Lucile Miller

Interviewed by Ruth Doyle on March 16, 1984 at an unknown location.

Oral history tape number: 5

It's March 16. Now, Miss Miller, could you repeat some of those things that you said to us before, about how your family happened to come to Madison.

Well, when my father [William Martin Miller, Sr.] graduated from Berea College, from Berea, Kentucky – the college that was founded in 1855, an integrated college – he came to Chicago to study law. His uncles had moved there and had been there since the Civil War. In the summertime he would come to Milwaukee to work in the old Plankington House. There he met Mr. La Follette and they became friendly. Mr. La Follette liked him and he admired Mr. La Follette, because he was a legal scholar. Even though his family was furious – they wanted him to stay there and finish law – he wanted to come and get the experience of working for somebody like Mr. La Follette, so he came to Madison.

He brought your mother here?

Well, my mother [Anna Mae Stewart Miller] had met him when she went with his cousin to Daddy's graduation, and their friendship started then. Momma was educated at Kentucky Normal and Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee, and she was teaching at the Kentucky State Reformatory. Then she decided to marry him and come to Madison. So she came up to Chicago and Daddy came down from Madison and his mother came from Cincinnati. He was an only child. His mother came from Cincinnati [for the wedding] and they were married there in Chicago. Then they came to Madison. They spent their honeymoon at the Henderson's farm that was out there on the Beltline, in 1903.

How many children did your parents have?

Six.

Did they really? Six children?

Yes. Two boys and four girls. Now there are three of us left.

What did you do as a job? Where did you go to school? I'd be interested to know. You were one of maybe a handful of black families in Madison at the time.

I went to Lincoln, up on Gorham Street. In the South, people would talk about that the Northern white people were trash. When Momma was going to marry Daddy and come here, the white people in the South were just horrified: She'd be up there with all this white trash. That's what got Momma so worried when it was time for me to go to school.

Were you their oldest child?

Yes. It happened that her doctor was Dr. [Sarah] Geraldine Vernon. Dr. Vernon was one of the early women doctors in Madison. Dr. Vernon had told Momma that she debated whether she would take the case or not. Somebody had recommended [her to my mother]. She had never come in contact with colored people before and she was kind of worried about that. Then she said she decided she would. She was glad she did because they became very good friends – so much so that my sister Geraldine was named for Dr. Vernon. Her house is still up there on Hancock [Street]. Then Dr. Vernon convinced Momma that it would be all right for me to go to public school. By then, you see, I was a year older than I should have been going into first grade.

While your mother was deciding.

Yes. So then I went into first grade with Geraldine, my sister. I wasn't competing with her and I

never realized it. You see, she was a very good student and I was a very poor student. Momma was climbing the wall all the time about that. Geraldine was the only girl in the 1923 class who took math all four years.

This is at Central High?

Yes. Madison, it was then. That was the only high school. I think in 1922 they built East. Was it East or West?

East came first.

Yes. Ted Pierce was the first colored that went out there. You see, then there was Verna Mae Hill, me, and Geraldine, and Ardelia [Butts Farmer].

Ardelia?

Farmer. Ardelia. I don't know if you ever heard of Mr. [Benjamin] Butts or not. He worked out at the Historical Society, at the library. He was a little drummer boy brought up from some place in the South during the Civil War to Richland Center, and from Richland Center Mr. Butts came to Madison when he was seventeen. He had learned the barber trade and he taught a lot of the older barbers the trade. Mr. [Herman] Singer, who had a barber shop up there on the corner of Blair, on Blount and Johnson, he [Mr. Butts] had taught him the barber trade. Well, then afterwards Mr. Butts went on to the Historical Society, the library, and worked there.

He was married to a woman [Amy Roberts Butts] who came from I don't know where, but she was originally Wisconsin. They lived on Dayton Street, in the 600 block. Their son Leo was an early graduate of the University of Wisconsin school of pharmacy. Leo played football out there all those years they didn't have any colored football. He graduated from Madison High School.

When they founded the AME Church, they moved that church down from up there on Hancock and Johnson Street. That's Bethel now. It was Bethel then. They moved it. You see, that's when the AME Church, the African Methodist Church, was there on Dayton Street. The Buttses, Mrs. Butts was the Methodist, joined their church then.

Did you belong to that church?

My Dad was one of the founders in 1902. Then the Buttses were neighbors. The Weavers bought a house on that block for an investment. He had a store up there on Mifflin Street. And the Hendersons bought a house in that block for an investment. And the church was there. See, Daddy was devoted to that church. Momma always said that Daddy loved the church next to his family. They had bought some property next door. Daddy was sick and one of the men came to tell him that the mortgage had been foreclosed. Momma said "No, don't tell him. He can't do anything about it now." You know, it would just upset him. He died not knowing that they lost that property.

That the Church had lost it?

Yes. She didn't want him to know it. He couldn't do anything about it.

How big a church was it when it was founded? It was all black people, I assume.

No, there were some whites. Mr. Miller, he was a man that wasn't black. He was always active in the church. And then there were one or two others. There was another one in the Salvation Army. I can't remember. She was there. But that's what it was: St. Paul African Methodist

Episcopal Church.

It must have been a very tiny congregation.

It was. You see, Mrs. [Martha] Henderson had been raised in the Episcopal church, but she left it to come to our church. And Mr. Butts, when he came to Madison, there were practically no colored people here. He belonged to the First Methodist Church and it was up there on Wisconsin Avenue.

Yes. Where it is now? It's a new building.

Well, yes, it's a different building. You know what he would do? In those days they had stoves in the church. He would clean our church, make the fire on Sunday morning, then go home and change his clothes and wash up. He did that all his life. He never did join. Mrs. Butts did, but he never did. But he always did that for the Church. You never had to worry: Mr. Butts was always there.

