and they used John Givens, and those of us who were kind of in a minority position temporarily, because most of the people didn't know what was going on, it was....cabel of people, Arlene Johnson and Ernest Greene, and his wife... it was a position to be big, and you didn't have to do any of the spadework, it was like the farmer who doesn't tend his fields and then he goes and steals his neighbor's crop [laughs]. Richard was caught up in all that. And that's why that report is kind of flaky. See, and the CORE chapter could have had this report [NNNPC], but they were so opposed to my being in the limelight, and they thought if they froze me out, that would be the end of it. They didn't do their homework. They didn't know that I was dealing with the Near North Non-Partisan Conference, and was head of the committee and doing all of this research. So the report that Richard gave was like, it was off the wall.

JD: Yeah.

CB: And it reads like that. Now as far as the NAACP report was, they had done a lot of homework, but even they didn't do the homework that we had done on this report because for various reasons, they didn't know. They were looking at, they were reacting, while I was looking at what was the cause.

JD: Who's they?

CB: The NAACP. They were reacting. They could see that this was bad, and this was bad, and this was bad, and we wanted it to stop, and I was trying to show why it was this way, that these weren't necessarily evil people, but they were doing evil things to maintain a system that fit their desires and preferences.

JD: Let me move on just a couple months or up to a year here, up to some MUSIC questions I have. I have a fairly good sense, I think, of Lloyd Barbee's walkout and the confrontation with the Story Committee that hit the papers, the greater sense of community, the Near Northside Non-Partisan Conference, CORE, the State NAACP, were bringing on demands, and the formation of the MUSIC umbrella organization of all of these groups. But I get a little hazy about who's coming up with this Freedom School withdrawal idea.

CB: The boycott?

15:00

JD: Where is that idea coming from, and how hard is it to persuade African-Americans, ordinary African-Americans in Milwaukee to go along with it?

CB: I can't tell you who was initially responsible for it. I think it, it fed on probably three sources. One, we had some wonderful ministers who were part of the Near Northside Non-Partisan Conference, three of whom are deceased, but Rev. Gregg, Rev. Beauchamp, and Rev. Talbert, they were the most perceptive, aggressive, intelligent and militant, and so MUSIC started as a result of what we knew what was going to happen anyhow, but we hadn't decided what direction we were going to take. The presentations, Story Committee, you know, it was phoney-baloney, but I convinced the Near Northside Non-Partisan Conference, and they said, "Yeah, we know it's phoney. And yeah, they're going to ignore what we're doing. But this is a wonderful opportunity to publicize their phoniness and how bad the problem is, and why it's necessary for us to be unified in what we do, and not just see what the Near Northside Non-Partisan Conference, or CORE, or the NAACP, or anybody else," because there was a group of ministers at the same time who were trying to... undermine what the civil rights organizations were doing, so they could get the credit. It was, let's see who were they, it was Beecham, who was Beauchamp's brother.

JD: Huh, okay.

CB: Same name, but they pronounced it differently.

JD: Whew, throw me off on that one. Whoa, I'm sorry, I've got to back up. Beecham and Beauchamp...

CB: They're brothers.

JD: And they have the same last name, spelled differently? Because every time I see Beecham's name written down, I see B-E-E-C-H-A-M....

CB: They're brothers. Who were the others?

JD: Rev. Phillips... I'm looking at the names of the ministers that you and SNCC picketed.

CB: Yeah, Rev. Phillips.

JD: Calvin from Mt. Zion Baptist.

CB: Calvin from Mt. Zion.

JD: Rev. J.A. Lathan, I get him confused with Rev. R.L. Lathan.

CB: J.A. Lathan and R.L., they're brothers.

JD: J.A. from St. Mary Baptist and R.L. from New Hope.

CB: That's right.

JD: Metropolitan Baptist, Rev. E.M. Kelly, is that the right minister with the right church?

CB: Metropolitan?

JD: That's okay, I can look.

CB: Anyhow, they were having private meetings with the Superintendent [Vincent].

JD: Pushing for?

CB: Pushing for....

JD: As far as you know.

CB: As far as I know, a resolution for the pending confrontation, which was the school boycott. See, they were selling us out in front of the school board. They promised that they would, see now, the reason that that developed the picketing, see my job with MUSIC, as the vice-chairman, one of the vice-chairman, because there was actually three, was to recruit churches to use, be used as Freedom School sites. And that's what I did. I contacted the ministers and arranged to go to their church at service and give maybe a 3 or 2-minute talk on the evils of school segregation, and how we were obliged as Christians to do something about it and stop cooperating with it, and we wanted to use their church as a Freedom School site. And I was pretty successful. But underneath, there were two things working against that. These six ministers and Police Chief Harold Brier and his subversive squad, who he had two detectives, who they used to follow me all of the time.

20:00

JD: I've heard a couple of your stories where you'd go into one house and leave out the back door and things like that.

CB: Yeah, sure, in fact the Williams' was one of them...

