

TAPE TRANSCRIPT  
Durham Civil Rights Heritage Project  
CDS, Durham, NC

**Interviewee:** Luther M. Holman  
16 Fellowship Drive  
Durham, NC 27704

**Interviewer:** Will Atwater  
c/o Center for Documentary Studies  
1317 W. Pettigrew Street  
Durham, NC 27705

**Place:** St. Joseph's AME Church  
2521 Fayetteville Street  
Durham, NC 27707

**Equipment:** SONY MZ-R700 Minidisk  
Sony microphone ECM-907

**Tape:** SONY MD-80 Tape

**Date:** January 19, 2004

**Description of Interviewee:**

**Circumstances of the Interview:**

**Luther Holman (LH) and Barbara Lau:** (Discussion of interview format)

**Will Atwater (WA):** This is Will Atwater. It's January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004. I'm about to interview Mr. Luther Holman. Actually, can we start beginning by you just kind of stating who you are?

**LH:** My name is Luther MacDuffie Holman, Jr., and I'm from Durham. To be exact, I was raised in north Durham. My father is Luther MacDuffie Holman, Sr., and most folks know him as MacDuffie Holman, of "Duff," you know, as I was saying. Right now I just completed my degree in sociology, and I will be working on my Master's in sociology. I have three more courses, and I have my Bachelor's in social work. I'm planning on dedicating the rest of my time to the fulfillment and documentation of the civil rights movement, and document the things that my father and everyone that associated with him, and to bring out the unsung heroes that were very involved, and to place us, put us in the place of where we are at that time.

**WA:** Can you talk a little bit about what you remember about growing up, and during the movement?

**LH:** (Laughs) Yes. Like most kids at the time, I really didn't understand what all the fuss was. I know that there was a lot of discrepancies between the white and blacks. And my father was the type that he had a lot of pride, and everyone around him had that same type of pride. He didn't feel as though that there was a equal—there was—equality was not the same. When I was young, I remember walking on the picket line—as you know, we're talking about seven, eight, nine years old, we're talking about in the heat, ninety to a hundred degrees—walking around in circles in front of a store. At that time it was Keillor's, on Roxboro Street, the corner of Roxboro and Dowd Street. One of those things really upset me, because I'd rather been playing. But at the time, Mr. Keillor did not have any blacks working for him, but yet he was in a black neighborhood and that's where his money source came from. My father and others, it was a

thing where they just got tired of it. Union Baptist Church is right beside it, so during that time, Reverend Croom was the pastor there, and it was the start of a lot of things. To be exact, Floyd McKissick Sr., and Jr., his family, all of them stayed right down the street, to be exact. So it was a type of family. There was a lot of unity in trying to achieve these things.

But after that, Mr. Keillor ended up selling the store to another white man, Mr. Broadway. I'm not exactly sure if he really felt as though he needed to actually hire anyone black, you know. So he sold the store to Broadway. Broadway, I think, was picketed too. But in the end, he ended up hiring blacks, and that was another accomplishment. Another thing, when I was younger, I remember that a lot of folks believe that the first sit-in was up in Greensboro, but really it was right next door to Keillors—Maola Ice Cream Parlor. You know, I think it was in the '50s, latter part of the '50s. And that was the first sit-in, really, because the way things—you know, you weren't served, you know, a lot of things coloreds and blacks. But then again, I was a young boy, still walking and looking, and not understanding that folks were fighting for the rights, you know. Only thing I wanted to do was just play. But next thing you know, my father was taking me here and there. He was really disappointed over the fact that a lot of the preachers in the area wouldn't have the meetings. You know, they wouldn't like to have meetings about, you know, civil rights meetings, at their church. But Reverend Croom—eventually Reverend Croom died, but here comes the Reverend Grady Davis. And this was—I call him a little short James Brown, because he was feisty. And he believed in civil rights. So they ended up having the meetings there. So Union Baptist Church became, in a sense, one of the landmarks, you know, for that. And by being a member of the church, and Mama and Daddy made us go to church *every Sunday*—and it's fifty-two Sundays in a year, because there's fifty-two weeks in a year, you know—and sometimes I had to go to church three, four times a week.

Stay in church all Sunday. So, you know, a lot of things there. That was my training, my initiation. And by being around these grown folks, seeing how they were striving to try to get the rights—There was a lot of fear, fear of retaliation.