Did the church, I gather, became an important social contact?

Well, I don't know. Yes, in a way, and in a way it wasn't. Yes, maybe it was that. Most of the people then were people who were former slaves. But they were different from the ones now. They had a lot more pride. Yes, they were all together different. They weren't telling how black and disadvantaged they were. If they were disadvantaged, that was something that you didn't hear about. I mean, they didn't go around talking about that. And they weren't as highly sensitive as people are now.

Did they have a good choir? Did they have an organ in the church?

Yes. One of them that I always remember was Mrs. [Mary Cattron] Horton. She loved to sing. But they didn't sing these songs that they sing now.

They sang regular Protestant hymns?

Yes.

I remember Mamie Anderson, who was a friend of mine, was a beautiful singer.

Yes. Well, you see, they were Wisconsin. They were from down this way. They were born in Wisconsin. I went to our church here not so long ago and they had those gospel singers. I almost fainted. They would have never had them back in those days.

You mean they were real jazzy singers?

Oh! They would have never... of course, now you can't say anything. But I sat back there and thought, "Oh, if Momma could hear this, would she ever... " And Mrs. Butts, oh! They wouldn't know how to accept it. They really wouldn't.

And Mrs. Horton?

Well, Mrs. Horton would have kind of been wishy-washy on it.

Wasn't there a Horton man, a composer, a famous musician?

That wasn't any kin of them. Mrs. Horton was originally from Beloit and her mother evidently and her parents evidently came up from [unclear]. Her mother was one of the most dignified women I have [ever known], black or white. She was just a wonderful person. Well, you see, so many of those people that come from [unclear] migrated here in Wisconsin and they were all

together different from the ones that come now.

When you and your sister Geraldine started at Lincoln School, I'd be interested to know how you found it. Did you enjoy it?

I don't remember being mistreated. No, I really don't. Everybody is digging up how bad they fared. Now, this was something that happened when I was in Lincoln School. I was in seventh grade, in World War I, and you know Mr. La Follette, his family was against World War I.

He was run out of town practically.

Yes, [unclear]. We had Mrs. Eagan. [She] was the patriot. They had the kids doing everything. We bought stamps and we did all kinds of things. Red Cross and all. Well, I didn't do any of it. I refused to do it because I wasn't for the war. I maybe couldn't explain it, but I wasn't supporting war. Period. I didn't do any of it. Well, when it came time to finish seventh grade, they said I hadn't finished it. In the summertime we went to the country. That meant every morning I had to get up early and go to summer school.

How did you get in from the country?

Well, Daddy had a horse and buggy. One time he had a car. They were just first getting cars then. Then I went in eighth grade and when it came time to graduate from eighth grade, they said I hadn't finished.

That was because you hadn't done the war project?

Yes, that's what they said. But Momma and Daddy decided I had. So they went to... my color didn't come into it.

But your opinions did.

Yes. A lot of people would have said they did it to me. I'm glad I didn't know that. I'm glad all these were not here that are here now who would have been telling me every other minute, "They're doing it because you're black. They're doing it because of the blacks." My parents wouldn't have gone along with black, because they weren't black, I mean in color. They went to Mr. Dudgeon.

He was the superintendent, wasn't he?

Yes. He studied it and he decided I had finished eighth grade. Color had... I often think of that now. That never occurred...

Never thought of it.

No. Nobody. No. I cannot say that that ever came into it, the color. Now it would be a whole lot of confusion about it because you were black, this and that. I think it is too bad. You see that segregation and discrimination has caused people to think that every time you do something to them, it's because they're colored. That's wrong. I can't go along with all these racists. I don't care if they're black or white. I can't make excuses for them just because they're black. That's what they almost want you to do now.

Don't you think maybe it's improving some now?

Well, I get awful discouraged.

I have this program that I work with at the campus with the black students. I'm just amazed how

well they've done and how those who have graduated from law school are well situated, working hard.

They're not here in Madison.

Some of them.

Well, all the Negroes that I knew who came to Wisconsin, back when I was younger, they were all very upper-class Negroes. They didn't dwell on their color. They recognized what it was all about. They knew what their problems were, but they just didn't keep it going, you know, every time you saw them "somebody this, that."

Now I know a little colored girl she said to me, she goes to East... that man is a Negro, the principal out there, and I understand that he treats all the kids the same. He's not treating the white ones any different than the way he treats the black ones. She thinks he treats them different and that he isn't as nice to them as he is to the white ones. Well, I've had people tell me different. You see, that's what segregation and discrimination has done to so many people: it's caused them to... they really don't have the same standards.

One of the main troubles, I think, in Madison is that they still don't have enough open housing.

What about the housing? What happened to it? They passed a law.

They passed a law, yes. But there still is... it's probably economic partly.

Yes. I probably would be considered a bigot, but I'm not for all these women... one day [unclear] this colored woman – she was a great big fat one and she had two children and no husband and another one coming on the way – she had all kinds of complaints – the housing and this and that. So I said to her, "Well, where are you from?" "Gary, Indiana." I said "Well, you've got a Negro mayor there and everything should be..." You see, here she was. She brought her problem here. Why don't she stay in Gary with it? That's what I think has caused a lot of the trouble. These people, like here, they'll sit and say "[unclear]". The white community isn't educated. They think all these people live over here at Bayview; the word is out that all these colored women come in here with children and living on welfare. Then they tell me there's some places out on Simpson Street where there's quite a few and they're on welfare. I thought we worked for open housing.

Yes, we did.

I thought we had it.

It's true that the population has scattered some. But since the schools can't...