JD: Oh, you'd go see Ralph Williams.

CB: I'd go see Ralph Williams, and I'd go in the front, and after about 10 minutes I'd say, "Listen Ralph, I've got to go see somebody over on 10th Street. Can I go out the back?" And my car would be parked out on the street and they're watching my car. And I'd go visit two or three other people, and they'd be there three or four hours, and then I'd come back and I used to do that all the time, because I knew they were following me. But those two things, they'd go around and visit the ministers and try to intimidate them, because I remember three in particular, where they were successful, they scared the ministers.

JD: The three were...

CB: Friendship, where they got to him and he called me two days before the boycott, because he was still working at A.O. Smith, and they got him. And then there was the one at, that was Friendship, another one on 22nd and Cherry, where they had had a fire there the year before...

JD: Philadelphia Baptist maybe?

CB: Yeah, Philadelphia Baptist, and they intimidated him, because they didn't have a fire policy, and there was two others, but I don't remember all the details, but then of course, the Big Six, we couldn't get their churches.

JD: The Big Six, it's not that they were intimidated by the police necessarily, it was, they, as far as you know, saw an opportunity to...

CB: Well, you know, I guess it's human nature. There are about 10% of human beings who are pro-active, in other words they believe in doing something about their condition, more than just talking. And these people, either because they don't have the education or the dedication, or the persistence, want to jump on the bandwagon. They don't want to do anything to get the bandwagon rolling, because that's hard work, but if they see something and they think it's the band wagon [snaps fingers], they're right there. That's what these six ministers were, because I knew most of them, personally, and good people, but very misguided, and there has been a tradition in the African-American community for ministers in particular, but not limited to ministers, who if they couldn't direct the show that was going on, they would go around to the side door, and see if they couldn't get something going that they could run. And if it had the blessing of The Man, then that was all they wanted. And that's what they were doing. And of course, all of this was brought to a head with the Story Committee. See the first part went pretty well, and that's when Golightly, Dr. Golightly and I got into this dialogue and it ran off for almost 20 pages. But the second session, the follow up session, where Story showed his real colors, publicly, because we knew before that, then we had a meeting after that to organize MUSIC, and the idea of the school boycott, I think several people mentioned it, I don't remember exactly whom, but it was wonderful, because it was the first time that the African-American community and its supporters set up a new organization that The Man did not control, could not influence, could not intimidate, could not coerce, and a lot of wonderful people became involved in that, some who were members of the three organizations, the principal organizations, and some who came in just because they were interested in doing something positive about this. They were so incensed with Story, and that darn committee, so you see what I... convinced the CORE chapter to do, was to picket the school board members who were in the racist majority on the board at their home, and Story had nerve enough [laughs] at one meeting of the school board to say, "Boy, you have some wonderful singers" because we had people picketing his home and singing freedom songs outside [laughs]. But he was a character, he was, he really was. It was the SNCC group which was an offshoot of Near Northside Non-Partisan Conference, and these were all high school students, and there's a group, I had to try to sit on them a lot of times, because they were ready to go.

25:00

JD: Can I ask, is this like Pamela Kirkland, is that a name?

CB: Pam Kirkland.

JD: Students are the hardest people for me to find later on, because I don't know who their adult, parents were necessarily, and that's the way the phone directories listed them all. Any of those kids still around the area as far as you know?

CB: Oh, gosh, I'd be hard pressed to tell you where Pam and her sister, oh.

JD: The other names I've got are Jackie Jones, Paul MacDonald, this may not be SNCC necessarily, but I'm just curious. Or Russell Brown.

CB: It might have been, but those three were not very active.

JD: Yeah, but the Kirkland family, you're right, I've come across sisters, one Pamela, one...

CB: Her mother was active in CORE, um, I can't think of her name. The daughter of a woman that I went to high school with... and she's a professional singer now, why can't I think of her name? Adrian was her mother's name. Adrian Blan was her maiden name. Adrian's mother was a professional singer, but her daughter, why can't I think of her daughter?....

CB: [To Loretta] Why don't you tell him how you got involved in MUSIC?

LB: Oh well, I had just come back to Milwaukee. I originally came in the '50s to go to Marquette, and then I was away for awhile and I came back in '64 and I guess I, from reading the newspapers and et cetera, got interested in what was going on and through a friend, became aware of MUSIC and went there.

CB: Was it Marilyn?

LB: No, I didn't know Marilyn until I went there. I can't think, well actually, it was Pat who, and then she, she had a friend who knew, and I can't think of her name.

JD: Was this a Pat who later, I can't remember her last name, but was a driver for the PACE students?

LB: No.

JD: Different Pat. That's Patricia Scott.

LB: She actually wasn't involved herself, but she was aware of what was going on. And then through going to MUSIC, then became interested in CORE, and became a member of CORE.

30:00 JD: Now, I think you both were, [unintelligible] when people get arrested, their names appear in the newspapers. This is the end of May in 1965, I believe you're both arrested at the same arrest.

