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Chuck Coleman, Oral History Interview, November 13, 2018

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Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral Histories

Oral History Interview with Chuck Coleman (CC)

Conducted by Historic Preservation Graduate Student Rachel Burns, (RB) and Historic Preservation Graduate Student Matt Jones (MJ)

Transcribed by Rachel Burns

RB: This is Rachel Burns, I'm a graduate student in the Historic Preservation Program along with Matt Jones, another HP student. Today is Tuesday, November 13th, 2018. We're here in Halle Library interviewing Chuck Coleman. Coleman is a former Eastern Michigan University student activist. Before exiting the university in 1978, Coleman was a member of the Black Student Association, Campus Service Corps, and a student representative of the Office of Minority Affairs. Coleman played an important role in bettering conditions for students of color on campus. Today, we are interviewing him as a part of our "Taking Great Risks" Oral History Program here at the University Archives. I have some preliminary questions to start off.

CC: Okay. Little corrections. I left in '72 and you said the Office of Minority Affairs? Not actually. I was Assistant to the Director of Student Life Programs on Minority Affairs. That was my actual title. Student activities were what it was, and then it was updated to student life programs.

RB: Thank you.

CC: No problem, and I don't think I heard any else that were different.

RB: So what years did you attend Eastern?

CC: '68 to '72.

RB: Okay. To start off with, can you describe the atmosphere on campus for African American students when you arrived at Eastern?

CC: Oh boy, you're sending back 50 years right off the top (laughs)? I'm going to have to speak for myself. When I got here, I was in Best Hall. I think there were three African Americans in Best Hall, including myself. I had absolutely no issues with any of the fellas. They invited me to play softball, touch football, and basketball with them. They even-I don't know if they still use this terminology, but they took me out with them on keggers. Do they still do keggers?

RB: Yeah.

CC: Okay, so that was totally new to me (laughs). I literally didn't have any issues as far as the students in my dorm. To be honest with you, my suitemate was a guy who would every Friday- I'm telling on myself. I wasn't old enough to buy whiskey. So I'd leave him some money in my room and he had access from his suite, and he would get the money. When I would get home from work, he would put the whiskey on the desk with the change. He had a problem with my roommate who was a hippie and he didn't like hippies. As far as black folks, he didn't have an issue. DuBeaux was his name. I never had an issue with the students. I felt that some of the teachers were not enlightened, I guess. But as far as the students, I didn't have any issues, personally. I can't speak for anybody else. Other people said they had problems. I personally did not see them.

RB: How did you become involved with activism on campus?

CC: That's a good question too. I remember the night before the takeover of Pierce Hall, it was my second started. It had just started at the end of January back then. This girl who I've known from the Upward Bound program I had been in gave me a call-she'd only been on campus for a couple of weeks because she started in January. She gave me a call trying to describe what was going to happen, and I blew it off. I wasn't dealing with that. I happened to be going to class, and I saw all of these black kids-where the heck have these guys been? Because like I said, I only saw three of them in my dorm. I didn't see any in my classes. My roommate was also heading to class. He went this way and I went that way to see what's going on. Then of course, I found out the students had taken over Pierce Hall, and from that point on, I thought "I got to check this out." I just started from there, little by little getting involved. I ended up being one of the so-called leaders I guess.

RB: So, one of the groups you were with was Campus Service Corps?

CC: Yes.

RB: What role did you play in that group?

CC: The original name was Campus Service Corps. It was at that point, we found out that white students were in Campus Service Corps, and they would go to the south side of Ypsilanti where the black students, and they were acting as big brothers and big sisters to these little black kids. One of the members found out about it and said "this ain't right. We should be doing that." We did, we actually took over and told them they should go to the north side or wherever the predominantly less fortunate caucasian students were, and they did. We seperated like that. We of course changed the name to Black Campus Service Corps under Chuck Minneman, who was probably our biggest supporter up here. He was Director of Religious Affairs, I believe it was. Did I give you a good answer?

RB: Yeah.

CC: Did I sway away from the question?

MJ: No, you're doing good.

CC: If I do, just reel me back in. My mind's trying to go back fifty years.

RB: I know from previous interviews there was the Breakfast Program and Big Sisters Big Brothers. What other services was Campus Service Corps offering?