Well, that's the part that I... now, when my nephew Jackie bought a house – they wanted their own house – he bought a house out in South Madison, on Van Dusen. A couple of his neighbors are fellows that he had originally gone to Central with, to school. Well, now there are eighty colored children. I got all excited at first and I didn't want him to go there. My Grandma didn't want us in Chicago going into schools with all these colored people that came up from plantations. I said "Oh, they're here. They'll be going there and nothing but trouble." Well, Jackie says he's going, because he wants them to know all kinds of people. That's true, but he would have a better opportunity of knowing all kinds of people than we had. Longfellow was a mixture of everything. Momma didn't want her grandchildren going there. We were safe over where we were. Well, he bought a house out there.

On Van Dusen?

Yes. It's a house that formerly [belonged to] the Hamm family. They were early Madison, South Madison. There's another two or three other fellows that he knows. His next-door neighbor, he went to Central with him. They weren't colored; they were white. He feels comfortable in that, and he liked that old house. That's what he wanted. I think to a certain degree they are spread around, but I think the people that are... that's why I was trying to find out if there are any apartments here where they're all colored.

I don't think there are any where they're all colored. I think there are sort of concentrations of black children still in those south side schools – so much so that the federal government said it was not an integrated school.

Well, they have eighty some children at Franklin and there are over two hundred, so it isn't a predominantly black school.

No. It's a forty percent or something.

Yes. I would prefer that to busing kids all over town. For instance, my sister Caroline has taught in Negro schools, and she's also taught in Ohio. She taught in an all-white. In New York she taught in all-white. Freddie Mae Hill, when she graduated from the university, she couldn't get a job. She taught at Tuskegee and Kansas City, and that was hard. Well, her sister Justina has taught in the South and the main problem that Jess has, that an all segregated school there has – she was telling me that last night – is that they don't give them the same equipment.

You can see that in the big cities.

That's what they don't do.

But in Madison they do.

It's just like my sister, C. A.'s father, my sister's husband, Mr. Johnson, was the Negro supervisor of two of them in Columbia, South Carolina. They say with some of these colored ones and some of the white ones that they hire here, he wouldn't have hired them. Caroline taught there. The reason why I think Columbia must have had a good school is because every one of his children, he had two boys and, I guess, five girls, they all went on to graduate school and they all finished. They all got master's. And like C. A., he was an exception in science.

Your mother taught before she was married but not after.

No. But the point about it... and that's one thing that I will know to fact. A woman that was a friend of mine, she was white, she had, I don't know, some trouble. Anyway, she had to go back to work. She had a rooming house here. What she did, she could go back to the university and get a master's and then get a job here. Well, Momma wouldn't have been able to do that. You see what I mean? That's why Freddie and Gerald and all of them were colored and Jimmie Tyler that graduated from the university here, they had gone through the public schools here [but] they couldn't get a job here.

They had to leave Madison.

Yes. Even jobs in the state, you had to... these colored people who are here now have much better opportunities in that way than we had. But I don't think we have as much bitterness.

How do you account for that? How do you account for the fact that the people, like your mother and father and other people, were not bitter? And didn't raise their families to be bitter?

I think it's because of their intelligence.

Yes, their own dignity.

Yes. Momma thought she was as good as anybody. She had had a good relationship with white people in [unclear]. You know what they would do? My mother and her two sisters would ride first-class so they know what they were. The white people that knew them would see them and speak and wouldn't say "You head in back." But some colored person would be sitting there... that's what segregation has done. They'd be sitting in and used to sit around stations in the South and sit in the front and they would say "Mrs. Anna Mae, you're getting on the wrong coach." Momma would say to them, "You shut your mouth and tend to your business." They'd go right on. Well, some white person that knew them, and the ones that would know them would be the upper ones, they would say "Oh, Anna Mae." They wouldn't say what are you doing in here?"

They just liked her.

Yes, yes. And they were, you know, like kin.

She never permitted herself to be...

No. So while they were there, they didn't sit around. You see, Daddy was always interested in solving a problem, not just coming up all the time with it. I really didn't grow up feeling inferior. I mean, I knew all about it. I knew all the Negro history and I knew all about slavery. That's one thing I must say for my grandmother.

You had two grandmothers?

Yes. The Millers were people that thought there was nobody superior to them. My other grandma, she was more quiet. My aunts, they don't think anybody was inferior to them either. Grandma and Uncle Jimmie, I can't imagine them ever thinking they were inferior. They didn't have that appearance at all, period. That, I think, helped. When somebody is sitting around telling you about how people treated them... Whatever the Millers' life in slavery was, they didn't relay it to us.

One incident that I always remember quite well was when we were visiting in Kentucky, in Richmond, and I was a little girl. Uncle Jimmie and a friend of his were going to see the Millers. The Millers evidently were the ones that we had been owned in slavery. Well, they went to see them. We all three went. We went to the door and rang the doorbell. This little colored girl, the maid or something, she was there. When she saw who it was, she ran back and hid. Then she would run and peek around the corner. It made Uncle Jimmie so mad he started swearing at her. The woman of the house heard and she came running down the steps. "Jimmie, Jimmie, Jimmie." She threw her arms around him and kissed him. You see, that was their relationship with the Millers. When their father came out of slavery, he bought a farm. Well, you know, it's just like C. A.'s grandfather.

Who's C. A.?