I remember when I was small, too, I remember on one end of the corner of Dowd and Elizabeth, that was one of the congregation spots, more like the inner-city part of north Durham, because you had the grocery store, a little corner bar where, you know, what I would call—you know, where you could get you some drinks, hot dogs and stuff like that—barber shop, shoe shine, you know, funeral home. It was a thing of, where, that's where you would meet, at the corner of Elizabeth Street and Dowd. And right at the other corner, going toward the next block up, which was Broadway's store and Maola's, right at the corner of Roxboro and Dowd. And I remember when we were at the corner of Elizabeth Street, these white boys came by in a—old car—and they yelled out and threw something at us. Here it is in our part of north Durham, you know, the black section, and they come through our section throwing things and yelling out, “Niggers, niggers.” Well, by that time, you know, there was enough pride and things going on, and by the time those boys got up to the next block, the other guys had, you know, had ran up and told him, you know, like something was pointed at the guys, you see, at that point. I mean, you could actually see it. And when the boys got up there, the white guys got up there, to the end of that block, at that stoplight, they had to stop. And the other guys, the black guys, were right on the corner. By the time the message had been relayed up there, they were throwing things at these guys before they got out of north Durham. And I'm saying, “this is something here.” You don't come into this area, you know. This is what we have, there's a lot of pride.

Later on my father decided to organize, or help organize, the East End Neighborhood Council, which involved with—help, you know, organizing, taking care of the citizens. To be

exact, he even went to City Hall and argued with the mayor, I think, or the city manager, one of them—he and others—until he actually got that truck. They gave us a truck, you know, the city, garbage truck and stuff, so that we could actually go around in the neighborhoods on the weekends and get all the trash and old appliances out of the back yards. You know, we're talking about rats and snakes. Even went up under houses. And it was all free. They never charged anything. The only thing that the people would give them was something to drink or a sandwich. That was it. I went around on one of those cleanup campaigns with them, because one was all I could stand. I didn't want to spend my time. You know, I wanted to play. But after I did that with them, I saw there was a lot of folks that just were thanking them. And I'd seen some cry. And a lot of those things touched me. That's when I realized, then, that my father was the type that—certificates were good, folks could give presents, that was good, but the best present or anything that you can get from someone is gratification, "thank you." But when you really know that you've touched someone, you can see the tears in their eyes. And it was like a pure thing. Totally pure. So, from that point I realized that, when someone can thank you, and it's from their soul, they'll pull these tears, and it's tears of joy. And that's the best thank-you that I've ever seen. And that's what he taught me.

And then from that point on, I needed to—I was trying out for the basketball team at Durham High. So poor then, at the time, our sneakers, Converse, and by being poor, I could only just run, you know, use them all year long, so by the time school started I had holes in the bottom, and I was sliding all over the place when it came to trying out for the team. Daddy and Mother worked during the day, so I wasn't able to get my card and stuff, you know, because of the fact that you had to have a physical. So the next thing you know, my father, him and others,

started the East End Neighborhood Health Center, which was located right on Dowd Street, right beside East End School. At that time it was East End School.

**WA:** Do you remember what year that was?

**LH:** Ah, not exactly. Not exactly. I just remember that—had to be in the—oh, had to be in the early '60s, latter '50s, because I was in the—let's see, I graduated in '69, so it had to be in between '67 and '69. And he had started, he and others had started a health clinic, and what got me was the fact that he had gotten doctors from Duke Hospital, Memorial Hospital. There was another hospital also. But the thing was, these were interns, and they would do their internship there free. The clinic would open, I think, at six o'clock in the evening, every evening, and it was free for the poor, black and white. You know, you had drug addicts, you had kids, white kids and stuff—and blacks—that didn't have money enough to take exams to actually get into certain things at school, you had folks that couldn't afford—really, that was the purpose—folks, old folks and young folks, that couldn't afford medical attention. And he got it. You know, he did it. I used to love going up there just to see him. You know, just made me feel good. And this was a house. You know, this was a two-story house. And, to be exact, from where I stayed I could look at the back yard, you know, of the house. So it was just like walking-distance right over there. And it was amazing.

And when he did that, there was another thing that really touched me. Then it was just a continuous fight for rights. I think he was a vice-president at one time of Operation Breakthrough here in Durham. He was on the board for UOCI, UDI—and I'm not calling things, these letters, out, because that's the way I remember it. And there was lots more. He's been recognized by I don't know how many organizations in the Durham area, and maybe even out of that. I really just don't even know.

**WA:** So he sounds like he was a big community activist.

**LH:** Oh! My father was a advocator for civil rights, you know, and that was his thing. Yes, he was a activist, along with the others. You know, the helped, which I'm going to help document also so there will be more information about this later on too.

**WA:** So what did he do for a living outside of this work? What was his job?

**LH:** Oh, to be exact, see, my father, he worked for Colonial Warehouses, which supplied all the Colonial stores at that time. They were out of Raleigh. That was the home base. And he would get up every morning, had a self-alarm, I don't know, I think maybe four o'clock or five. But he was up, and that amazed me too. There was no clock too. He just automatically got up. And they had a pool, a little carpool, and they went around to pick each other up. And he did so well, was so loved by the fellows and stuff, the staff down at Colonial Warehouse, that they actually made him spokesman. I forgot the proper name for it, but whenever there were any grievances, he was the person that took it to the management.