CC: Let me go back to the Campus Service Corps. I became a mentor to one or more of the students. These were great grade school students. Some of the high school students kind of grouped around us and we took them in too. As I recall it, some of the other guys might not recall it the same way, one guy came up to us who claimed to be a member of the Black Panther Party in Detroit and said "what y'all doing?" He came up to our office and asked "what are you guys doing?" We told him that we were doing Black Campus Service Corps thing via Big Brother Big Sister for the students. He said "If you guys ain't feeding them, then you're doing nothing." We thought okay, let's feed them too. Things were simple back then. We developed a program under John Sanford. He was over Campus Service Corps and, since the breakfast program was with Campus Service Corps, he was in charge of the breakfast program. This guy I believe had multiple sclerosis. He had one leg that he would drag. He had a difficult speech impediment, but for my money, was the best orator on campus. This guy was phenomenal. Now, don't tell him I said anything good about him, that's my arch nemesis. But he was. I don't necessarily have heroes, but he comes close even as a peer. So we started raising money. I'm from Inkster, right up the road down Michigan Avenue. A group of black gentlemen from Inkster took over this building that was closed. It used to be a city youth recreation building. City closed it out for finances. These guys kicked the door in, took it over, got the lights on, started bringing in programs like the Breakfast Program. So me and a couple other guys found out how they did it, and brought that information back to John and the other guys. Not that to say that they used it all, I'm not trying to say that my part in this was all that big. I was just one of the guys serving breakfast mainly.

MJ: Who was cooking?

CC: The ladies, man. Some of the fellas. Charles Johnson, he was my roommate and he was very involved also. He did a lot of the cooking. But some of the ladies, and we had some of the future teachers who said "we can deal with us, not all of the radical stuff, but we can be big sisters and brothers to these kids and feed them breakfast."

MJ: Okay that's interesting.

CC: Yeah, the levels of participation. I think if there were 500 black students on campus at that time, at any given time, we'd probably had 15 active members. Our mass meeting showed one thing, they would come to the meetings and show up. That was good because the

administration would see us and think we had bigger numbers behind us than we actually did but at the most it was 15 at any given time. I think you saw them, did you get to see it?

RB: It was recorded, so I got to see it.

CC: Okay, those were-except for Russell McReynolds and Herb. Well, that was his nickname Charles Johnson, who is deceased. He wasn't here. Jean Guillard. She died about a week before the program went on. But what you saw pretty much were all of the real leaders of that period of time.

RB: Would you say you became active in your second semester?

CC: Yes, I would say I became active in February of 1969.

RB: Could you describe the atmosphere the day of the Pierce Hall takeover, like how other students were reacting to it?

CC: Yeah. You know, I came to it, after the fact to be honest with you. I saw the aftermath, and I gathered what was going on after talking with some guys. I don't even know if everybody was from the campus, to be honest with you. I had not seen that many black students. The atmosphere was exciting, electric-ask me again. Maybe I can get to it better.

RB: So the day of what were other students thinking about it?

CC: Some of them were not for it, vocally against it. They thought they shouldn't do that. But others were standing back saying "Yeah, rah rah rah!" including me at that point, as I said, that was my first participation. But really Bob Smith and Kurt Hill, those guys would probably be better to give you an understanding on that. It was my first day on the job I guess (laughs).

MJ: Do you think that there were people who weren't students that day?

CC: Some. I didn't really notice until one of the guys that was involved with us was from Ypsi-Eric Lewis who was a student in Ypsi High at the time-old Ypsi High right here on Cross Street. He told me that day of the oral presentation, that he and some of his buddies came and were up there. One of his teachers was up there too and told him to get the heck out of there. I'm sure there were some extraneous people there saying "what in the world is going on here?" They must have heard all of these police sirens and I'm sure that brought some people to campus also.

RB: Were you ever involved in the discussion with administrations after the takeover?

CC: Yes, I was one of the members of-we called them the deliberations team. We had to-what's the word? There's a hierarchy deliberation- but they called them deliberations and not (pause)-I can't think of the term right now. It will come to me later.

RB: What were you doing to prepare to have these discussions with the administration?