That's my sister's husband, in Columbia, South Carolina, in Fayetteville, really. He bought land and now they have over a thousand acres of land. Here a few years ago they celebrated the hundredth year of Hodges owning that land. The governor sent a letter. All the prominent people in South Carolina sent congratulations. They have a booklet. I said to C. A., "I wished I had it to show you." He said "That's not Wisconsin." I said "No, but it shows." Now his mother is ninety-two years old and, you know, some of those Hodges, one old-maid daughter, are still on that

land. They have not [unclear], and they've got good housing. In fact, when Ethel, when she had been here in graduate school, when she would talk about the man who was superintendent of schools there in Columbia, well, you know, it just was a real good friend of theirs. Regardless of the people that they had, he was a good friend of theirs.

Doesn't it hurt you some to see these caucuses on television where the Democrats in the Southern states don't seat the black and white people at the same meeting?

No. Can you imagine whatcha call it – the one that was often in jail down there – Jesse Jackson.

George Wallace, yes. I think Jesse Jackson is making a great contribution to get these people registered to vote.

I'm not real crazy about him.

I like him. I think he's charming.

Well, a friend of mine who was a librarian here, she kind of knew him. Somehow or other, I don't know, I think there's something about him that I don't like.

I like him, but I don't think he's really qualified to be president. He hasn't had the right kind of experience.

No. What I've been worried about is the fact that he had that education program and he didn't do anything with it. That's what I think he would have proved himself. He has a terrific ego and I think he's on an ego trip. He isn't like Dr. King.

No. Or Andrew Young.

No, no. He isn't like them. He isn't in their... he's got a lot more... but yet he is making true points.

He got ten and twenty percent for the vote.

Yes, he is. And when they say it couldn't be done, it can be. That's the one thing I appreciate about him.

All the black mayors and legislators that we've seen as our delegates and so on. They're not necessarily supporting him, but there are so many office holders.

Oh, so many more. When you think of Birmingham. Well, you know, one thing my mother always said, she said "You knew exactly where the Southern whites... he wasn't a hypocrite and so you didn't have to fear him on that basis. If they were your friend, they were your friend."

Did your brothers and sisters stay in Madison generally?

Yes. Nobody went. Caroline went and that's what upset my mother. Well, DuBois, my youngest brother, he wasn't [unclear]. Everybody said Dr. Miller was the first Negro to get his Ph.D. He was an M. D. and then he came here and got his Ph.D. in pharmacology. He told Momma, "Let DuBois stay and don't keep worrying about him."

But my other brother, everybody thought William was going on to school in chemistry. When he was sick – he had cancer – and he was married, one day I was talking to him on the phone. He said "I made my life and it's all my fault." I said "Yes. Your grandma wanted to send you to the University of Chicago and she never got over it." He said "Well, here was Momma and Grandma, two women, and I just didn't want to be ordered." I said "Listen! Grandma, when she could have said, 'my grandson is this or that,'" I said "that's all she wanted." I said one time

I had said something about Daddy, and she said "Well, you don't forget. I saw that he finished and helped him." "No," I said "Grandma wanted it and Momma certainly wanted it." It certainly upset her. People would say "William is still here and his father is a Milwaukee doctor and graduated from the university." Whenever she would see him – she's dead now – she would say "Well, did William go on?" I said no. Momma was all upset because we didn't go on.

You didn't go on?

Oh, no. I had so much trouble with math. Now maybe if Daddy had lived, he would have...

He would have seen that you got your...

He would have coached me in math. And then I was thinking afterwards... when I think about it, Caroline, my younger sister, said "Well, you know, what Momma's trouble is. If we didn't do this and that, she thought it was a reflection on her and she just couldn't take it." Well, really, she couldn't. And Mae got married young and that really... well, we have made up to Momma in the fact all fifteen nieces and nephews have gone to college. Caroline's and William's. Plus the fact that now there are three great-nieces in college and one great-nephew. I said if Momma can look back, then she'd say...

It's worth it.

She figured that we were such a disappointment. But that would have satisfied her because all of Mae's kids and then my sister Caroline, that her three boys and one girl...

You had a nephew who was equal opportunities officer in Minnesota?

Yes, that's [unclear].

Where is he now?

He's still up there. He had applied to the Urban League here. I don't know why he wants to come back, but they just have a love for Madison. His boy is in college now. He was in law school at one time. I thought maybe he would have gone on with that. His uncle in South Carolina that lived in New York got his doctorate here and then went on to law school and got a law degree. He is working in New York with the welfare department or something. [Unclear] never practiced. He's dead. He died a few years ago. He worked for the city and the welfare department. He had some kind of administrative job and he said it was always worth it.

Let me ask you about your politics. I know that you were always interested, you and your mother, in politics.

Yes, we were La Follette Progressives.

All your life you were active.

Yes. With the La Follette family. Of course, then afterwards we did join the Democrats. I'm just worried about them now. Who do you think is going to win the nomination?

I hope Mondale will, but I don't know. I don't think we can say that Reagan can't be beat now. I think he can be.

You do?

Yes.

I can't understand. He comes from that poor town down there in Indiana and his father was on

WPA. How can he be such a conservative when he really... that little town he came from, that was just a poor town. He grew up poor. And the college he went to certainly wasn't one of the outstanding. What was it?

Eureka College?

Yes. That wasn't a high-named college. If he had gone to some other areas, the University of Illinois or something like that. But there he was at Eureka. And coming from that little town, how he could be so conservative. Of course, her, I don't know who her father was, but her step-father was a doctor there in Chicago, so they didn't have that much to back them. And I never thought he was such a great actor.

He's a pretty good actor now, I think.

I don't see how people can stand it. Most of the time I can't even look at him. He's such a hypocrite.

I know.

Oh. He's a dangerous man.

Were you and your family great Roosevelt supporters?

Yes. Well, you know, it took Momma a little while to try to get to the Democrats, but that was real different. In fact, you know what happened here after we all disbanded, the Progressives, then all these people you had known as liberals and everything had gone to the Democrats. That was one of the things there wasn't any question about.