LB: Yes, we were at the same demonstration.

JD: Now I get my demonstrations mixed up. Was this a chain-in or was this an office demonstration?

CB: Sit-in in the Superintendent's office. Outer office.

JD: Now I'm curious, when I read through the names of who gets arrested, I don't think it's for this particular one, but sometimes for other arrests, I often see in say a group of 15 who were arrested for a MUSIC event, that out of 15, maybe 11 or 12 are women. Was it common practice do you recall, or is it just a strange impression that I have from a couple of arrests I've looked at?

CB: It's because the African-American men, by and large, who were involved in the civil rights struggle, couldn't afford to be arrested. Their employment would have been jeopardized. And the women, you can remember those times, there weren't many African-American women,

or women period, who were employed, so it was easy to get them to volunteer to be arrested. Because I remember, that sit-in demonstration was CORE. MUSIC didn't have that many demonstrations early on. The breakup of the school board meeting, the first one in September, that was SNCC, and nobody got arrested, but what we did was at a certain point in school board meeting, we got up and we had Rev. Champion say a prayer and then we marched around inside until one of the lookouts came and said, "The police are on their way." The police station was about 7 blocks away. So as they were getting ready to come in, the entrance off the parking lot, we marched out of the auditorium, and I remember laughing about it later, we said, "There's a demonstration going on in there. You'd better hurry up!" [laughter]

JD: Why were you willing to get arrested? Put yourself back in '65 if you can. How did you explain it to yourself or people that asked you?

LB: I just felt that... if you feel that getting arrested wasn't comparable to the evil that was going on, even getting arrested, it wasn't even comparable to what was going on, if you kind of felt that something drastic had to be done.

JD: A comparison here. This is the Star that came out in May '64, the first Freedom School boycott. This is the second Freedom School boycott, October '65. One impression I have, and I'm trying to get a sense if this is up the right alley or not, is that from the first one to the second one, the role of Black history, from what I can tell, seems to become much more important to the second one.

CB: In the first boycott, there was some emphasis on Black history, because of what CORE had started, and some of the other people were concerned about, but that first boycott was so fraught with dangers and threats that much of our energies and focus was eaten up just by organizing it. See, a boycott of that magnitude had never accomplished or even proposed before anywhere in the country. We were talking about a boycott where we fully anticipated that we would get maybe 15 to 20,000. Actually what happened was it was over 23,000. So we didn't just want to protest, we wanted it to be an educational experience. So that meant that we had to have sites, that was my baby, teachers....

JD: Who was in charge of getting the teachers?

CB: ...curriculum. Well, one of the other vice-chairman, and I don't remember which one right now, I'm sorry to say, but the tasks were divided. The most important was getting the sites, that's what I did full-time, recruiting the teachers, and then developing the curriculum. Now unfortunately, curriculum didn't get as much emphasis as securing the sites and getting the teachers, not that it wasn't important, but we didn't have the people-power to devote, not only that but also supplies and transportation and safety. We had Dick Gregory here for the first boycott. That was also my baby, taking him around and getting him out of here, because he had to go someplace...

JD: Can I ask? I have seen film footage of Dick Gregory talking to a crowd, and I've read newspaper accounts of Dick Gregory talking to a crowd, and a variety of people say, some people say, "That's what really made it click for me." But I haven't found anything like a tape recording of Dick Gregory talking to a crowd in Milwaukee. You don't have anything like that lying around, do you? Or know of anyone who might?

CB: At that time, there might have been some TV stations that would have had it. That was when he was talking to the high school Freedom School site at St. Matthew's, that's Rev. Gregg's church. Other than that, I do not recall, because I was not making recordings at that time.

JD: No, you're running around trying to get the thing organized. I'll keep looking for that with the news stations.

CB: You might, Clay, Clay was around?

JD: Clay said he started filming in 1968.

CB: No, he wasn't around then, so it would have been maybe Channel 12, and Corello [?], he was a cameraman for Channel 12 back then. He has those camera stores now.

JD: The other question I have of the two boycotts is, this one is scheduled to last a day, lasts a day. This one talks about lasting a week, three and a half days.

CB: I can't help you much on the second one because we got married when it was going on.

JD: Well, congratulations.

CB: Well, just before, the week before it was to go on, and we went on our honeymoon, the week it was going on. Lloyd [Barbee] was very upset with me when I told him that first things first. The first one was more focused because it was just for one day, and there was so much opposition. The school administration, I don't know what kind of pressures they put on minority teachers, but I know that they did, to keep them from participating, and many of them took sick-leave, but it was so roiled up, if I can use that word, and people saying, "Oh, they don't know what they're doing. It can't succeed." So that would get a couple thousand malcontents who participate, and lo and behold, when we started getting the reports, 3 or 400 children here, 4 or 500 children there, you know, every Freedom School site was overwhelmed with children, and people were coming in off the streets sometimes, to participate and to contribute. When the press reckonly reported that, as close as they could tell, 23,000 children had participated, it was an overwhelming success, but shortly after that, of course, CORE had its sit-in, and we had the sit-in because Vincent, we had one meeting with him, and we asked him to stop the intact busing. And we told him how bad it was, and that it had to stop, and that the transfer policy had to be changed, and he was adamant about it, so we said, "We've got to have another meeting." "No, there will be no more meetings," he said. "Well, we'll sit out here in your waiting room until you change your mind." Well, that went on for thirty days. Well, we said we're not getting anywhere,

40:00

so that last day, we asked, to tell you that the office is closing up. "Well, some of us are going to stay, we're not going to leave." And anybody who cannot afford to be arrested, you leave when they say that. So it was Loretta, what was the, it was two UW-M students, er, one Marquette student?