CC: Me, I was more of an observer. Now, as I recall it, Bob Smith and Russell McReynolds were the two principle people who would lay out our side. These guys were outstanding. You know Bob, he's going to be here tomorrow doing a program on campus. He's outstanding. He ended up working for the Charles H. Wright Museum and all that kind of stuff. I learned a lot about the history of this time from him. Russell was, as he put it, the school trained him to be a deliberator. He put it right here. As a matter of fact, one of the things that came out of the deliberations was my job title assistant to the director of student life programs. Russell wrote up the job description for it. To me, that was just amazing. This guy was a senior at the time. The kind of thing these guys could do was just outstanding to me. My job was just to support them, primarily.

RB: What was it like to be in the room with the administration? Was it ever tense? Or were things more laid back? I feel like it would be like a congressional hearing or something where it was really tense.

CC: It got kind of intense. As I recall it, I believe some of the board of regents, or maybe all of them were involved at certain points. I remember President Sponberg, Vice President Nelson Gilden, who was director of Financial Aid and Admissions. A lot of top guys. You would have thought that our side would have been outmatched, or felt like we were outmatched. These guys were calm. I'm giving them credit because I was like "Wow! We're in here with the president and vice president! We're having deliberations with them about things we think should go down on the campus." It got kind of tense, especially if they just shot down something that we said that we thought was paramount. It got real tense one time because simultaneously, the white students who primarily were the anti-war activists were having deliberations. Negotiation, that's the word. We couldn't call them negotiations because whatever we decided-if you negotiate something, it's got to happen. With deliberations, you just discuss it with them and they come back to you to see what they could do. But they were having deliberations at the same time. The school gave us state cars to drive the students to the south side for the breakfast program. Something happened where Lewis Profit, the vice president of financial-money [Lewis Profit was Vice President of Business and Finance] I guess he was the treasurer or controller. He cut out the state cars. During the deliberation with the white students, we just busted in there and gave it to him-Profit. What a great name for the treasurer right? We gave it to him. This time, I was the main guy because we had to get our own cars to get the students over there and I was one of the drivers. I said "Profit, you're taking food out of the hungry children's mouths!" One of the white guys, I think his name was Tim said "up against the wall Chuck! Get him up against the wall!" It got tense from time to time. There was some table pounding and to be honest with you, it was more of us than them doing the table pounding and raised temperatures and attitudes. They were more calm and collected.

RB: How often did you meet with the administration?

CC: That's a good question, going back 150 years it's hard to say (laughs). I'm looking at this picture here, it must have been from 100 years ago. [Coleman references a map of Ypsilanti on display in Halle Library].

RB: I think it is from 1890.

CC: Oh, 1890, it must be a little more than 100 years then (laughs)! I don't know how often it was to be honest with you. Like I said, we had our own and you can see the result. The primary result is the Black Studies-The Department African American Studies and Africology.

MJ: Do you think there were any demands that they were more set against than others?

CC: I would one of the things that one of the things that we insisted was that we would be-One of the demands was increase black faculty and staff. We wanted to determine who those staff members would be. The selection committee, we wanted to do that. That was a real pushback. I would imagine probably the black studies program too, there would be some pushback too. That's a lot of money to start up a whole new program. What I recall was that they did not want us to be on the selection committee.

MJ: I always think about demonstrators or activists having demands and going to something like administration and you just assume administration wouldn't anything to happen because it would already be happening. I don't think that's true, were there some demands where they were like "yeah, of course we'll do this."

CC: That I don't recall. I mean, I don't think that there wasn't anything we said that we didn't get some pushback on. I think that probably in their hearts they realized that they needed to do some more recruiting of black students and more retention programs. Go out and recruit more black faculty and staff members. I believe that, I think they knew that. It's only good for the university really. I don't think there was anything that they just rolled over on, not really. I remember the job, the Assistant to the Director of Student Life Programs, Russell put in there that we wanted two positions. We were discussing that and after that we walked out of the room and I said "who would be the two guys for that job?" Russell "Chuck,they're only going to give us one. You ask for two, and they'll give you one." Some of the stuff we padded also, because we knew that they were going to get chopped. So we asked for more. That was one of the specific things that I recall.

RB: I have some questions about your role. Could you repeat the job title one more time?

CC: Assistant to the Director of Student Life Programs on Minority Affairs. I got \$2.50 an hour. The job title is longer than the money! But that was a lot of money back then. It was the highest student pay rate at the time, that was one of things Russell insisted on.