So you weren't comfortable with the Democrats.

Yes, because it wasn't like the old-line Democrats.

I can remember that in the very early days of the Democrats, you and your mother were always there and always part of it.

Yes. You see, that was one of the reasons. So many of these people like, you know, the Rouses, and all those people, they had been La Follette people. That was the part. You just knew them. Lots of people had been there and they were going to the Democrats.

As a little child, I gather from what you said, or as a young person, you felt the controversies surrounding you had nothing to do with your color but with your political views during the first world war.

Yes, yes. Well, that was it.

And that you didn't participate in these projects. What happened? Did you just say I won't do it?

I just wouldn't do it. You know, my sister Geraldine was busy doing it all. They didn't insist, my parents didn't insist that I do. The thing that I have thought about since then when so much of the color became changed now, that everybody brings that in. The first thing, if you're colored, well, then it's because you're black or this or that. That's what I think is very unfortunate, and I'm glad I didn't grow up in that. A lot of colored people said Momma thought she was so much. I'm glad she thought it. She passed some of that on to you and you didn't think you were so low that everybody could walk on you.

Did you feel you were discriminated against when you were looking for work or anything?

Well, I never... no, I can't say. You just knew what was the use in applying for a job, a certain kind of job. You knew you weren't going to get it? Now, Mrs. Guy, if you were ready to teach, what was the use in applying?

Then the other thing about the housing was that Daddy bought wherever he wanted to. He owned some property in South Madison. When they first started plotting Keyes Avenue and out there, Momma said that's how stupid Daddy was. He should have bought something out there, but no, it was too far, and he wanted to be closer. We had the place in the country. Well, there was no problem. The people, like the Shepherds, they bought in there. Then, of course, there were some who started buying out there in South Madison. They wanted to. And then those people that bought on Dayton Street, that was all right. But no, I can't say that I grew up thinking every time somebody did something or said something to me it was... because maybe some white kid had had the same problem.

You found in school there was no problem.

As far as I'm concerned, I can't say that I was mistreated. And, you know, my color never came into it when I didn't do those projects.

What about your nieces and nephews who grew up here? Have they had any?

Well, I don't think they have, as far as I have known. Willie and Frannie, I don't think they did. Frannie was in everything at Central.

And certainly your sister Mae's children were some of the famous athletes, weren't they?

Some of the kids, now like Delphine and Justina, they went away to colored school because they thought it would be... well, any how they would meet colored people. There weren't any much to meet in Madison. That was one of the reasons why they went in and also to get to know everybody. The Negroes that came to college back in the earlier days were more intellectual than these that come here now.

I think that's probably true of students generally, too.

Yes, yes. I'm shocked at what comes here now, white and black.

Yes. They're much more oriented towards jobs and, as you say, the Latin and Greek and so...

Yes. That's gone. Now, you would never believe that Mr. Bowles was a great black man. He had finished college and he also had finished law school in Chicago but he ran on the railroad. He was a railroad porter. Well, I can remember Daddy and Mr. Bowles loved Greek and Latin culture. If you would have heard Mr. Bowles, you would never have dreamed he was a railroad porter or that he was a black man. There was nothing about him about what they represent. They didn't sit and talk about how they were discriminated against. I mean, you knew what the problem was, so you didn't have to spend every day and every hour talking about it.

They had a club called the Booklovers' Club. They had some Negro history in it. Those people were more intellectual. There were just a few of them here then. They didn't spend all their talking time talking about what the white folks had done to them in Mississippi and all that. That's what is very disturbing to me now. That's all you hear. That disturbs me. I'd rather go on and work for a project than just keep on talking about it.

Were you in on the founding of the NAACP here?

No. You know, that was really [unclear]. Well, when they brought the Army here, to Truax.

Yes, the second world war.

They had a segregated USO out there.

Isn't that funny!

Yes. We heard about it. Now, I hadn't seen Louise, or talked to her about it but somebody had told me about it and that the clubwomen were going to run it.

This was the Utopia Club?

I went to a meeting and we talked, and then in the mean time... try to do something about it. So the first thing that was done, they organized what they called the [unclear] league. We got a few people interested. To make them mad, somebody decided we should have an NAACP. Daddy had originally belonged to the Niagara Movement, even though they don't have one here in Madison.

And in 1920, who was that minister? There was a minister here, a white, who helped organize it. I don't remember. I remember going to one of the programs once and they were all whites there. Me and Momma were the only colored. Then that died and then they didn't have any.

Then when we decided we'd have one, was O'Dell the first president? That was what started. The federated club women were opposed to it because they wanted to have... they were going to be directors of this USO. You see, that's what makes a lot of colored people segregate to themselves. They like to run something, but they don't want to participate in it.

I'm not for this they call it the black political and social. When I was working down there at the school, on Lapham, the tenant union, the tenant resource center, I would see the black men there. This one, I thought he was really nice and polite. He never mentioned it to me, but he mentioned... I know she evidently told him what I said. She said one of the girls that was director of the community service, Debbie, said "You know this girl? I'm going to be supporting that black for social and political." I said "Well, I'm not." I said "I am not doing it," I said "for the pure and simple reason they haven't got enough votes in Madison to swing anything." They didn't.

Even now they haven't. If they don't get in and work with the other people that are willing to support them, they are lost. Now, you know, when all the legislation was passed here, if it hadn't have been for whites, where would those few black ones be?

The NAACP was always integrated and had many more whites than blacks, I gather, in the beginning.

Well, here it did. And who was sitting in for fair housing? The whites were sitting in. They were helping us with that fair housing. That's what I object to about the blacks that are coming in here now. They all come with a chip on their shoulder and they don't seem to be able to get into the community. They want to be in things and they want to be.