LB: Oh, it's been so long.

JD: It's been thirty years ago, I understand.

CB: A Marquette student, a European-American Marquette student and an African-American UW-M student.

LB: Well, was Nate arrested? Nate was pretty involved then. No, okay. My memory for names is not good.

JD: I've probably got their names in the papers, it's okay. If I can ask, this is around the same time as you're getting married, as a couple, an inter-racial couple in Milwaukee in the mid and early 60s here, how did this work out for you?

CB: Well, after you get accustomed to the stares that you get from people...There were all of these people who had hidden agendas. You didn't know if they were doing it because they just didn't like you, or they just didn't like the fact that you were an inter-racial couple. Probably like any other marriage, ups and downs.

JD: Did being involved in a group like CORE that was pushing inter-racialism, was that a big support for you when you were getting together, do you think? Or MUSIC or something like that?

LB: I would say it probably was. We had a common goal [laughs], and would imagine in that type of atmosphere, it was more acceptable.

JD: I've met three or four biracial couples who've gotten together around that time, and it's just something I ask to get a sense of what people lived through and how they got together.

LB: I would say the philosophy is, it's not my problem, it's their problem. That pretty much took care of it.

JD: That sounds like a pretty good way to deal with it. I'm going to fast-forward a bit through time to the 1970s, '72 to '74, I think, are roughly the years you're involved in education issues again, President of the Federation of Independent Community Schools. And your children at this time are going to Harambee at this time, right?

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: Three children?

LB: Two.

JD: Two children?

LB: Two at that time.

JD: Why the Federation of Independent Community Schools? Why get involved in something like that? Especially when times were tough. There wasn't a whole lot of money to keep them afloat, from what I can tell.

CB: Well, the question of school segregation in Milwaukee had not been resolved, and they were still doing the research for the suit, and the only accommodation that had been made was the end of intact busing, and hadn't completely ended, but it stopped doing the busing four times a day, and they stopped insisting on the teachers riding on the buses, and they had integrated the lunch periods and the recess, but they hadn't changed the transfer policy very much, and they had stopped building the additions, and they were no longer using any Willis wagons, although Auer Avenue was the only site, and it caused so much conflict, because there were what, 2,400 African-American children going to Auer Avenue with those Willis wagons, and that...

JD: I've seen the photographs of those.

Oral History Interviews of the More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, 2007-2008
Oral History Interview with Cecil Brown Jr. and Loretta, August 9, 1995, part III

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
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Archives

Brown, Cecil, Jr., and Loretta, interview with Jack Dougherty, August 9, 1995 (at the Finney Public Library, 4243 W. North Avenue, Milwaukee).

CB: ...the Federation of Independent Community Schools....My, I think our view of the schools was that they were so bad, not because they were inherently bad, but the attitude of the teachers, the failure of the school board to really, honestly deal with it, you see, for a period there, the school board's answer to the disciplinary problems they were having with African-American children on the lower-elementary and upper-elementary was to get African-Americans who didn't have the necessary qualifications to teach the two-year exemption that the State would allow, provided that the applicant took additional courses, so you were getting African-American teachers who were not qualified, really. Those things bothered me so the girls went to Guardian Angel, and then we thought about what's going to happen after they get out of Guardian Angel. And Harambee was probably the best, if not the best, it was the best, of the independent community schools, because they had the concept of learning contracts, where the children agreed to do certain things and the teacher agreed to do certain things, and they signed a contract. We sent them there, and of course, I didn't have any thought at the time they're going there to being involved in the Federation's board, and I kind of got drafted to represent Harambee on the board and then it turns out, it was a time for somebody from Harambee to be the president, and I got kind of stuck with that.

JD: [Laughs] Was this, in your mind, were you stepping away from the MUSIC activism, or had it just died down entirely by then?

CB: MUSIC was no longer an activist organization. They were doing the research because there wasn't too much that could be done, and the CORE chapter went through another, oh.....

LB: Fiasco [laughs].