RB: Do you remember who you reported to?

CC: Tom Otts. He was the first guy. I can't remember the first guy's name. You know how college is a revolving door. Can I tell a story?

RB: Sure.

CC: Okay, at this point once I got the job-matter of fact, technically the black student association's office was on the upstairs in the Mckenny Union. All authorized student organizations had an office in the student union. We had one, it was big enough for a desk and two chairs and a file cabinet. I don't think we even knew it was there, to be honest with you. But when I got the job, that office was down the hall from Tom Otts' office. At this point, we were well acquainted with President Sponberg. Any vice president, we didn't have an appointment, we went straight into their office to talk to them. That's the kind of relationship we had with them. Well, I come to work one day and Tom Otts says "man, I got to apologize to you, but you've worked so many hours, you've run out of-" what's that money they call it?

RB: Work study?

CC: Yeah. "The work study program, you just ran yourself out of it." I said okay and still went to work. I was still going to do the job anyway. I wasn't just working, it was part of responsibility for my other organizations. So I went to what was called our black student association office in Starkweather Hall with the Black Campus Service Corps headquarters and I mentioned it to John Sanford and Floyd Walton, who happened to be there. I said "man, they're not gonna pay me any more, but I'm gonna keep reporting." The next day, I came into the office, and apparently John and Floyd had a meeting with Sponberg. They mentioned to him that my money had run out. The next day, Tom Otts' face was flushed. He said "Chuck, I just got off the phone with the president. He's never called me before! I doubt if he could pick me out of a line up. But he told me not to ever let your money run out." He had a batch of money in his-president's gotta pocket full of money somewhere. He said "he's gonna pay you out of there. If you have any trouble Chuck, you come to me and let me know. I've never talked to the president before!" But we were going into his office anytime we wanted to, it was no big deal to us. Not being grown up, having worked thirty hours for an organization, I've never been in the president's office. I retired from DTE energy. I've met the president, but I've never been to his office. I look back and think "I guess that was a pretty big deal." Shoot, we just went into his office, no appointment or anything.

MJ: What was Sponberg like?

CC: Sponberg was tough. I remember an article written in regards to what was going on campus. You gotta remember, it wasn't just black students, it was the Vietnam War. I was here for four years and I think there was some kind of strike three of those years-or some kind of event. '69 was the student takeover. '70 or '71 I believe it was when the anti war protests attempted to shut the school down.

RB: Oh, the SLAM strike. 1970.

CC: Oh yeah, that's right. What was it?

RB: SLAM strike.

CC: What year was it?

RB: 1970.

CC: Okay, it was '70. The next year, not the faculty, but the staff like cleaning crew and cooks and all that, they went on strike. It was just like every year. The paper said they referred to Sponberg as president from the old days who ran the school as if it was in his vest pocket. He would hand favors, if he desired so. He was a tough guy. But at the same time, just like I said, he wouldn't let my money run out. I remember a good friend of mine-another roommate of mine, his nickname was Doc. He ended up being a medical doctor. He and I went over to Jones Hall to visit. The president's house used to be right next door to Jones Hall. We went over that direction. I said "Hey, that's Sponberg." He was tipsy. He came out and wanted to talk. He was talking and my buddy said "I'm here and I'm having a hard time financially. I need a scholarship." He said "you play football?" and my friend said "no, I don't play sports, I'm pre-med." He said "come to the office Monday morning." Now, he was good and tipsy, but he came to his office that Monday and he gave him a scholarship. Sure did. He wasn't all tough. Now, I imagine under different circumstances he probably would have been a really easy guy. We called him "old weird Harold" after one of Bill Cosby's characters. We didn't call him that but that's what they called him in the *Second Coming*, the radical newspaper. We picked it up too. He was a tough guy. But we had total access to him and if he said he was going to do something, he did it pretty much.

RB: Going back to your job, what were your responsibilities as the assistant to the director?

CC: I was to develop programs, projects, and activities designed to have a positive impact among the minority students on the campus.

RB: What exactly does that entail?