I watched those men down there at Malcolm School. They were happy to be there, because they were being treated just like anybody else. I don't know. They were in VISTA and some other office. They were in there. I watched them and I know they came in where we were. They wanted to be a part of it, but yet they come up with all that black stuff.

Now, like for instance, I'm sitting on the porch down home, on account of this change in color on Dayton Street. A little colored boy came along. "I hate you." I said "What did I do to you?" "You're a honkey." Where did that child learn that? Here he is in Madison, going to

school. Where did he learn that? Who taught him that? Somebody at home taught him that.

I have always known what the problem was. You see, I grew up knowing what it was, but I didn't grow up hating any particular people. Of course, the way Momma and them talked about [unclear], they had good white friends and they weren't Uncle Toms. They were talking about what so-and-so did to them and this one did to them. The same way in Richmond.

In fact, to show you how they are, a woman that had been in the reformatory when my mother was a teacher there, she had wanted to come to Madison with Momma and work for her. She had been doing the laundry and everything there. Well, when she came to Daddy, [unclear], she came to the front door and [unclear] told her her feet were dirty and that she had to go to the back door. You know, she was humble. [Unclear] was colored and she was colored. Well, when Daddy and Momma took offense to it, they spoke to her, [unclear] said I can't have anything coming from down there in that neighborhood she comes from coming to my front door." See? That's colored.

So you see that is the point that when people make those differences, even within the race. And this little boy. Who taught him that? That he would take and say... now I wonder how many little white children... now when I had colored children, they'll annoy me and harass me about my race and this little boy he really carried it so far. [Unclear] been on the bus with me. His mother was with him, so I finally said "You ought to teach him some manners." "He can't help it. He don't know any better." I said "Well, what if somebody looked at him because of his looks?" Why, she started swearing at me and chasing me down Mifflin Street.

Then, you know, this Miss Cummings. I saw her in the *State Journal*, that she was doing something in human relations. When I went to tell her about it, she said "What were they, white or black?" I said "black." "I'm busy. I've got to go." She was in a hurry. She wouldn't take it. She wouldn't listen to me.

Just like I'm for black history being integrated into the history books. They all quit speaking to me. They don't want to have no part of me [when] I say this. A friend of mine is Norwegian, born and raised down here in Stoughton. She had gone to high school but she hadn't gone to college. She said "Just think, Lucile, I've lived all my life. Here I am an old woman and I've really never known much about the history of the Negro, other than that he was a slave." That was one. I have said that I think the history should be in there just like the history of the Germans and all the others.

Then people will grow up... now here, just like living here. I don't have any trouble with these people. Most of them never came in contact with a colored person. They've got some colored people living in here, two or three men, but they have never come in contact. I know one woman that comes here all the time. She's really a good friend to me. She comes from up the northern part of Wisconsin. She never has had any contact. All they know about them... or else they know something about jazz.

Black history means that the white people are getting off the hook. white historians should be revising and improving what they offer.

Yes. You see, now like they had black history month here. Years ago Mount Zion Church was down there on Johnson Street. Mrs. Guy, Mrs. Eunice [unclear], she was Mr. Guy's first wife, she would have Negro history week there for a week. There would usually be students here. They talked about Negro history week, the history of the Negro absolutely. I don't know what they're doing now. I just don't know what they're doing now. I can't understand it. I don't read any history.

I will say at church Sunday, a couple of Sundays ago, my nephew is superintendent of AME,

I was so shocked, [unclear] and I guess that's the reason he asked me, because he knew I wouldn't sit through anything else. "We're going to have Negro history celebration in Sunday school. We'll pick you up and you can come." I was absolutely shocked. Those little children had learned and they were taught to take a certain Negro and talk about him, you know, this history. That was really a shock to me, because these other ones hadn't been doing that. Most of them don't even know Negro history. The black ones don't. And they don't have any literature or anything. They don't have any books. I would want people to know that I am an American, too. That's why I am not for that black history department out there.

The segregation makes it worse, and the white people are deprived by being segregated just as much as the black people.

It's just like one time when they didn't have colored [unclear] dormitories. Well, I just went out there. We were talking and she was trying to tell me how different they were. And then she said "Well, now I don't want you to leave here thinking I'm prejudiced, because our handyman... " I said "That has nothing to do with it." I said "A handyman!" I said "I'm not being disrespectful to him, but that's different from a student going to college." And it is! I don't care what anybody says. That's not being disrespectful to the handyman. You know, he was black. I said "Sure, he was just your handyman. He wasn't trying to compete with you intellectually."

I think it's probably still true that a kid can come here, go to college for four years, and leave without ever talking to a black person or being friends with a black person, because there still are so few of them.

Yes. I don't talk the colored stuff all the time, because I talk on everything. When I get on Madison, you know, there are all these other things that I'm worried about that's happening to Madison. Most of these kids that I come in contact with down there at the tenant union, they never had any contact. Some of them will even tell me that. They have never had any contact where they came from or since they've been here. It's all a brand-new experience to them.

I learned so much in working with the minority students on the campus. I was the only middle-class white woman that I knew that had an opportunity to really get to know what these young people were like and where they came from and meet their parents and all. It was a wonderful experience for me. I learned more than the kids did.

Well, yes. It can't help but be when you live in a community... now it's just like here in Madison. When we lived here, when we were born and raised here, you knew every colored person in town. There was such a few, you see. They weren't the educated ones. Now I'm not putting them down, because I preferred some of them to what's the educated ones here now. And they were Midwesterners and they spoke... their sentence structure and all was Midwestern. It wasn't Mississippi and all that that you can't... a lot of them I can't even understand them. I can't. It makes me mad and then it makes me sad. I can't really understand them.