CB: It wasn't a fiasco, it was another power grab. There was a group of people who, after we had gotten the first thing straightened out, and we were really doing things, we were into job fairs, we were talking about co-ops and African-American history and all that, and then a group led by Jeannetta Robinson and Coretta Simpson and the gal who was on the staff at the Urban League who had come here from San Diego, they wanted to run the CORE chapter and they couldn't. They didn't see any way of beating me out as chairman. So they first went down to Chicago and tried to talk Jesse Jackson into letting them organize a Operation Breakbasket, and

they didn't know that I had ties with Breadbasket, because their people and myself had been tied together at the '72 National Democratic Convention, and keeping Daley's hand-picked slate from being recognized. They didn't know, but they went through those things and they managed to raise so much rucus and intimidate people and disrupt meetings that the national office suspended, no it didn't suspend, yeah, it initially suspended the charter. So, there wasn't a whole lot going on in the NAACP other than Lloyd and the research, were not involved, so kind of had to wing it, and I say Harambee as being the next best thing. And I felt all along that there had to be some kind of challenge to the school, public school system, so that parents who were unhappy, or were displeased or disgusted with what they weren't doing as well as with what they were doing, had an alternative, and the independent community schools seemed like the best alternative. It's amazing, back then we struggled. The only favorable publicity we got was from out-of-town papers. The *Chicago Sun* sent a reporter up and he did a gem of a story. I took him around to...

JD: While you were president? I'll look for that.

CB: ...and then we had a liberation walk to try to raise money, and we got people sniping from within. But WAWA covered it pretty well, and the local press gave us maybe a couple paragraphs. That was real, those were real alternative schools, run by the parents, and not hand-picked, in fact, we couldn't get money from our friend, Frederick John [?], because he wanted to have crucifixes in every classroom, and we wouldn't agree to that. And I went to Washington a couple of times, trying to get money, but it didn't pan out, and unfortunately only three of the schools survived. Harambee and Urban Day, which was really St. Michael's originally, and St. Leo's, now a preparatory school, but Martin Luther King and St. Francis and Boniface went down the tubes.

JD: In this period, '64, '65, what definitely seems to be driving you during a lot of this is school integration, school integration. We get to '72 with the Federation of Independent Community Schools, is that the theme that's central, is that the theme that's driving you still, or has it changed a bit?

CB: I don't think anything changed much. The characters may have changed, but the theme was always the same, that school segregation was evil, that it not only denied African-American children of a quality equal education, but it dehumanized them, because it didn't teach them anything about their culture or their heritage. It exposed them to propaganda in the guise of history, and it brainwashed them. You know, when you're confronted with it daily, you're not inclined to really get on a soapbox and preach on the public streets about it, but it sure as hell irritates you. And whenever you can, you try to do something about it.

JD: Would you describe the Federation of Independent Community Schools as a different strategy to achieve the same goals that you had been working on?

CB: Yeah, primarily to see that your children got, see when I got started in this business, I was not married, and I had no children, and, but I knew that eventually I would get married and that I would have children and I didn't want them to suffer the things that I suffered, because when I went to school, I was never exposed to African-American teachers. All the way through school, public school as well as private, and I didn't know anything about my culture and heritage until I was about 16 and a staff member at the Urban League asked me to give a talk on James Weldon Johnson, and I didn't have the slightest idea who James Weldon Johnson was. She said, "Well, you get over to the library," at the Lapham Center there was a library there, "and get a book on James Weldon Johnson." And I did and she was a member of Calvary Baptist Church, and I read about James Weldon Johnson, and I went and I talked about James Weldon Johnson and that was the beginning for me of awareness, because in the public school system, they certainly don't talk about James Weldon Johnson. They don't talk about anybody unless it's someone who got some notoriety, a little blip in history. You hear about George Washington Carver, or you hear about the slave revolt that didn't succeed, Nat Turner, but you don't hear about Denmark Vesey, you don't hear about the slave rebellions in Virginia, and you don't read about the Africans who chose to leap off of cliffs in what is now Brazil rather than submit. You don't read about Toussaint L'Ouverture [sp?] and the impact that his rebellion against the French had on American history....

JD: Those are vivid examples.

CB: Toussaint L'Ouverture was the first general to defeat Napoleon's troops in battle in 1804, and as a result of that, Napoleon gave up his dreams of creating a new empire in the Western Hemisphere. France owned or controlled the western half of what is now the United States, with the exception of the area of Texas, Arizona, and Mexico. The Louisiana Purchase was a direct result of Toussaint L'Ouverture's successful fight against the French because for at least eight years, the Americans had tried to purchase that from France, and Napoleon wouldn't have anything to do with it. That's why Benjamin Franklin was in Paris, that's why Thomas Jefferson was in Paris, to try to achieve that. So when his troops got defeated in Haiti, they decided to sell it for \$4 million. Now when you read history, you don't get any of that. The best you get is the Lewis and Clark expedition and even when they relay that, they don't include the fact that many of his followers were African-Americans, or give credit to the Native American woman who actually helped them get to the west coast. So you, those things are not relayed, and I was particularly upset, because my major at Marquette, I had two, philosophy and history, and I was so disgusted, because even at the college level, the propaganda was still going on. Here I was a history major, I had 28 hours of history, which is about as much as you can get, and very seldom did I encounter anything that revealed the impact that Africans had on the development of this country. I was just grossed out, it led me to start reading books on African-Americans, because