CC: Cultural programs. Here again, I had no idea what I was supposed to be doing, so I went back to Inkster. My buddy ran the Malcolm X Cultural Center. I don't know if I've given you his name before but it was Dontrell Woods. He ran the Malcolm X Cultural Center. That's when they broke in the old building and took it over and set it up. They used to have great cultural programs, jazz programs, drums, dancing, all African dancing, they had karate exhibitions. So I went to them "Man where do you get these guys from?" He told me "go down to the-"what was the name of it? There was a place in Detroit off of Woodward on the north end. It was a building

with activities always going. I went down there, saw some of the acts, got their names and phone numbers and had them do programs for us. Basically that's what I did. We would write different position papers I guess, that would black students or minority students-minority students was a word that we used that meant black back then- minority students need remedial training in English and composition. I wrote that up and gave that to my boss. Pretty much it was cultural programs and activities. If a guy came to me and said he wanted to have a communist speaker on campus. Come on now, we'll do that. We don't get much of that. We can do that. I remember this one guy-I was putting up a flier for one of our activities and he came up to me railing about the Armenian Massacre. I had never heard of it before. He was just railing and I said "let's talk about it." He wanted to argue and fuss. I would have put the program on! I didn't know that the Turks had done that, they say they didn't. But I didn't know that history and I would have put it on if that guy talked to me and told me about some people to contact. My favorite program was-the first thing I did was-the only real program I remember that existed for the Black Student Association was the Black Queen Contest. First thing I did was cancel that contest. I said "we're not going to have sisters competing against each other. The queen who will win will be light skinned, blue eyed and blonde hair. So we're not going to do that. We are going to have a tribute to Black women." So we had guys doing poems and musical tributes and all kinds of stuff. I'm sorry I can't remember too many details, because we're going back 50 years. Those are some of the programs I say we put on. I never put on a program myself. I never was out front doing speaking. I always preferred being a producer or in the background.

RB: Did you ever collaborate with the Black Student Association on creation of these programs?

CC: Absolutely. I would tell them what I had planned and they would help me do it along with the funds coming from student life programs. But any assistant, manpower-you wouldn't say manpower today, people power would come from Black Student Association itself. Of course, some of the members would put on programs themselves. I did do another big program. It was an anti-drug program. "Skag ain't dope, it's death." Actually, I had my uncle come on campus to do that program. He was a recovering heroin addict. He came up and brought one of his buddies. I think his name was Watts, from the Sociology Department. I think he might have been the moderator. I have some other guys that I can't remember. That was a nice program. I remember this one program too. One of our demands was a Coordinator of Minority Affairs. When she got on campus, she complained to me that the black students didn't know she was on campus. I said "okay, we'll do a focus program. We're gonna focus on this department." I had a program at Jones Goddard, a program at Best, Wise, Buell, Downing and I had a program at Walton, Phelps, Sellers, at the same time. They were running simultaneously. I picked someone from Jones Hall to be the moderator and somebody from-also on the hill. We also had the hill, it was built while we were here. I had four different programs going. I would start at Jones at 7:00 and then by 9:00 it was over and I wanted to make sure everything was doing good. I wanted the students to know that these are your support staff. Come out and meet these people. Especially Rosita Dorsey who was the admission and financial aid officer. She was great, she was our Angela Davis. I did that kind of program too. It wasn't just cultural programs. I tried to do

some practical stuff too. Black Solidarities Days, that was the name of that! I wanted to make sure that all of the black students were unified. That was mostly a cultural program.

MJ: I looked at some information on that. Nikki Giovanni was here, Alex Haley was here.

CC: That was after though. Both of them were after me because Roots didn't come out until '76 or '77.

RB: Alex Haley came to campus in 1977.

CC: I didn't have any idea who Nikki Giovanni was when I was in school. She might have been in school (laughs). Both of them were later. I was the one who coined Black Solidarities days. They still use it? That's awesome.

MJ: I'm not sure if they do, I just came across the file with a lot of the files with a lot of the programming and fliers.

RB: Were these programs well received, well attended?