What sort of things did the early NAACP do?

Well, that's what we were working on.

You got that, the USO. That became integrated?

Yes By then it was time to really start working on these other civil rights, equal opportunity.

And housing.

Yes And housing. That's the reason why I'm so worried. Out there where my little nephew that goes to Sandberg is, there are one or two colored ones. I don't like to bring color up to him, because he's just enjoying life so. And I don't like to use the word "black." I think there's one or two in that school where he is.

That's the far east.

Yes.

Way out on East Washington Avenue.

Yes. I think there's one or two out there. Then, of course, Jackie's little boy is right over here at Franklin. There are eighty-some Negroes at Franklin. Then there are only two hundred some whites. I'm not worried about that. I think that's all right.

The federal government doesn't, I guess.

Justina just said to me last night...

... within the last couple of years, went to a party that somebody gave and invited all the black people in professional jobs in state government. It was a large crowd of very nice young people that have moved into Madison because there were good job opportunities. These were not radicals and not scruffy-looking. They were just very good professional people, and there were quite a few of them. I was impressed. But there's still so few that you have to go looking for them kind of. You don't come across them.

I am so anti that black history stuff. I can't take it and I get very angry about it. The other thing is when my father came to Madison, those were the days when Negroes weren't educated. But Daddy, that made no difference to him. They were his people. He didn't care how black and ignorant they were, he wanted to help. So now like Mae is going out there to Lincoln, helping little kids read. There's so much talk about one-parent families in Madison that I have felt that some of these Negroes should do more work amongst these one-parent families, whether the mother or the father. They don't do any volunteer work like that. That's what disturbs me.

That is true.

Yes. And then when you go back and try to go back in their history, in many instances they came from the lower echelon. Not that they weren't bad people, but they didn't come from the upper class either. Most of them that had come here have gotten their education and this is the first good opportunity they've had. But they forget all about those others that are down in the gutter. There are a lot of them right here in Madison. That's what disturbs me about them. They don't want any [unclear] inquire what are they doing. What are the disadvantaged? They're talking all about them. Whenever they get a chance to get up and make a spiel, they'll do that. But they themselves, what are they doing to help? And you're very unpopular when you come up with that.

Actually their responsibilities are just the same as everybody else's.

They don't give a darn. When I used to work at the [unclear] after school, Jewish kids would be coming there. Their synagogue was up there. They were doing something for them. They were helping those children. I think here that the high crime rate has deterred them. Compared to the blacks, the number of citizens, the population of the blacks compared to the crime rate, personally I think it's high.

I don't know. Really I don't.

They don't put it in the paper all the time, the blacks. But as near as I can count them up and I do, you see, I cut them out and save them. I think there's some things that you can do. Now, for instance, like with Dad, a man told me that he was in Michigan and a man told him if he ever came to Madison to look Mr. Miller up if he didn't have a place to sleep or something or needed a little help he'd give it to them. That was the truth. I never will forget there was a man living in the house, he was rooming there in the house. Daddy went over to see him and I was with Daddy. This man was worried that Daddy was going to send him out to Verona, if he was sick and he didn't have any money. Daddy said no, he wouldn't do that. He would keep on until he found some of his relatives who would take him. Sure enough, he found some. They didn't live here in Madison.

Those were the days when you didn't run to the welfare every minute. You had a pride that you would also help somebody who was having problems. When I see these today, I don't see them doing anything. That disturbs me.

I'm going to do a project up there at the neighborhood out there, and I talked to David about it. There are a lot of colored children up there. Most of the children in Madison now, their backgrounds are very deep South. Half the time you can't understand what they're saying, and they're mostly very dark, and they're very sensitive. They're just very sensitive. Well, I got a cutting out of the paper. All the papers I read, all the things about Negroes, I mean, what's going on. Now, not the bad things. Oh, like a woman who died recently and about her working in the theater. She was never known really, but yet that was something. Different things like that. I think this is about that little whatcha call him boy. [Unclear]. See, that's what I'm interested in bringing to those kids' attention, instead of forever bringing that they're the ones that's being kicked around.

When I think about fellows that used to come here, Negroes, to go to school, if they didn't have money, they worked. Now there's any number of them. They've all done well. Some of them I hear from and they really made it. But they're not still talking about how black they are. That's what I'm for getting out of. I just don't want to hear it. That's only creating inferiority. And then I think that they should do more to help themselves.

And help each other.

That's what I mean! Helping each other. When I sat there the other day, down at our church, and I saw that program, those kids have done research to find out. They weren't just there telling about all the problems they've got. That brings you a certain amount of pride.

Sure. And do a good job.

Yes, in whatever. Now if you don't do a good job... like I met a colored woman working there. She came in. She had two children and she had two grown-up boys that were bad, in a lot of trouble. She told me about them. She's going to Edgewood – she was a sophomore or junior at Edgewood – and she's forty years old or somewhere around there. I said to her, "I can't imagine that you would have boys that age and in trouble all the time." She says "Well, that's the way I was. I was almost too late. But I'm trying to make up for it." And I said "Well, in your training of the two little ones, the young ones, you see that they go to different road." She's a very bright woman; now she's out at Edgewood. She's on welfare, but yet she's doing something.

She's making progress.

Yes! That was really an education to me, to see her. And that she would admit that she had these two no-good boys and that she had been... she didn't blame them, she blamed herself. She said "I woke up." I said "Oh, I can imagine a person with your drive." She's interested in her work and doing all right.

Yes. Very smart person. Intelligent.