when I was in the Assembly, one of the things that I was very happy to do was, I introduced a joint resolution to have the State of Wisconsin recognize Black, then it was called Negro history week. And it passed both houses. And a copy of the joint resolution was sent to all the libraries and the universities in Wisconsin. And then of course I suppose I went too far in the view of many of my colleagues and I, because that Negro history was the second week in February, so I came back with a resolution to put Wisconsin on record of observing Brotherhood Week, which was the third week in February, a joint resolution. Some of them, I remember, some of them kept saying, "This is too much." I said, "What do you mean it's too much? It's just talking about the observation. You're not doing anything." [Laughs]

JD: How can you go wrong with this one?

CB: They got two joint resolutions and they got through.

JD: They got through?

CB: Both of them went through. Being in the minority at that time, because we only had 36, 99, that was about as good as you could get.

JD: I'll wind it down with just this. Committee of 100, which you're involved again, co-chairman, weren't you tired of these education issues by then?

CB: Well, a little but, gee the Committee of 100 came about because of the lawsuit..

JD: Sure, Reynolds' decision.

CB: This was like planting a rose bush and it started to bloom. And I couldn't say no, I'm not going to be involved, when I had devoted to many hours, so many days, and so many weeks and months and years trying to bring about a change, a drastic change, and the Committee of 100 was, to my way of thinking, a very good idea. It was about as rambunctious a group since the days of CORE and MUSIC. It wasn't at that same level, but it was pretty close, because we had some firebrands in there, and of course, the situation was one where you had a school board that was predominately racist, you had a superintendent who was new and it looked like could be favorable to some things that should happen. See, I had sat by and watched superintendents like Vincent, which unfortunately they named a high school after, if I live long enough and get enough influence, maybe we can change the name of that damn high school, and then we went through Mr. Oil, what was his name?

20:00

JD: Gousha.

CB: Mr. Oil.

JD: Did you call him Mr. Oil?

CB: Slick as grease. Never did a damn thing, deflected all, but so the Committee of 100, I felt was a wonderful opportunity, I think you did too, didn't you?

LB: I was kind of busy at that time, I didn't get too involved.

JD: You were kind of busy doing what?

LB: Oh, taking care of the family, that sort of thing.

CB: Well, we had three children by that time, and the youngest was only two years old.

JD: '76, '77.

CB: Two years old, so we had... gotten the two oldest ones into Harambee, but the middle child had a reading problem and didn't, Harambee wasn't equipped to deal with it. We sent her to Lee and they made some progress, but not enough. And it wasn't that, see it was a talent that she had that caused the problem, that and an aggressive older sister, who read to her.

LB: And then the fact that she was in a class, there were two girls in that class in Harambee, there were all boys.

CB: The problem was that Hope...

JD: That's the name of the child.

CB: ...the second child, had a fantastic memory. Her older sister Faith would read stories to her, a lot of books, and she would memorize those stories, because I can remember when I was working in the Insurance Commissioner's office, and long hours, and I'd come home and try to encourage her and I'd say, "Go get a book and read a story for Daddy." And she'd run in her bedroom and get a book and read what I thought was a story. I didn't pick up on it. I thought I was doing the right thing by having her read me a story every night. She couldn't read. She had memorized all of those stories. So prior to the Committee of 100 being organized, the school board had agreed to create a specialty school...

JD: Is this the Jefferson Pupil-Teacher Training Center?

LB: Pupil-Teacher Learning Center.

CB: And a good friend of mine was the principal.

JD: Who was that?

CB: Cloyce Burns. And I remember, I was going, for some reason, maybe the good Lord was moving me then, but I was going to school board meetings, this was in '75, and I remember telling the deputy superintendent, when they came up with the idea how are you going to choose the students to attend Jefferson, I said, "If my children don't get into that school, I'm going to picket and get all my friends to picket." The Superintendent says, "Don't worry about it, your kids will get in there." [laughs] I was only joking at the time but they took me seriously because my children got into Jefferson, which was a wonderful specialty school, and it's allowed to just kind of die on the vine, because the Committee of 100 recommended that there ought to be 10 of those Jefferson Schools, and this is part of the problem that the school district is having. They only wanted to have one of each kind, and we had recommended that there be 40. School without walls, open classroom school, a Jefferson type, and the IGE [Individually Guided Instruction], and what was the other one, there were four?

JD: Montessori maybe?

CB: Let's see, there were five, Montessori was one. What is the Garfield? Garfield is a classroom without walls. So what is Lloyd?

LB: It's been a while for me.

JD: That's okay, I can figure these out.