CC: Some of them were, some of them were not. My words would be that the large group of black students were pretty apathetic to be honest with you. From time to time, they would come out for big events like the tribute to black women that were really well attended. The Black solidarity days were really well attended too. Some of the other stuff, not so much. Even when I set up those programs in the dorms, people didn't come out a lot of the time. There was a lot of apathy. You even see it at the voting polls, you'll only get a percentage of the registered voters out, even though we had a good turnout this midterm election. I would say that was even a historic turn out. But normally, you don't get a large percentage of people, you know. Then ten years later they will go "I was there. I did this." No, I ran into a guy in Atlanta who was a friend of my cousins. My cousin and him were talking about doing business. I ran into him and said "man, don't I know you from Eastern? Weren't you involved with the black student association?" He said "oh yeah, I was the president from '68 to '72 and I was this and I was that." I was like "Okay, you were involved in '67, '68." I didn't actually say that to him but he was like "I did this and did that." Oh, yeah, okay. When we left I said "Cuz, that dude's a liar." He said "Okay, good. I've been having trouble with him. I won't go into business with him." But you find a lot of people like that "we did this and we did that." Hmm. You sat there and watched buddy. Even some of the people who Rosita Dorsey-she was an admissions and financial aid counselor-she would go out and recruit specific guys for us. One guy started a student walk out in high school. She recruited him because she wanted him here to work with us. But he sat on the sideline, talking about an armchair quarterback and an armchair activist, same thing. We had a lot of that. The people that you saw, those were the people who actually put themselves out there. A couple of them were from Canada, and they faced deportation. Matter of fact, if they got arrested-they were in Pierce hall-if they got arrested, they would have been deported. But they took that chance because to them, it was serious. Lot of people didn't.

MJ: Were there many black students who didn't support the takeover?

CC: Probably the majority of black students didn't support it. They may not have been vocal about it but if you talk to them it was like "Man, what y'all doing? Y'all crazy." Lot of them felt like that. It was a lot of individualism. It's all about me, me, me as opposed to doing something for someone else. The generation down the line-most of this stuff we were doing never benefited us. We never saw the black studies program in effect. They started bringing more black students and they started recruiting black faculty and staff by the time we left. We didn't get to see the benefit. But it wasn't about us. It was the right thing to do and the right time to do it. That's how we looked at it. Now, there's one thing I have to say before I leave. Nobody ever said that they were president of the BSA. Nobody ever said "I'm the president." We didn't rule by decree. It was a team. If you had an idea, you had to defend that idea and if people agreed with it they would do it. There were several voiceforus arguments in our meetings. But when we went to deliberations in front of the administrations, you'd have never known. It was a total unified effort. It wasn't about "my idea, they don't want to do my idea, so I won't support anything." If we agreed on something, whether you agreed or not, you were going to do it or you had to go somewhere else. The best team I ever worked with was these guys. Me, myself, personally, I feel like I'm a regular, normal, average guy from Inkster who met some above average people at an extraordinary time and we were able to do some great things. That's how I like to look at it. It wasn't about the individual, but the unit. What's the term? Synergy. Oh man, the synergy was awesome. What we could do together was awesome. But one problem is that they spoiled me. Once I got out of the university setting, I started dealing with these knuckleheads. If I had a problem on the job I couldn't go to them to get it solved. I didn't trust them. I never met a group of people and been associated with a group of people like this again. It was awesome, these guys are awesome.

RB: I have a question going back to programming for the Black Solidarities Days and the Tributes to Black Women. Those programs were successful and very well attended. Was the attendance mostly just students of color or did white attend these kinds of programs?

CC: Not those programs for the most part. I guess we were separate but equal back then. There wasn't a whole lot of animosity but it was more like "this is my place and that is your place." Everybody back then had either an actual railroad or a proverbial railroad track that separated the black side of town from the white side of town. Even in Detroit, even back then. That's how it was in Inkster. There was a railroad track just south of Michigan Avenue that separated the Black community from the White community. We didn't fight one another, we just didn't have anything to do with each other. They got their programs, we had our programs. We had our groceries store, they had their grocery store. We had our doctors, they had their doctors. We took that attitude to school.

MJ: You had your homecoming and they had theirs, right?

CC: Uh, did we have our own homecoming then?

MJ: Wasn't there a black homecoming?