**WA:** So he was a natural leader.

**LH:** A natural. Automatic. You know. And I started finding out things. Because he used to sing with the Harps of Harmony, so I spent a lot of time, every Sunday—not every Sunday, I used to beg him sometimes, “Can I go?”—at WSRC. At that time, Dr. Jive and Hester, Irving Hester, all of them were there at WSRC as disk jockeys. And that was the first time I had actually seen Shirley Caesar. Shirley Caesar stayed in north Durham at that time anyway, before she became famous. But everyone would congregate right there at the WSRC station, and you'd hear the voices of the Cooper Four, the Sensational Nightingales, even the Mighty Clouds and the Original Blind Boys--I can just drop all these names—before they became all famous. And Harps of Harmony right there with them.

**WA:** And WSRC was a local station in Durham?

**LH:** Right. Was on Club Boulevard, to be exact. It was over in the area where, I think, the Cablevision place is now. You know, where folks pay the bills. You see, and they wouldn't have never known, you know, back in that little area, there was this black radio station, WSRC.

**WA:** Well, tell me a little bit about your mother.

**LH:** Yeah, well, Mom, Mary G. Holman. Very feisty, as I heard. She was in a sense the backbone of the home. Her main thing was—well, she didn't take any junk off anyone. The pride-level for my mother and father was quite high. I guess being poor, and things being taken away from you, you know, made you stronger and want to make sure things were better for your children. And my mother, she worked for Scott and Roberts for years as a seamstress and an inspector, and then, later on, she worked for Durham Drapery. And during that time, they didn't have any blacks working whatsoever. But she got over there, and she became the first black that they hired. And whenever something wasn't right, she would go ahead on and start a fuss, and let them know that she doesn't have to take this from—you know, because they treat her like a, you know, like a slave-type situation, or a maid or whatever. They talked, said whatever they want, because white folks at that time would speak to you as though you're not a human being, you're a slave. Now, you couldn't speak to my mother that way, you see. And she was the type that it didn't matter if she was outnumbered. She would fight to the end. And a lot of folks thought she was on the—you know, like I said, that feisty, and you don't want to mess with anyone that's feisty. But she became the first one to integrate Durham Drapery at that time, and also opened the doors for other black women to actually be hired there, really, blacks. So that was one of the morals, you understand, that I loved, and that's been embedded in me.



And one of the other things that I found out later on that she had been on the board for Lincoln Hospital. And during that time—which, it's called Lincoln Health Center now—but during that time, that's where I was born, and usually, mainly anyone black, you know, born in Durham, would probably been born at Lincoln, back in those days. Which carries a lot of history there. The involvement, since I was with Daddy most of the time, Mother's involvement, I'm just, here in my later years, starting to find out all the things, at least remembering, some of the things that she had done, where she had been. But I always knew that she was a fighter. So it's a list of things, you know, that she has done. But she was mainly raising the kids, and making sure everything was right in the neighborhood.

**WA:** Sounds like you come from a pretty dynamic family. So, tell me a little bit about your brothers and sisters.

**LH:** Well, I don't have any brothers, but I do have two sisters that are younger than I am. Cathy Holman—to be exact, Cathy Vendetta Holman—and Anita Latrelle Holman. And at this time, Cathy stays in Fayetteville, and Anita, she's still here in Durham. But during the years, their involvement was mainly just about everything in church. Both of them graduated, you understand. My sisters, both of them have degrees. I think Cathy has a degree in biology, and my baby sister Anita has a degree in radiology. It was a thing where education was a must. Bringing in a C is no good. Bringing in a D or F was unthinkable, because that brought out the switch or the belt. You know, no bad grades. So my sisters, like I said, their main thing was just being girls. Participating in things that they could participate in. But mainly that was it. I was so busy being with my father, and when my father and mother were at work--I think they call it "latchkey kids," you know, where the parents were away from home, and they raised themselves.

And I was more like the mother and father, because when Mom and Dad was at work, I would actually raise my sisters. And we had a lot of adventures.

**WA:** So you started earlier by saying that you just got your degree.

**LH:** Yes.

**WA:** And you want to devote your time and energy to collecting information about the community, kind of similar to what we're doing.