CB: Those were the five prototypes, and we recommended that there be eight to ten of each one. Well, there are three things that people should take into account when they talk about the schools system. It's what The Man wants, that's one, what the union wants, that's two, and what the Board wants, that's three. Now the union has never been a leader in that fight, except to protect or enhance what the majority of its members want. Now they've always had 1 or 2 or I guess now they have a couple hundred minority members, but they never really represent what the minority members want and need, and they certainly don't stand by what the children should have, and that's what make the situation, and that was [unintelligible] to me by the Committee of 100, because I knew at the time of the formation of the Committee of 100 that the school population was already over 50% African-American. And they hush-hushed that for two years. McMurrin played with that figure, and I probably should have pushed him harder on that, now it's gotten to the point where 60% of the school population is African-American, and another 5 to 6% is Hispanic African-American, and another 2 or 3% is Native and Asiatic American. So 70% of the children in the public school system are non-European-Americans. But you look at the teachers' union, and it's still 80% European-American. You look at the counselors and the principals, and the administrators, and it's still 80% European-American. So you've got an educational system, and these people, and they're playing right into the hands of people who are not disposed to look at the best interests of anybody, so-called school choice. I had a shot at school choice when we had the Federation of Independent Community Schools, and didn't buy it, and didn't buy into it, and didn't support it, when it was really controlled by the parents. These freedom choice schools today are not controlled by the parents. They're controlled by people who are crass opportunists, who view this as an opportunity for them to make a living, aggrandize themselves, seem important. Yeah, I tell people, I say you look at Polly Williams, and Polly Williams is a creature of Monroe Swan, who she's related to.

JD: I didn't know that.

CB: Monroe Swan has been disgraced and discredited, so that he cannot be in the forefront of anything anymore, but through his cousins, sisters, and brothers, set up these front organizations and they are not operated in the best interest of African-Americans. Now his relatives got control of organization back in the '70s that could have been a very powerful force in this community: Triple O. Larry Harwell is related to Monroe Swan. And they got money from SDC, and the first thing they came up with, not the first thing, but one of the things that they came up with was

Black-A-Vention, and I had to tell my people, "Don't get involved in that." Because these people are not honest, they're not sincere, they're crass opportunists. And I had one hell of a time, I said, "Go to the meetings if you want to, to be informed, but don't get involved." A good friend of mine, we fell out about it, because he, he was bound and determined that he was going to be president of Black-A-Vention.

JD: Can I ask who your friend was?

CB: Adolphus Ward. See we were in People's Theatre together, and did plays, and Adolphus got his family and all, doing the, got elected, and then Adolphus used the side door. He was going to make a deal with Henry Maier about something, I can't even remember now what it was. He went down there and he sold out the Black-A-Vention [laughs] and the Black-A-Vention, you know, where is it? At one time, they had a thousand people involved, more than any other group outside of NAACP and CORE before we were dissolved, because one of the reasons that these people tried to take the CORE chapter was when we got the money from SDC to operate the youth program, we had some of them going out doing surveys, and asking people if they wanted to join an organization like CORE, and we actually had 900 plus applications. We would have been the largest direct-action CORE chapter in the country, because none of them had a large number of members, because there aren't that many people who are tuned into direct-action, and it's a hard work to find them. But, so Annette Williams, who is probably a good spirited person, I don't view Annette as being mean-spirited, but she's being manipulated, and if she's not being manipulated, then God help us, because this is a woman who when I first met her, back in '74, she got elected as recording secretary of the 18th Assembly District Democratic Party. I was chairman of it. And she was elected recording secretary. At that time I was in a position to provide some secretarial help. I told her, I said, "Listen, if there's a problem duplicating the minutes, because they should be, I can have one of the secretaries of a consumer organization that I was coordinator for, listen to the tape and type them up." She got incensed, incensed. So I went and did it the first time anyhow. And she raised a fuss. I said, "Well, 35:00 Annette, you don't have a tape recorder. You don't know how to take shorthand, are you going to right those minutes out in longhand?" No, and she never did, she never functioned, but fortunately she went to UW-M and got some education, but when you look at a person, I'm not saying that people can't change, and certainly can improve themselves, but her whole association has been negative with education. Harwell and Triple O, used Triple O to organize Blacks for Two-Way Busing. It's a scam. See, the thing that the Committee of 100 stood for was, you put those specialty schools in the central city, so that if European-Americans wanted their children to get that specialty school education, they had to come to the central city. You don't put those specialty schools in the outlying areas, where you have to bus African-American children to get it, and European-American children can walk across the street or around the corner, or a block so

to speak, that was the whole strategy behind that. And because the majority of the children in the public school system were African-Americans, for an organization like Triple O and Larry Harwell to talk about the imposition of busing being imposed on the African-American community, simply reveals that they didn't do their homework, they didn't know that already, a majority of the children in the public school system were African-Americans, and no matter what kind of system you establish, they were going to have to bear the burden of transportation if you were going to have integrated schools. That the best you could do is have the specialty schools, the best schools, located in the central city, so that at least there would be some European-Americans going to those schools, and there would be some integration, and it wouldn't be forced busing, as they talk about it. Forced busing. And they led themselves to all types of misinformation, like school integration was a result of forced busing, you were forcing people to bus their children in order to get an education. Well, hell, busing has been going on ever since there's been buses. And an overwhelming majority of children in this country today are bused, and it isn't because they are bused for integration, they are bused because you have unified school districts.