CC: You might be right. When I first got up there, I didn't do a lot. I guess I was apathetic too. You might be right about that. I know that there was black homecoming later on but I don't know if we had it when I first got there or not. Oh, I'm sorry- I know that they had a black homecoming queen, so I imagine they had black homecoming program. Some of those guys were still around when I saw them. I knew them from just being around. I was just getting involved and they were getting ready to leave. There was a lot of animosity. A few of them came, like I mentioned, I had some communist programs. There was a black communist named John Porter I believe. There was a white dude on campus-that was my man Ed Mattos. If you didn't come across his name, they probably struck it from the record (laughs). He was a definite militant man. Matter of fact that night that I told you about how me and my buddy ran into Sponberg, Mattos walked up and Sponberg looked at him "You are not supposed to be on campus! I will call the campus police." He took off (laughs) ! He was not supposed to be on campus at all. But that was my man. He was with the SWP, the Socialist Workers Party. He would bring some guys and I would put a program together. We had some white cats out for that, but for the most part, not really. And it wasn't really geared to them. It was geared to black folks. There wasn't any animosity like I said. It was pretty straight up.

RB: So when I was doing research for the interview I saw this document in the Sponberg papers. It was a letter that you wrote.

CC: Really?

RB: Yeah. It was about the creation of classes to bridge the achievement gap for black students. Could you describe how you became interested in that process? Because we know that he had multiple copies of it in his records.

CC: I remember writing something like that for my boss. What happened is when they first agreed to have the job, they said "okay Chuck, here is your director or manager. Everything you do, you have to write a report on everything you do." I guess it wasn't a report but a proposal. "After you are done then write a report." So I started writing stuff. He said "okay, cut that out." He was reading too much. I had no problem with it, they had taught me to write at Inkster High and here, so I didn't have a problem. If they wanted me to do it, I would. I guess that was one of the things. Was it English?

RB: Yeah.

CC: And that ended up in Sponberg's papers? Really. I believe that was a proposal or a report to my boss. I don't think it was Tom Otts, it must be the first guy.

RB: Okay I was just curious about the creation of classes but you were in charge of programs. How did it work out?

CC: Well, I was a member of the black student association and one of the leaders. I really didn't separate the responsibility. I was a member of the association, I was part of the campus service corps, I was in the Breakfast program and I had my 9 to 5 to do too. I'm sorry, if you come across, I would love a copy of it.

RB: Yeah, I can dig that out.

CC: I would love that.

RB: I have a few conclusion questions. Because you were involved in all of these different organizations and your job and stuff, how did you balance being a student?

CC: Well, all of the activism was one thing as far as I'm concerned. My personal responsibility was x but my buddy's responsibility was y, so I would help him with y and he would help me with x which meant I wouldn't have to work so hard. If I have five things to do, and I give you one and you one and other guys some, I could coordinate and I wouldn't have to do a whole lot. I had a simple system for studying that I would tell other students. Go to class, take good notes, redo the notes as soon as possible after class while it is still fresh in your mind, and do the homework. That's at least going to get you a C right there (laughs). That was my attitude. That's how I did it. I was in the upward bound program in high school and they helped with developing studying habits and all of that stuff. I never missed a party, matter of fact, I gave a whole bunch of parties. But during study time, I had to knock that out first. After the job and other responsibilities, there is still time for Saturday night.

MJ: I think it was Floyd who said that being an activist made him a better student. Did you feel like that?

CC: I would have to say that's probably right. I felt like I had more of a stake or something in it. I felt in the back of my mind that if I flunked out then maybe I wasn't supposed to be here or something. Here I was pounding on the desk and that can of stuff. I was the kind of guy who did that, it was my job to disrupt things. I would pound on the desk trying to throw off Sponberg while the other guys got some sensible stuff in. He's right about that. I could agree to that. To me, it was all the same thing. It was all one thing.

RB: What positive changes were you able to see after all of the activism you had done on campus?

CC: I saw black faculty and staff come in that were professional men and women who blew my socks off. I don't know Okafor that well but Ron Woods is very impressive to me-Just to see him To see that Rosita Dorsey, just so professional. Roselle Davenport ended up being the

Coordinator of Minority Affairs, the second one I think. I had left when she got that position, but she was here and I knew her and I knew she was committed. It was awesome to see that the department has a master's program, it's just awesome to me. Seeing these black students going to Eastern, it's awesome to me. I love when her black students say "where are you going to go to college?" "Oh, I am going to Eastern." Oh, man, that's awesome. I was a Huron. You're going to be an eagle. It is just heartwarming to see that and to know that I had a part in starting that process. Some of that stuff happened when I was here. To know that we would get up early in the morning, I can't fathom doing that now. I wouldn't even recommend a student do that today. My daughter came up to Eastern and graduated. She's an educator in Ypsilanti as a matter of fact in a charter school. I would have never told her to get up at five o'clock in the morning and take herself to the south side to cook breakfast for the kids and be a big sister to them. But to do it then, it was such an extraordinary time. My thing is if change is needed, and you are there, you should be the agent of change. That's why you're there, especially if you know it's supposed to be done, do it or give it a heck of a try. I don't know if that answers your question. I forgot the question.