**LH:** Yes. To be exact, what had happened that brought this about—see, I watched my father take his last breath. At that time I refused to believe that that was the end of an era. I look at it as, right now, still, I know he's gone home, and that I look at it as a vacation that he won't return from. But the main thing was he had done so much, and a lot of folks don't know about it. And I have seen others, you know, receive awards and recognition, and I'm saying, my father's done ten times as much, you know. He's helped a lot of folks get to places where they are today. And he became an unsung hero. And right now, if I was—just for him to even know that I was going to bring attention to what he has done, the good things that he's done, you know, not only for me but for other kids, and their children, and their families and stuff, at this time—you know, his thing is, "Let the work I've done speak for me." But he was a footstone. He helped with a lot for the city of Durham.

So I want folks to know that, because at this time the kids have gotten to a point where pride is not there. They don't exactly know where Central actually started. You try to have Founder's Day, but some don't attend. You have all these other organizations that don't exist, some don't exist now, and a lot of people have died, and they've taken a lot of this pride to the grave. A lot of old folks at this time don't get the respect from young folks, because young folks don't believe in giving that much. So that means the old folks have gotten to a point—the

elderly, I should say—have gotten to the point now where they think it's a waste of time to try to let the kids know, "Well, this is what I used to do. This is where I come from. This is what happened. This is how come you got what you have."

You know, but then again, when you look at the things that they did, even the elderly who may not have much to show other than the pride for what they did, inside—the kids are more based on things that are material. If you don't have this and that, then your accomplishment didn't do anything. But what they did was open doors. So right now, what I wanted to do was make sure that everyone, not just my father, everyone that he worked with, everyone that he touched, I wanted to make sure that it's documented out here. This is why. This are the group of people that fought for your rights, that fought for the things to be the way they are now. You know. Not only did it place this type of building here or establish this, it also opened the imagination, for others to think, "Why?" So right now, like I said, it's a lot of things. And it's not just in north Durham. We're talking about movements that started all around, you know. And right now, my thing is that everyone is doing something, you know, to try to accomplish certain goals, and they're the links in the chain. But these links, they're not connected. So my plan is to connect the links, you know, and bring this establishment together. You working on this? Okay, then, we're going to put it with this. You know, they're working on this. And right now, the separation of things is the way it's been going continuously. Everyone is going forward in this line, but no one is touching. You know, I guess it's because this person wants to take credit for this, and this person wants to take credit for that. But my main thing is to bring those links together so that everything will be strong.

**WA:** Can you talk a little bit about—I don't wan to hold you much longer--

**LH:** Oh, that's okay. No problem.

**WA:** --where Durham is today—

**LH:** Compared to where it was then? Well. (Sighs) Back then it was a situation where you could leave your door open. You could go to sleep in your neighborhood with your door open. Lot of folks may have slept on the porch if it was warm, or something like that, and just dealt with mosquitoes. You know this person that stayed down the street or around the corner, you knew his people or something like that, and you didn't want him to go home staggering or something, if he was drinking or something. He had a home there. And then it became to a point where folks were—like I say, it was a lot of church-going. It was a lot of drinking and things going, and you've seen a lot of folks die with a lot of drugs and stuff at that time. But now, now things have shifted, because the kids have found another savior, you know, in hip-hop.

But as far as things go, say, for instance, let's take the political field. Back then it was blacks against whites. Now it's a dual situation where it's blacks against whites and blacks against blacks, whites against whites. You know. So all of a sudden there's, for personal needs or whatever, the city itself have leaders where, you know, they're arguing amongst themselves. Disagreeing with each other about certain things, accusing each other of things, you know. You know, a personal arena. Vendettas and mudslinging. And I'm saying that the reason that you're up there is to try to help *us*. That's how come you were voted. And you know, we're down here on this level fussing with ourselves, because we can't get things organized. Now we have folks up there, you know, that we voted in, arguing with each other, doing the same thing. You know, and it's not going anywhere.

Back then, there was more of a togetherness, and trying to be part of something. You know. Now you see it's a situation where no one wants to be—And that part was one big part. But everyone wants to be a piece of something now. Not a part, but a piece of the pie. But not

the entire thing. For more personal gain. Back then it wasn't the personal gain, it was the issues at hand. We progressed in education, as far as going forward, but we're still behind on that.

Preachers, you know, they're not preaching the same thing. A lot of preachers are going into the business looking at it as business. Personally, I don't think that you have to get paid to speak the Word. Now, if you want to make it your living, and that's what you just want to dedicate things to, then we can deal with a regular salary, if you're going to dedicate and take care of me on a religious basis. But when it becomes a thing where you have to have a little extra this and extra that, I think it's just too much.

But as far as everything else goes, later on, maybe if we have another interview when there's more time, I can have more things organized. Because you just wouldn't believe all the things that's in my mind, you know, over the years that have accumulated, that I must place out there. So if you want to be part of that, there's no problem, you understand, with it.

**WA:** All right. Well, thank you. Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

**LH:** Oh, and my motto is that it's in the contract. Everything we do, it's in the contract.

**WA:** Sounds good. (End of recording)