Yes. You see, there are a lot of them that would be that way if somebody... and that's what I sit here and I watch those kids that come from Bayview and I notice those teenaged boys. They don't stop and monkey around. That gives me a good impression of them. They're living over there and they all come through here and go on in and go home, and they don't stop and create any problems. I just feel that more people should be helping. I mean, Negroes are the ones that get it. They have been able to come and they should help these less fortunate ones. That's what interests me.

I think maybe that's coming, too. I think you can relax a little bit.

That's been worrying me.

People in the law school... you know, they bring in twenty new minority students every year, and it's set up so that their whole way gets paid. Some of them have done wonderfully well. I've been at the law school for ten years and there are a couple thousand lawyers now, during the time I was there.

You mean black ones?

No. All the other kind. But there are about twenty graduating each year now.

You mean of black ones?

Yes. black and Hispanics and a few Indians, but mostly blacks, of course. Some of them have done so well. There are a number of them here in Madison working for the state or in private practice, and some of them are really just remarkable. I get wonderful letters from them.

Well, I'm glad I know that, because I didn't know that.

A lot of them also every year are in the master's program in business in the commerce school, and they're doing well, too. It's very heartening.

It's a theory that I'm interested in: going out and helping others. I'm afraid what will happen and it will happen in Madison, like Milwaukee. You know how terrible it is.

Well, they have such a terrible police chief there.

I know. It's the whole situation is bad.

A number of these young blacks are lawyers in Milwaukee. They're in the district attorney's office and the city attorney's office. Our son-in-law is a public defender there. He's a lawyer, and he has about six of his colleagues are recent black graduates of the university law school. And the firms have them, and some of them are in business. Some of the young women are practicing law. It's really a remarkable thing. Wisconsin has done better than almost any other university that I'm aware of in getting them into school and seeing that they finish and have opportunities.

I know Madison and all its faults. I have a little difficulty accepting some of the criticism that the blacks make, because they haven't done one thing to help improve. They weren't here sitting in

for fair housing, they weren't here doing anything. And yet... and then I try to find out where they came from, what were the problems there and why they are here. Instead of going on and working for improvements, they just keep on talking about the past and keep it alive. I think that I would rather see progress made and not be sitting around talking.

Now, for instance, up at the hospital, you know, when I go to Jackson, there was a colored girl. She's a big, dark, fat, colored girl. I like her so I'm not talking about her, but I'm just saying what she looks like. She is in the cashier department. She has charge of the accounts. Some of them get mad if you ask them where they're from, and then I try to explain to them why I'm interested. She came here and I think she went to MATC. Everybody likes her up there. Well, then there's another one that works in the drug store at the hospital. When I was over there at the hospital, one girl, a colored girl, worked in the cafeteria and she was a pre-med student. I can remember the time when she wouldn't have gotten that job over there, even though it's just working in the cafeteria.

She certainly wouldn't have been a pre-med student.

No! And then another one, she was going to graduate this year. She was just working there. She worked so many days after school and different hours. No, you couldn't get in med school here. There has been a little progress made here. I would like to see less emphasis on black all the time. It just upsets me.

These children coming along now should be aware of people like you and others. It should be seen to it that they're aware of the opportunities that are available to them so that they will go out and look for a chance.

When we were coming along, those opportunities weren't there. And I won't say that we weren't bitter as these are. Now, for instance, I was just talking with somebody last night and they were mentioning... no, Jess was telling me about a picture and how Helen and Hazel and most of them are dead. They couldn't have gotten a job, but their niece has got a very good job with the state. Then one of their nieces has worked at the Emporium. She's a sales lady. When they were coming along, they couldn't have gotten it. No. So I'm saying it's not a perfect situation, but it certainly is a far cry over... and when we were coming up, you didn't hear them sitting around and they didn't have all that hate. That is something that I can't adjust to, and all that highly sensitive.

Just like Jess said last night about the segregated schools in the South, that they just don't give them good equipment. Mrs. Eunice Guy was a teacher in La Follette and when she retired and came here and married Mr. Guy – he was a tailor here for years – every year she would go to the board of education and try to get Negroes in the public schools.

It took a long time.

Yes, but eventually. When I was growing up, I would have never thought they would have had a colored principal at East High. No, I wouldn't have! There aren't that many colored kids there anyway.

No, but there is a black principal at Cherokee School.

Yes, I know it. But I never would have connected it. What I'm saying is things aren't perfect, but they certainly have gone a long way. People should recognize the fact and should make the best of it and, I mean, really work on maintaining that, because in some ways they're losing.

That's right. They are. There are fewer of them coming to college than there were ten years ago.

Nobody knows why that is.

Well, it's just like I just read in the Chicago paper. I was going to send a clipping to some of the children, some Negroes here in Madison, about the high crime rate, the high whatcha you call it, the gang, and they're all black. I was in Chicago when the Al Capone gang... you've heard of them? Al Capone?

Sure.

I was in Chicago then and I worked in a dress shop over on Madison, I mean Wilson Avenue and Sheridan Road. They stayed open until ten o'clock. I'd get on the elevated there at Wilson Avenue and ride to 51st and Indiana, get off and walk over to 4930 Indiana and never had any problem. People say you wouldn't dare do it today. Those gangs, like the Al Capone gang was in operation. Somebody like me or the average citizen, they weren't bothering them. Now those little black gangs, they're bothering everybody. In the public housing, they hold them up and all that sort. Well, that's what's making [unclear], you see what's happening.

Look at what Reynolds, what that man is doing in Washington to civil rights, how he's changing it all around, getting very highly conservative people.

Yes. With a different view.

That's what worries me. You've got to just think in terms of improving your conduct as well as the other people's, too. That's what worries me about Madison.