RB: No, that's fine. That's okay.

MJ: That was a great answer.

RB: If you had to boil it down to one thing, what would you say was your greatest contribution to Eastern?

CC: I would have to say the participation in the campus service corps activities. I should toot my own horn and say all of the programs I put on, but nah. If I'm being honest with you, it wasn't those programs I put on. I would go to one guy, he would tell me where to go, and here let's put it together and I'll organize it. That wasn't a big deal to me. But to go on the south side of Ypsilanti, to me, we literally took the school to the community. That was one of our goals. It wasn't a demand or a deliberation. We just wanted to open up the university to the community and let the south side guys come over and play basketball in Warner gym and all that kind of stuff. The one thing, it would have been the big brother big sister program and the breakfast program. To see those little guys, they looked up to you. I took them to Inkster and they got to meet my cousins who were their age and they got to play and all that kind of stuff. It made me whole.

RB: Those are my questions. Do you have any other questions?

MJ: I don't think so. I will say that I know that an issue that universities have today is just bridging the gap between themselves and the community around them. It's still hard. So, that is an accomplishment to go out there and do it yourselves.

CC: When I parked over here in the Mckenny union parking lot-I still say Mckenny Union. I was looking at the library and thought "look at that big beautiful building." I'm sure it's steel, brick,

and concrete but that's stodgy though. Stodgy doesn't go anywhere. Stodgy stays right here, and you come to it. That's the mentality especially in the 50s and 60s with administration, especially Sponberg. "This is my place, you come through me. If I deem it proper." No, man, let the little kids run wild up here. Let's have some fun up here. It's put in their head "I want to go to school, this school in my backyard." Let's get some funds together so that these kids don't have to get a hundred thousand dollar loan to go school and most of them don't even graduate. Then they have a 100,000 dollar debt. Even if you do graduate, you get a \$30,000, \$40,000 job to start off with. How do you pay that? We said "come on, let's put this together." After I left there, I found out that there are schools like LSU. I played basketball on LSU's campus. I played at the University of Windsor. I played softball, basketball and touch football on Wayne State's campus. That was great to me. I don't know if they have that even today at Eastern. I know my grandson did play a lot off campus. I don't know how much they have opened it up today. To me that's what should be. It should be an open campus. You have to have security, I understand that. I get Trump, you can't have everyone just walking in (laughs). Let me get off of that. But you can't just have anybody just doing anything, I understand that. But it should open to the point where the community should be able to use the university. That's not only good for the community, but it's great for the campus as well.

RB: Anything else for the record.

CC: Yes. I want to thank you guys. I want to thank Eastern Michigan University, the president, the archivists and the interviewers for showing interest in this 50 year old stuff. Really, you guys have been great towards us. The school has had us up here to my knowledge several times. We were back here in '89 for the twenty year anniversary. I forgot about it, but there was a document that showed it. But I really do. I appreciate that there is appreciation for the things that we did and it hasn't been forgotten. A college has a revolving door. Were it not for the archives, they wouldn't have any idea that all this happened. It's great and I just want to thank you very much and thank you for your attention.

RB: Thank you.

CC: It's nothing to me. Even back then, to me, it was something I was supposed to do. I was there, and the opportunity was there. Today, if I was coming out of high school, I would have probably gone to a black college. But in 1968, it was the best decision I made. I'm so glad. I got accepted at Michigan State and Western, but Eastern gave me money. I'm so glad. I had the experience of my life. I was on my own, in a protected environment and I was able to, with my friends, accomplish some pretty important things. I'll leave it at that.

MJ: We're glad you got accepted too.

RB: Thank you again. We appreciate it.