JD: I know what you're saying about Larry Harwell's organization. Does the same apply for the Coalition to Save North Division?

CB: Yeah, that was Howard Fuller's....

LB:and Harwell and them, they were involved in it.

CB: ...now you see what we had proposed, what the Committee of 100 had proposed, that North Division be a specialty high school.

JD: A medical specialty.

CB: No, we didn't propose that, that was....

JD: That's administration?

CB: No, that was Fuller and that was Harwell, and then the administration as the cop-out.

What we had proposed was that three things. That there be at least four Jefferson Teacher-Pupil Learning Center Schools, that there be two on the middle school level, and that North Division be a high school for teacher-pupil learning, Montessori, open classroom, and classroom without walls. Never happened. Because these people, it's just like, they further compounded that by when they wanted to create a separate school district. Now most, see, remember I talked about the bandwagon? If you check the press, there was very little opposition to that coming out of the African-American community. I was one of the few who opposed it.

JD: Opposed?

CB: The creation of the separate school district.

JD: Okay, we're talking the New North Division District, around 1987.

40:00

CB: That's right. I opposed it. I went to their meeting and opposed it. I didn't just flip off, but I went to their meeting and said, "These people who are proposing this are ignorant, but worse than that, they're lazy. And they're crass opportunists." Because at the time they were proposing that, which would have affected maybe 7,000 students at most, I said, "What are you going to do about the 50,000 African-American students who are still in the system? What are you going to do?" That's why the school choice thing is, it's the same thing, only in a different guise. You maybe, okay, 7,000, what about the 60,000? And if you're really sincere and you're really honest, you have to do your homework, have to do the research and you have to know what you're talking about, what the results will be if what you're proposing is implemented, and what the impact will be on the majority of the students. You see, when you talk about those who benefit from integrated education, it's all the students, not just the minority students, it's all of them, because if you raise a European-American child to believe that the minority students haven't, their parents and ancestors, haven't done a damn thing to improve, you know, what's going on, then you are penalizing them, because they're going to have to go and operate in a world where they're not the majority.

JD: You have quite a bit of stamina. Does this come at being an expert at meetings for years and years?

CB: Boy, I was educated in that at North Division. North Division, I learned how to be a leader, and it wasn't in the curriculum, it was an extra-curricular activity. During our lunch hours we went, and we didn't eat with the other students in the cafeteria. And I remember I used to get criticized because I didn't eat with the other African-American students in the cafeteria.

Leadership Club met in another classroom. They'd wonder, "Where were you? Why aren't you eating with us?" Because initially I had criticized them because they would sometimes engage in food fights or they segregated themselves, they all ate together. I said, "This is ridiculous, and I'm not going to have anything to do with it." [laughs] You get all kinds of things that go on, that people now report, because it's something that's new. They talk about at college, the minority students all eat together and they talk together, like hell, they got that from high school! That's where they got it from. And they got it because they were not made welcome. You see, when you're not welcome, and you're not in the majority, for your own self-protection, you gather as many as you can around you, so if something happens, you are not out there in a position to be lynched, and psychologically that's what happens when there's just a few minority students at a high school.

LB: I have that meeting at 2 o'clock.

CB: Okay, we're going to have to go.

JD: And you've been very generous with your time, and actually I've covered, you've covered a fair bit of ground that I wanted to cover. I have a form, which I mentioned. Over the

next six months, I occasionally come across names for which I have no clue of an address on. I'm working in Tennessee for the next few months. Would it be alright if I occasionally sent a letter with people's names to see if by chance you knew where these people lived?

CB: Sure.

JD: The other one is, just if you know off-hand, the Milwaukee Defender, which you used to work with, the libraries have saved only 1957.

CB: Only?

JD: And a few issues from 1958. Milwaukee Public, UW-M, State Historical in Madison, nothing else. Now, Mary Ellen Shadd is still alive in Atlanta, I've been told.

CB: She's Mary Ellen Strong now.

45:00 JD: Do you know of anyone else who may have copies of the Defender? I've been told that she may not herself.

CB: I had them but, I moved a couple times and the copies that I have are no longer available. I regret that very much because, first Mary Ellen and I had a difference of opinion and I left her, she changed editorials, I was the editor, and I got very upset with her, and I told her, I said, "Freedom of the press is not just a theory. And if you're going to change editorials," I said, "I don't care if you are the publisher, then you tell me about it and don't do and I find out about it after the paper is printed." The hell with that. I was really upset with her about that.

JD: I'm sorry about that. I'll continue my search for the Defender, if it's something that you stumble into someone who says, "Oh, I've got a bunch of those in my basement," would you please let Clayborn Benson know.

[consent form]